

Formulations and preformulations in press releases¹

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1. Introduction

Of the countless attempts that have been made at defining the news, perhaps one of the simplest and yet most revealing is to say that it 'makes people talk'. Surely, the would-be news promoted by public relations practitioners will never make it into real news if people do not talk about it, in particular if journalists do not use it in their own reporting. As Ivy Lee noted, after one of the first P.R. campaigns in history had won substantial newspaper space for a gift from the entrepreneur John D. Rockefeller to Johns Hopkins University:

[i]n view of the fact that this was not really news, and that the newspapers gave so much attention to it, it would seem that this was wholly due to the manner in which the material was 'dressed up' for newspaper consumption. It seems to suggest very considerable possibilities along this line (quoted in Schudson (1978: 138).

That today's press releases are meant to be 'retold' as accurately as possible - preferably even verbatim - in the media is clear from the following, rather embarrassing, extract from a covering letter²:

- (1) (ASQ, Houthalen; 23 February 1994)
Wij zijn er van overtuigd, geachte heer, dat deze tekst de basis vormt voor een krachtig artikel, zodat wij beiden er de vruchten van mogen plukken.
Voor bijkomende inlichtingen staan wij steeds ter uwer beschikking.
Hopend spoedig een knap artikel van U over ons te mogen lezen (...).

[We are convinced, dear sir, that this text will provide the basis of a strong news article so that we can both profit from it.
We are at your disposal for further information.
We hope to soon read a nice article from you about us (...).]

I have previously analysed the special audience-directedness of press releases into its underlying components and I have shown that they can be characterized as 'projected discourse' (Jacobs 1998). In this paper I set out to describe how the genre's peculiar reception format is mirrored in specific linguistic choices at the production end. More specifically, I shall look at formulations in press releases and suggest that they serve as preformulations, i.e. they are part of the writers' effort to furnish the media with stories that 'anticipate' the appropriate news

style. Drawing on Bakhtin and Voloshinov's dialogic views of language I shall then go on to analyse embedded formulations in press releases as double-voiced, serving a face-saving role that is by no means restricted to press releases, but plays a distinct role in a lot of 'cultured' discourse. By doing so, I come close to a somewhat different definition of the news, viz. that it 'is not what has happened, but what someone says has happened'.³

2. (Pre)formulations in press releases

Garfinkel & Sacks (1970) use the term 'formulation' to refer to those parts of a text that writers use

to describe [it], to explain it, or characterize it, or explicate, or translate, or summarize, or furnish the gist of it, or take note of its accordance with rules, or remark on its departure from rules (351).

Heritage & Watson (1979) draw attention to the use of formulations in delivering and receiving news. In particular, they show that instances of 'saying-in-so-many-words-what-we-are-doing' are frequently used by news receivers to demonstrate understanding of what news deliverers are saying and to have that understanding confirmed. Significantly, most are strategic reformulations, with only some of the original information preserved and the rest - often consciously - deleted or even transformed, as in this extract from a radio interview with the 'Slimmer of the Year':

(S: Slimmer of the Year; J: journalist)

S: You have a shell that for so long protects you but sometimes things creep through the shell and then you become really aware of how awful you feel. I never felt my age or looked my age I was older always older - people took me for older. And when I was at college I think I looked a matronly fifty. And I was completely alone one weekend and I got to this stage where I almost jumped in the river. I just felt life wasn't worth it any more - it hadn't anything to offer and if this was living I had had enough

J: You really were prepared to commit suicide because you were a big fatty

S: Yes, because (...).

(quoted in Heritage & Watson 1979: 132)

Formulations may play a similar reformulating role in news deliveries. In news interviews and press conferences, for example, they help the interviewee to steer an awkward question into a more desirable direction (Clayman 1993a), as with the following inquiry into candidate for the U.S. presidency Gary Hart's affair with Donna Rice:

(GH: Gary Hart; J: journalist)

J: I told you some days ago when we spoke, and I told our audience this evening that I would ask both questions. I will ask you the first now just before we take a break because I think I know what your answer's gonna be. Did you have an affair with Miss Rice?

