Expressions/Representations of the Relationship between the 'State' and the 'Citizen': Register Analysis of Local Government Discourse

Giulio Pagani
Lancaster University
Email: g.pagani@lancaster.ac.uk

Abstract

In this paper the discursive construction of states and citizens is examined by considering the meanings of texts in the light of Bourdieu's (1991) notions of linguistic markets and Halliday's (1978) notion of language as social semiotic. Register Theory is used to provide a framework for text analysis of discourse produced by a local government institution in order to map linguistic changes onto changes in the apparent relationship between citizens, states and 'the market'.

Keywords: *State, Citizen, Register, Authority*

1. Introduction

What is the nature of the relationship between the 'state' and the 'citizen'? What do citizens expect of the state and what does the state do to shape those expectations? A step towards answering these questions may be to try and examine how states and citizens position themselves in relation to each other, to investigate how such positions and expectations are effectively developed into models of what a state is and what citizenship is, and how these models are learned. My aim here is not to tackle these questions with reference primarily to social or political theory, but instead to approach them through analysis of discourse and thus to employ linguistic or semiotic theories. The rationale for this is that ultimately I consider these questions to be questions of *meaning*: meaning making, meaning exchange and meaning valuation. The starting point, however, is to venture briefly into the domain of socio-political theory so as to discuss the definition of some key terms.

2. Theorising 'State' and 'Citizen'

Hall (1992: 292) describes a nation-state as 'a system of cultural representations' as well as a political construct and, according to Verdery (1996: 227), a nation-state is both an ideological construct and a symbol which, being ambiguous, can be made to mean different things to different users of it. Two main 'meanings' of nation are proposed by Balakrishnan (1996: 202): one, a particular cultural and political form of existence assumed by an entire society; and the second, a community of customs, memory and ethnic ties. Smith (1995: 111) refers to these as 'civic' and 'ethnic' nationalisms respectively. Verdery (1996: 227-229) goes on to suggest that the two meanings of nation are each symbolised differently and represented by different discourses which engage in a hegemonic competition over the 'nation-as-symbol'. In order for one version or other to become pre-eminent, it requires acceptance by individuals so that the meaning of the state becomes internalised and assimilated. Verdery calls this the formation of national subjectivity. The mechanisms by which

this might occur are suggested to be 'daily interactions and practices that produce an inherent feeling…of belonging' (1996: 229).

Ideologies are conventional and interlinked ways of thinking, talking and writing about the nature of the world-order. They are, in Chilton's (2004: 27) words, 'the ready-made moulds for the thinking of thoughts'. A crucial effect that an ideology achieves is to make a particular world-view or social arrangement appear natural. One of the tools of ideology propagation, or discourses of nation, available to a state is ethno-cultural nationalism and ethno-symbolism which relies on 'symbols of nationalism' (Smith, 2001: 7-8) like flags, myths of common ancestry and history. An alternative or complementary tool is a service-based version of a civic nationalism signified through what I would correspondingly term 'symbols of nationalisation', visible as obvious signs, for example logos or texts on vehicles, buildings or documents amongst other things, and in the consequent linkage of those signs with the service provided under them by what could be broadly termed the agencies of the 'welfare state'. It is this latter type of discourse of nation that is of concern here.

Theorising on citizenship in its modern form effectively commenced with Marshall's (1992) model of citizenship, social class and nation-state, according to which citizenship comprises civil, political and social rights that add up to enable a person to live the life of a civilised being. (The social rights referred to are, in broad terms, ones delivered by the provision of a welfare state.) First published in 1950, this was very much a product of its time and reflected a sense of optimism engendered by the social settlement of the post-war consensus in the UK. Such a model of citizenship would seem to be consistent with a meaning of the nation-state that is promoted by a 'civic' discourse. Since the 1980s the politics of citizenship has replaced the politics of class as a key topic and, according to Nash (2000), extensive debate in political sociology has centred on challenging Marshall's model from a range of angles, in particular, ones which focus on citizens' *obligations* rather than *rights*. These challenging models are typically characterised by a reduction of the role of state and corresponding increase in the role of the market in delivering social rights.