GH: Mister Koppel if the question is: in the twenty years of my marriage, including two public separations have I been absolutely and totally faithful to my wife I regret to say the answer is no.
(quoted in Clayman 1993a: 168)

As indicated above, in this paper I shall look at how formulations are used by news deliverers in press releases. To start with, a quick glance at the corpus shows that they usually serve to 'furnish the gist' of what the press release is about. Not surprisingly, they frequently occur in the headline,

- (2) (GB, Brussels; 13 April 1995)
GB START SAMENWERKING MET QUELLE - POSTORDERVERKOOP
[GB STARTS CO-OPERATION WITH QUELLE - MAIL ORDER SALE]

in the first sentence,

- (3) (Bekaert, Kortrijk; 26 January 1995)
DELAWARE COMPUTE ANTWERPEN N.V. (D.C.), een 100 % informaticadochter van N.V. BEKAERT S.A., met hoofdkantoren in België, heeft een overeenkomst bereikt en ondertekend met MARBEN BENELUX (Marben) om een nieuwe gemeenschappelijke vennootschap op te richten OCKHAM TECHNOLOGY N.V.
[DELAWARE COMPUTING ANTWERP N.V. (D.C.), a 100 % informatics subsidiary of N.V. BEKAERT S.A., with headquarters in Belgium, made and signed a deal with MARBEN BENELUX (Marben) to found a new co-partnership OCKHAM TECHNOLOGY N.V.]

or in both:

- (4) (AEG, Brussels; 19 April 1994)
AEG TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS NEEMT DE ACTIVITEITEN VAN VON-ROLL-MONORAIL-SYSTEMS OVER
AEG Transportation Systems, Inc., uit Pittsburgh (USA) heeft de monorailactiviteiten van Von Roll AG uit Gerlafingen (Zwitserland) overgenomen.
[AEG TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS TAKES OVER THE ACTIVITIES OF VON-ROLL-MONORAIL-SYSTEMS
AEG Transportation Systems, Inc., from Pittsburgh (USA) took over the monorail activities of Von Roll AG from Gerlafingen (Switzerland).]

- (5) (Nestor, Tielen; 18 April 1994)
 FA. NESTOR KOOPT VOORRADEN CONCORDIA MAIL
 De firma NESTOR, gevestigd te Tielen, heeft vandaag de voorraden van Concordia Mail gekocht.

[FA. NESTOR BUYS CONCORDIA MAIL STOCKS
 NESTOR Co., based at Tielen, today bought the stocks of Concordia Mail.]

Thanks to their strategic positioning, such formulations, of course, help journalists instantly decide on the newsworthiness of the press release. After all, as Herman & Chomsky (1988) point out, "the rule of least effort usually guides journalistic behaviour" (12).

There is another way in which formulations in press releases render a service to journalists, though. In newspaper reporting, for example, the headline and first sentence(s) - or lead - usually express the major topic of the text (cf. van Dijk 1988: 53).⁴ Press releases that start with formulations therefore require the minimum of reworking on the part of journalists; at the same time, they stand a much better chance of being selected for publication (Bell 1991: 58-59). As a result, through such features of mediation (eg Hartley 1982), the language of press releases reflects - what looks like - the writers' co-operative effort to 'make things easy' for journalists.

Mediation is a much more complex phenomenon, though. It is not just aimed at meeting the requirements of the target medium; it also helps fix "the premises of discourse and interpretation, and the definition of what is newsworthy in the first place" (Herman & Chomsky 1988: 2).⁵ More particularly, in line with the analyses of oral interaction referred to above, I would like to suggest that formulations in press releases allow the news deliverers to provide a powerful 'candidate reading' of their own words, highlighting those aspects that are especially reportable and controlling subsequent reformulation in the media. The fact that formulations may be used to set the journalist's agenda is particularly clear from the following headline:

- (6) (Exxon Corporation, Houston, Texas, 27 March 1989)
 LIGHTERING, OIL SPILL CLEANUP EFFORTS CONTINUE IN ALASKA

In the body of the press release, Exxon Corporation announces that one of its mammoth tankers, the Exxon Valdez, has had an accident in South Alaska and that 240,000 barrels of crude oil have been spilt into the sea. Significantly, the formulation in the title treats the oil spill - and even the start of the clean-up operations - as old news and directs the media's attention to the organization's continued efforts to deal with the contingency. In other words, the formulation in the title is not a summary of the bad news that the press release is meant to report. Instead, through backgrounding the catastrophe itself, it carefully diverts attention to the positive aspects of the story.

Apart from telling the various media who receive the press release what to transmit to their own audiences, formulations also tell them how to transmit it, as in the following extract, introducing a rise in the prices of the bank's services as a 'price adjustment':

- (7) (BBL, Brussels, 22 November 1994)
 PRIJSAANPASSING BANCONTACT/MISTER CASH - EN. EUROCHEQUE-SERVICES
 [PRICE ADJUSTMENT BANCONTACT/MISTER CASH - AND EUROCHEQUE SERVICES]

In this sense formulations in press releases are close to what Walker (1994) calls optimistic formulations, in which, "[t]hrough cautious lexical and phrasal selection, the participants design their talk so that they will be heard to be saying what they want to be heard to be saying" (132).

I propose to use the term 'preformulation' rather than 'mediation', since it draws attention to the specific linguistic choices through which the process of transformation is realized. In this paper, I shall focus on a special category of embedded formulations, i.e. formulations that are couched in metapragmatic discourse, as in the first sentences in

- (8) EXXON WAS READY FOR FULL-SCALE DISPERSANT APPLICATION MARCH 25
 Exxon Shipping Company President Frank Iarossi today said Exxon was ready to begin full-scale application of aerial dispersants to the Exxon Valdez oil spill on Saturday, 25 March. However the permission was granted to conduct only small-scale tests on Saturday and Sunday.
- (9) (EMC, Brussels; 20 April 1994)
 HOGERE WINST EN OMZET VOOR EMC IN EERSTE KWARTAAL (...)
 EMC Corporation deelt mee dat de omzet in het eerste kwartaal van dit jaar 267.058.000 dollar belooft, d.i. een stijging van 92% t.o.v. de omzet van 138.773.000 dollar die in de overeenkomstige periode van 1993 werd gerealiseerd.
- [HIGHER PROFITS AND TURNOVER FOR EMC IN FIRST QUARTER (...)
 EMC Corporation announces that the turnover in the first quarter of this year amounts to 267.058.000 dollars, i.e. a rise of 92% compared with the turnover of 138.773.000 dollars that was realized in the corresponding period of 1993.

Here the formulation in each title is followed by a second, embedded formulation in the first sentence of the press release. Such embedded formulations also occur 'on their own', as in

- (10) (Westerlund, Antwerp; 29 March 1994)
 WESTERLUND BEVESTIGT INVESTERINGEN IN ULTRA MODERNE
 INFRASTRUCTUUR NA BEKENDMAKING GUNSTIGE RESULTATEN VOOR
 1993
- [WESTERLUND CONFIRMS INVESTMENTS IN ULTRA MODERN
 INFRASTRUCTURE AFTER ANNOUNCEMENT OF POSITIVE RESULTS FOR
 1993]
- (11) (Customs and Excise Office, Antwerp; 28 September 1994)
 De Administratie der douane en accijnzen deelt mee dat haar Opsporingsinspectie te
 Antwerpen erin geslaagd is 32 kg zuivere cocaïne in beslag te nemen.
- [The Customs and Excise Office announces that its Antwerp investigation department
 succeeded in confiscating 32 kg of pure cocaine.]