Turner's (1993) view was that theories of citizenship were still underdeveloped because there was no good account of the processes that promote it in an individual. In fact, he suggested the concept of citizenship was seen as merely being a sub-topic for the social sciences sited within the problems of nationalism, identity and the distribution of resources in society. Thus, social scientists mainly analysed citizenship from above the level of the individual in terms of various legal, political and social entitlements. This being so, Shotter's work on psychology and citizenship is of interest because it considers the nature of citizenship from within, suggesting it is '…a status which one must struggle to attain in the face of competing versions of what it is proper to struggle for' (Shotter 1993: 115-116). Furthermore, he proposes that investigation is needed into the way society provides the means whereby people grow to make sense of life, including concepts such as citizenship. Discourse is clearly one of these 'means' since it can be defined as comprising socially contextualised forms of knowledge about reality which 'provide[s] versions of who does what, when and where [and] add[s] evaluations, interpretations and arguments to those versions' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001: 15).

The theoretical models outlined above are, of course, ones constructed within the bounds of socio-political scholarship. There is, however, another kind of model that we need to be concerned with. It is reasonable to assume that individuals have their

own, mental, models of what a state is and what it is to be a citizen. Gramsci (1971: 260-262), in introducing the concept of the 'ethical state', suggests that the state is an educator whose potentially interventionist and enabling role can lead to the adoption of a certain mindset by its people, a view echoed by Bourdieu who describes how agents of the state contribute to the formation of national identity since 'through bureaucratic procedures, educational structures and social rituals…the state moulds mental structures and imposes common principles of vision and division' (1994: 7).

Much of the above work looks at the nation from a different angle and has a different depth of focus on the nation or state to ours in that it mostly considers the existence *per se* of the nation, or the outer shell of the state perhaps, rather than the nature of the socio-economic and cultural system that underlies it or exists within it. This system is, after all, something that can be found to align with a particular paradigm and can change if a shift in that paradigm occurs without necessarily impinging upon the outer shell of the nation itself. In the context of this paper the inner workings of the nation-state could take the shape of the delivery and discursive representation of a 'symbolically nationalised' welfare state in one version or a market-driven society in another version. Each of these would be a paradigm that entails a particular set of collectively produced 'key organising principles, normative ideas and expectations regarding social relationships' (Burns and Carson 2005: 299). As stated in the introduction, the aim here is to consider how and why people choose to represent the nation/state they are affiliated to, and to represent themselves as citizens of it, in accordance with one or other of these paradigms/versions or some amalgam of them. I shall return to discussion of this topic in the final section, but I continue now by examining the interaction between state and citizen in one particular field – that of local government.

3. Engaging with texts – citizens as clients or consumers

Taking the concept of 'authority' (as enjoyed by public sector institutions) as one facet of the relationship between state and citizen, the analyses reported here result from an investigation into the social practice of communication between a bureaucratic institution, in this case a UK local government institution, and its public (Pagani 2005). The hypothesis under test was that this practice had undergone changes over the period 1990-2005, and that these were related to a corresponding shift in the status and ideology of local government and the 'public service ethos'. In line with this shift in its institutional paradigm, the practices of local government, including discourse practices, have become commodified and 'marketised' (cf. Fairclough 1995), and the roles of participants have apparently mutated from those prescribed by an expert-client model to ones aligned with a producer-consumer model. The authority and power hierarchy of participants may thus have been altered, and the aim of the investigation was to ascertain how these changes have been realised linguistically. 'Authority' goes hand in hand with power, or the ability of institutions to control the behaviour and material lives of others. In the present context, much of this power resides in ability to control meanings available to other discourse participants in and through language use.