As the main feature of such formulations is that they are embedded within an assertion rather than being offered as actions in their own right, I shall treat them as part of a broader use of metapragmatic discourse in press releases (cf. also Jacobs 1999b on issues of self-reference in press releases). Both the idea of preformulation, viz. that people use words to get other people to use words, and the notion of metapragmatic discourse now lead us to the works of Bakhtin and Voloshinov.

3. Double-voiced discourse

Bakhtin and Voloshinov⁶ have recently generated an "extraordinary amount of scholarship" and different people have come to see "very different things" in them (Locher & Wortham 1994: 518; cf. also Holquist 1990, Gardiner 1992, Lemke 1995). While one of their revolutionary assumptions was to look at language from the point of view of the individual, their approach should not be confused with the intention-based view of meaning that is associated with Grice and that has been seriously challenged over the last few years (e.g. by Verschueren 1995). For one thing, in an essay called 'The problem of speech genres' Bakhtin denies that communication is geared simply at making the other party recognize what you mean to say:

The desire to make one's speech understood is only an abstract aspect of the speaker's concrete and total speech plan. (1986: 69)

In Bakhtin and Voloshinov's view, the speaker's seemingly unlimited choice from the wide range of linguistic possibilities is primarily constrained by what was said before and what will be said afterwards: every utterance is a response to preceding utterances; at the same time, the speaker actively tries to determine the addressee's reactions, "for whose sake in essence [the utterance] is actually created" (Voloshinov 1973: 94).

Crucially, if such 'dialogism' seems to anticipate the sequential analysis of conversation, it is by no means restricted to direct oral interaction between two interlocutors. Just like 'real' dialogues (i.e. conversations), written discourse may "[react] intensely to someone else's word, answering it and anticipating it" (1984: 197). Bakhtin's own research on Dostoevsky's novels shows that they are

calculated for active perception, involving attentive reading and inner responsiveness, and for organized, printed reaction in the various forms devised by the particular sphere of verbal communication in question (book reviews, critical surveys, defining influence on subsequent works, and so on). Moreover, a verbal performance of this kind also inevitably orients itself with respect to previous performances in the same sphere, both those by the same author and those by other authors. It inevitably takes its point of departure from some particular state of affairs involving a scientific problem or a literary style. Thus the printed verbal performance (...) responds to something, objects to something, affirms something, anticipates possible responses and objections, seeks support, and so on. (ibid. 95)⁷

One illustration of the dialogic principle in writing is provided by metapragmatic discourse: in Bakhtin and Voloshinov's theory, the relationship between the reported speech and the reporting context is said to be analogous to that between different statements and rejoinders in conversation (1986: 92; cf. also Slembrouck 1992b: 102). In particular, just as turns at talking show the current speaker's strategic accommodation to what was said before and what will be said afterwards, reported speech provides objective documentation of how the quoted words were actually received by the writer and of how the writer thinks (or hopes) his or her own words will be received (Voloshinov 1973: 117).

Not all reported speech points are such dialogic interaction, though. As far as the relationship between one's own discourse and that of someone else is concerned, Bakhtin (1984) distinguishes three discourse types:

- a. direct, unmediated discourse
- b. objectified discourse
- c. double-voiced discourse

The first two types represent so-called 'single-voiced' discourse; they do not point at dialogue. In scientific articles, for example, previous research on the topic is traditionally quoted either for refutation or confirmation. Bakhtin says that in academic papers there is no interaction between

"two ultimate semantic authorities", but rather an "objectified (plotted) clash" of two independent positions with one of them "subordinated wholly to the higher, ultimate authority" of the other (1984: 188; cf. also Thomas & Hawes 1994). Such single-voiced discourse points at a 'linear style', with clear-cut distinctions between reported speech and reporting context. It is typical of the languages of the law and of politics, which are "marked by an acute awareness of property rights to words and by a fastidiousness in matters of authenticity" (Voloshinov 1973: 122).

With double-voiced discourse, however, the author penetrates inside the other's speech, "works with [his or her] point of view" (1984: 189). This is the pictorial style: the reported speech is being infiltrated with "authorial retort and commentary in deft and subtle ways" (Voloshinov 1973: 120). There are two directions in which reported speech and reporting context may interact: either the quoted words may start to change the writer's speech or the writer's speech may penetrate the quoted words. In the former case, with direct speech dominating the author's language, Fairclough (1988: 128), drawing from Bakhtin's analysis of so-called 'boundary maintenance strategies'⁸, talks about 'dissemination', e.g. the use of the tabloid headline

Mrs Thatcher will not stand for any backsliding

to refer to Mrs Thatcher's statement

I will not stand for any backsliding

Here, the original words are retained and presented as if they were the journalist's own language, and not a more or less literal quote of what the politician said.

Alternatively, when the quoted words get infiltrated with comments from the author, Fairclough talks about 'incorporation': i.e. the direct speech is not a literal rendering of what the quoted source said, as it includes features that unmistakably derive from the author's language, as in the tabloid headline

Maggie must get out, says Kinnock

which serves to represent the former Labour leader's statement

Margaret Thatcher must resign

Fairclough comments that, of course, Kinnock did not say that 'Maggie' had to 'get out'. Here the politician's statement is rendered in the popular newspaper jargon and it is no longer clear to what extent the quoted source is responsible for the quoted words.

Returning to our central object of analysis, I would like to suggest that most cases of metapragmatic discourse in press releases can be called double-voiced. For one thing, I have demonstrated elsewhere that a lot of quotations in press releases represent a form of incorporation (cf. Jacobs 1994). Unlike in the newspaper example above, the merger is frequently not just manifested in vocabulary changes. Generally, the quoted words were almost certainly never verbalized by the named source, but written by a press officer and (possibly) approved by the source (cf. Bell 1991). Rather than simply replacing a couple of words in the quotation, P.R. officers who write press releases tend to construct complete new statements. In (12), for example, the repeated suggestion of simultaneous delivery indicates that the quoted words cannot be a literal rendering:

- (12) (Bulo, Mechelen; 29 March 1994)
 "De uiteindelijk keuze voor Nike heeft veel te maken met bedrijfskultuur. Die is voor Nike even belangrijk als kwaliteit en design. De creatie van een aangename en motiverende werkomgeving stond bij Nike voorop," zeggen Dirk en Luk Busschop, gedelegeerd bestuurders van Bulo.
 "Ook de uitzonderlijke flexibiliteit van onze wandsystemen en het nieuwe concept Bulorondo (...), plus de ergonomische en logistieke troeven die wij konden bieden, speelden zeker een rol bij de toekenning van het order," aldus beide broers. (29 March 1994)

["The final choice for Nike has a lot to do with corporate culture. That is as important for Nike as quality and design. The creation of a pleasant and stimulating working environment was a priority for Nike", say Dirk and Luk Busschop, Bulo's managing directors.

"Our wall units' exceptional flexibility and the new Bulorondo concept, combined with the ergonomic and logistic advantages we offered also played a clear role in the allocation of the order", according to the two brothers.]

Equally unlikely attributions are to be found in embedded formulations in headlines, like

- (13) (Exxon Company, U.S.A., Washington, D.C.; 18 April 1989)
 VALDEZ OIL SPILL IS NOT THE REASON FOR GASOLINE PRICE HIKES,
 SAYS EXXON

and in

- (14) (Ericsson, Brussels; 16 May 1994)
 In vergelijking tot andere mobiele telefoons doet de Ericsson GH 337 het op praktisch alle punten aanzienlijk beter, aldus het bedrijf.

[In comparison to other mobile telephones the Ericsson GH 337 performs much better in practically all areas, according to the company.]