UK local government bodies provide perhaps one of the prototypical examples of a bureaucratic institution. The pre-1980 pattern of societal arrangement saw them as wholly part of the structures of the state and government as a whole – the 'public sector' as it may be labelled. In this 'traditional' pattern the bureaucracies of the state were positioned fairly high in the hierarchical structure of society. Local government

institutions, and their members and officers, were thus in positions of authority over their public clientele, as part of a post-war welfare state 'structured by concepts of formal rationality, bureaucratic dominance, centralised authority and hierarchical control' (Walsh 1994: 189). According to Abercrombie (1994: 45-47), this authority was based on a legitimacy that was itself founded upon the expertise acquired and deployed by the officers as professionals to whom the public owed respect. Keat et al. (1994: 3) note how authority can usually belong to individuals or groups with special knowledge or qualification allowing them to make judgements and impose definitions on contexts and situations. They go on to relate this definitional power to 'control of meaning' (Keat et al. 1994: 7) or capacity of the professional-bureaucratic bloc to set the boundaries and parameters of its activities according to its own terms.

This meaning control prior to 1980 was based upon a prevailing ideology of the state and public service ethos that bolstered its bureaucratic experts' authority over their public clientele. However, the late 1970s saw the beginnings of a crisis in this model and for public services in general. The organisational frameworks of the public sector were seemingly failing to provide good quality outputs because they were, according to the analysis of the time, inefficient, unresponsive to the needs of clients and too centred upon the interests of the professionals (Keat et al. 1994: 13). The reforms which followed during the 1980s pursued a Thatcherite new-right agenda which tackled what it saw as two interconnected crises: a crisis of funding and a crisis of ideological legitimacy for the traditional situation (Walsh 1994: 208). The old ideology of the role of the state was deemed inferior to the new ideology of a reformed public sector emphasising individualism in social relations and seeking a move away from bureaucratic control through a 'restructuring' based on the supposed virtues of control by a free market.

This change fed slowly through into the practices of local government during the 1980s. According to Cochrane (1993: 118), among the key features of the context in which local government then operated were permanent attempts to reduce spending and the creation of surrogate markets resulting from privatisation of hitherto public sector operations and the policy of compulsory competitive tendering, whereby local government's own staff had to compete on a price basis against private sector companies for provision of certain services. These features contributed to a decline in the authority of professional bureaucrats, (although the true extent of the decline is open to debate as discussed in Section 4). According to Keat et al. (1994: 7), the mechanisms that created that erstwhile authority were broken down and the claims to expertise of the professionals began to come under increased scrutiny. Not only had the sacrosanct practices of the public sector become 'commodified' and put up for auction, but the professionals then had to undergo the humiliation of competing for their own jobs on a 'cheapest is best' basis. Correspondingly, the construction of the public as 'consumers' of public services organised in a way mirroring a market implied that they should have a relationship with the 'producers' of those services that mirrored the one they had with private sector producers in the commercial sphere (Keat et al. 1994: 2). As Gyford (1991: 16) notes, the perceptions of the local government professionals were affected as the notions of clients and consumers contain important distinctions; 'the *consumer* is always right [and] can choose, criticise and reject…[t]he *client*…gives up those privileges and accepts the superior judgement of the professional'. This client/consumer dichotomy reflects a distinction between the public as object and the public as subject, between a passive or active public. The raised relative status of the latter went hand in hand with their

redefinition as consumers who could exert semi-continuous market pressure rather than as citizen voters with periodic influence (Cochrane 1993: 50).

'Text' is initially used to refer to the artefacts of discourse production. It is, however, worth observing that in the broader sense a text is, according to Halliday (1978: 122), 'the linguistic form of social interaction' and an 'instance of social meaning in a particular context of situation' (Halliday and Hasan 1980: 11). Within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which has a track record in investigating the relationship between ideology and discourse practice or how discourse has an effect on social identities, the meanings of texts were considered in the light of Bourdieu's (1991) notions of linguistic markets and Halliday's (1978) notion of language as social semiotic. The latter integrates well with Halliday's theory of register, which provides a framework within which to perform text analysis.