Here the writer of the press release and the quoted source represent one and the same institution, and the metapragmatic discourse is therefore of a self-referential nature. It is double-

voiced discourse, since one voice makes use of - what sounds like - another for its own purposes.

The following is an example of dissemination from the corpus, confirming the double-voicedness of metapragmatic discourse in press releases. (15) presents the beginning:

- (15) (BASF Belgium, Brussels; 17 March 1994)
 BASF: GEEN VOORJAARSMOEHEID
 DE ONDERNEMING ZET HAAR STRUCTURELE AANPASSINGEN
 ONVERMINDERD VOORT
 Ter gelegenheid van de persconferentie, waar Dr. Jürgen Strube, Voorzitter van de Raad van Bestuur, enkele toelichtingen gaf bij de balans van de BASF-Groep, gaf hij eveneens zijn kijk op de actuele situatie in het volgend beeld weer: "Wij hebben een goede start genomen en een uitstekende tijd gelopen over de eerste meters van de wedstrijd. Maar wij zijn er ons eveneens heel goed van bewust dat wij niet alleen een sprint lopen. Wij moeten een beroep doen op al onze krachten om de hele weg, die nog voor ons ligt, af te leggen. Wij beschikken niettemin over de nodige reserves om de eindstreep te halen.

[BASF: NO SPRING FATIGUE
 THE COMPANY CONTINUES ITS STRUCTURAL ADAPTATIONS WITHOUT
 ABATEMENT

At a press conference, where Dr. Jürgen Strube, chairman of the Board, provided some comments on the BASF Group balance, he also offered his views on the current situation by means of the following image: "We have taken a good start and run an excellent time over the first metres of the race. But we are also very much aware that we are not only running a sprint. We have to use all our resources to complete all the way in front of us. Nevertheless, we have the necessary reserves to make it to the finish line."

The press release starts with a double headline, followed by a more or less plausible quotation. What is interesting, though, is that direct speech soon starts giving way to indirect speech and, further on, to even more narrative portions with Dr Strube's views getting increasingly filtered by the writer of the press release. In (16), for example, the responsibility for the propositional content still lies with the quoted source, while the deictic centre (who is 'I', where is 'here', when is 'now?') has moved to the writer of the press release:

- (16) Volgens Dr. Jürgen Strube is de samenwerking met de Russische partner Gazprom veelbetekend en exemplarisch te noemen.

[According to Dr. Jürgen Strube the co-operation with the Russian partner Gazprom can be called significant and exemplary.]

Further on, in (17), not even the propositional content is left with Dr Strube:

- (17) Dr Jürgen Strube sprak over een lichte heropleving tijdens de eerste twee maanden van 1994.

[Dr Jürgen Strube talked about a slight rise during the first two months of 1994.]

The remarkable thing about this smooth transition towards increasingly less direct modes of speech presentation - and indeed the reason why I decided to have a close look at this press release - is that, towards the end, authorial narrative and quoted statement are merged, almost imperceptibly, in:

- (18) In het algemeen kunnen we de gang van zaken in 1993 als ontgoochelend bestempelen.

[In general we can call events in 1993 disappointing.]

Here, what looks like an extract from Dr Strube's speech is rendered directly, without quotation marks. It is what Fairclough (1988) calls the 'UNSIG(nalled) mode': what should have been represented in direct speech and attributed to the quoted source, is adopted by the writer as his or her own language. As Bakhtin puts it, the original writer's "enthusiasm" for the quoted source's words "destroys the distance and weakens the deliberate sense of a reproduced style as *someone else's* style" (1984: 190); the embedded statement takes over and the views originally expressed between quotation marks 'percolate' to the rest of the text (cf. Spooren & Jaspers 1990).

The above examples illustrate how thin the line between reported speech and reporting context in press releases really is. Thanks to double-voiced discourse, the writer can easily penetrate inside the quoted source's words (dissemination) or step out of his own (incorporation).

4. Objectivity in press releases

I have shown that metapragmatic discourse in press releases - including embedded formulations - can often be considered double-voiced discourse. In general, however, the line between reported speech and reporting context in press releases does not *look* thin at all. For most cases of incorporation in my corpus of press releases, for example, no conclusive textual evidence could be found to show that they were not a literal rendering; alternatively, the BASF press release presents what is only a very rare case of dissemination. In other words, most double-voiced instances of metapragmatic discourse are effectively paraded as verbatim, single-voiced

reporting to the extent that what really is - in Bakhtin's terminology - part of the pictorial style looks very much like the linear one. In Thompson & Yiyun's (1991) terminology, we are looking at writer acts (statements on the part of whoever wrote the press release) carefully disguised as author acts (statements attributed to a quoted source).

At this stage, it still needs to be explained why news deliverers resort to such carefully disguised, double-voiced discourse, i.e. why they go to such lengths to quote themselves, rather than just say what they have to say. As Fludernik (1993) argues

[r]epresentation inherently includes fictionalization, and fictionalization, like all rhetoric, has its own interests, its strategies, its tendencies. One traditional way of saying this has been to consider all discourse representation as either mediated or 'framed', but mediation and framing are formal concepts and they need to be complemented with more specific stylistic, rhetorical and historical analyses of the precise functions of quotation, of the different purposes of typicality or pretended reproductiveness in represented speech and thought. (22)

What are, then, the 'precise functions' of double-voiced discourse in press releases?

It has been well documented that journalists invariably prefer self-generated information and that press releases - and public relations activities in general - are thought to threaten the very idea of objective reporting. As Schudson (1978) puts it, news seems to have gradually become "less the reporting of events in the world than the reprinting of those facts in the universe of facts which [appeal] to special interests" (138).

As a result, the value of news subsidies like press releases has come to depend on "the extent that the source can disguise the promotional, self-interested quality of the information" (Gandy 1982: 14). I would like to suggest that one of the techniques to do so can be found in the double-voiced use of metapragmatic discourse explained above: news deliverers tend to refrain from expressing their opinions in an unmediated way; instead, they have to resort to projecting their own statements in someone else's words. By minimizing the face threatening act involved in delivering 'one's own news', metapragmatic expressions thus contribute to a "cultured" type of discourse, which is "refracted through an authoritative and stabilized medium" (1984: 203). As Shuman (1990) comments on the use of personal experiences in political junk mailings,

[r]eported speech can be an effective means for establishing, for countering, 'Who says?' In appropriating personal narratives, the authors of (...) junk mail attempt to

close off discussion concerning interpretation and instead to give the appearance of 'raw' facts (178).

Similarly, Clayman (1993b) sees footing shifts (including reference to elite sources) as a means of interactional caution in news interviews.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that double-voiced discourse allows writers of press releases to deflect a potentially troublesome communicative load on to a third party. On closer scrutiny, however, the distancing is no more than a *trompe l'oeil*. After all, in each case, as I have shown, the reporting and reported events are ultimately indistinguishable. The two voices, viz. that of the writer of the press release and that of the quoted source, belong to one and the same institution. Still, double-voiced discourse makes us feel safer, not because we can blame somebody else, but, as Goffman says, because "we can put some distance between ourselves as animators and ourselves as figures to whom final responsibility for words and deeds is imputed" (1975: 546).

Hardt-Mautner (1995) draws attention to a similar mechanism in newspaper reporting. Analysing the *Sun's* coverage of its own street poll about Britain's membership of the European Union, she points out that, through the use of photographs, personal details and direct speech, the interviewees are firmly established as 'real' people and their comments are made to sound authentic. The boundary between (the interviewees') reported speech and (the paper's) reporting context is further typographically enhanced. Still, Hardt-Mautner goes on, the quoted words cannot be a literal rendering of what the interviewees said. The transformation from the original statement to published quotation traditionally involves a lot of editing. What's more, in this case we can

doubt whether any proper interviewing ever took place at all, and if so, whether any serious attempt was made to faithfully reproduce the anterior discourse. (ibid. 197)

Hardt-Mautner suggests such double-voiced discourse - like that in press releases - has a persuasive function: it allows the "editorial voice of the paper to step back behind the voice of the quoted persona"; that way, the paper can be positioned "as a public forum of discussion rather than as a disseminator of editorial wisdom" (ibid. 197).

Finally, like many other features of institutional discourse (cf. Drew 1994), such embedding serves as a powerful communicative tool in a lot of more mundane interactional practices as

well. Goffman (1975), for example, refers to the frequent use of self-referential connectives like

In my opinion...
If you ask me...
I've always felt that...
In my experience...

and claims that what follows them

is to be placed in parentheses, a voice slightly different from the one the speaker had been using, one which presumably allows the speaker and his listeners to align themselves over and against the figure to whom the remarks are to be attributed. (Goffman 1975: 531)

In his view, 'preformulation' is not just a feature of institutional discourse but of everyday talk (ibid. 509). Similarly, Lee (1992) suggests that speaker intrusion and reference to the process of perception have the effect of "modalising the associated statement. That is [they express] a lower degree of commitment on the part of the speaker to the truth of the associated proposition" (Lee 1992: 138). Double-voiced discourse, in particular, allows us to identify a particular position but at the same time establish the possibility of some distance from that perspective.

5. Conclusion

Drawing from Bakhtin and Voloshinov's analysis of metapragmatic discourse, I have shown that, just as in conversation "the other's words actively influence the author's speech, forcing it to alter itself accordingly under their influence and initiative" (Voloshinov 1973: 197), the language of press releases - including the marked distribution of embedded formulations - can be considered the result of interactional processes that are closely linked to the institutional setting. More specifically, double-voiced discourse in press releases - as in ordinary conversation - serves as, what (Locher & Wortham 1994) call, an 'even-handedness' for making the unavoidably non-objective language of press releases more acceptable for journalists.

Notes

- 1 This article is a revised version of a paper read at the 6th International Systemic-Functional Workshop held at the University of Antwerp (UFSIA), 8-11 August 1994. I would like to thank Jan Blommaert for his useful comments.
- 2 The research I report on in this article is part of a wider, corpus-based study on the language of press releases. The corpus contains over 600 press releases from business as well as politics, both in English and Dutch. For a full description see Jacobs (1999a).
- 3 The two (contrasting) definitions of the news are taken from Sigal (1973).
- 4 Cf. Clayman (1991) observes interesting similarities in news interview openings.
- 5 The term 'mediation' highlights the *Janus*-like quality of press releases: viz. they aim at influencing news reporting but at the same time, as suggested above, to do so, they have to comply with some of the major 'rules' of news reporting. Note that a peculiar intergeneric *game* is going on here, with the language of press releases adopting some of the features of the genre of news reporting only to project some of the features of the genre of press releases on the language of news reporting.
- 6 M.M. Bakhtin, V.N. Voloshinov, P.M. Medvedev and others gathered in Leningrad in the 1920s. It has been argued that Bakhtin is the author of some of the texts attributed to the others. In this paper I shall draw especially from Bakhtin's "Discourse in the novel" (in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 1935/1981) "Discourse in Dostoevsky" (in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 1929/1984) and "Speech Genres" (in *Speech genres and other late essays*, 1953/1986) and from Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929/1973). I do not enter into the dispute of the authorship of the texts, though.
- 7 Linell (1995) argues that, while dialogical analysis is primarily applied to spoken interaction, it can also be extended, "partly by analogy", to monological texts (575).
- 8 Slembrouck (1992a) defines 'boundary maintenance' as the extent to which, formally speaking, elements in the quoted segments which belong to the reporting agency are marked off from those belonging to the anterior voice (237).

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