3.1 Authority and language

How might authority be realised in texts? Bourdieu (1991) provides a model in a theory of practice based on a quasi-economic exchange of symbolic and cultural capital. He envisages linguistic exchanges as situated encounters between actors endowed with socially structural resources and competencies so that any utterance or text 'bears the traces of the social structure that it both expresses and helps to reproduce' (Bourdieu 1991: 2). Thus, linguistic exchanges express relations of power and authority not least because the practical competence to make an utterance, or create a text that will be read, depends not only on grammatical ability but also on an ability of the author to earn the right to speak/write and be listened to/read (Bourdieu 1991: 3). This right to a voice is purchased using 'symbolic capital'. In the case at hand, such capital is endowed upon the author by the institution they are a member of and that mandates them to act upon the social world via words. This mandating is done through a myriad of devices such as a uniform, warrant, letterhead or style of language (the latter two being elements of its discourse practices in general) (Bourdieu 1991: 75). Thus:

> There is a whole dimension of authorised language, its rhetoric, syntax, vocabulary…which exists purely to underline the authority of its author…. In this respect, style is an element of the mechanism…through which language aims to produce and impose the representation of its own importance and thereby help to ensure its own credibility. (Bourdieu 1991: 76)

The implication here is that the discourse of authority has high symbolic capital, and thus power, due to its very *form*, which results from an overt competence channelled into demonstrating that it is worthy of recognition (ibid.). This form, with its particular terms of address, metaphors etc., is chosen so as to convey a certain representation of the social world, that is to propagate a certain set of meanings. Here there is an overlap between Bourdieu's theory and Halliday's (1978) notion of language as 'Social Semiotic'. Defining the latter as a 'network of meanings that constitute the culture' (Halliday 1978: 100), he posits language as a means of making meanings and then exchanging them between social actors (Halliday 1978: 2). This exchange does not necessarily occur on terms of equality between participants; the meanings of some social actors are worth more, and are thus more powerful, than others. This is because they are loaded with the symbolic capital of the institution promoting them in its discourse.

By virtue of the stock of symbolic capital that the state has as its disposal, it is the holder of, and conduit for, a symbolic power. This power is something it may delegate, a process which under the welfare state paradigm is traditionally realised via the state bureaucracy network. In this way its officers have the authority to create official discourses which are endowed with the state's symbolic capital to give them weight (Bourdieu 1994: 8,12). These discourses place the participants (creators and readers) in and around them – giving them 'socially guaranteed identities…as citizen, legal resident, voter, taxpayer…' (Bourdieu 1994: 12). In other words, these discourses define the *meaning* of citizen, resident etc. and state. Bourdieu thus sees social relations as 'relations of symbolic force, as relations of meaning and relations of communication' (Ibid.). It follows, therefore, that if social control and power relations depend upon the ability to control meaning, then a social semiotic approach seems to be justified. Whilst the traditional channel for delegation of symbolic power is the state's own institutional network, there is no reason why the state cannot alter its flow, either by modifying the old channels or by choosing new ones entirely. If the market paradigm is the one which is adopted then the socially guaranteed identities of the participants in discourse and society will be different. The meaning of citizen may be redefined so as to contain the notion of the individual as a consumer of marketised state services. The meaning of state may undergo a corresponding change, thus we can see here the potential effects of the state modifying its own institutions so as to mimic marketised ones but there will presumably also be consequences arising from the state delegating its powers and activities to other agencies altogether. In other words, the way that a state varies the rate of exchange between the different types of capital, economic, cultural etc., of the public and private sectors (and 'welfare' and 'market' models of society) will, through varied deployment and delegation of symbolic capital, have an effect upon the social semiotic – or the meaning network of society – and the discourses circulating in and through it.

The interrelation of the culture and the meanings that are inherent in any social structure as it exists at a given moment means that a change in one affects the other. A change in culture manifests itself in a change in the meanings that are exchanged in the social semiotic (in this case, language). A change in authority relations in a society is tantamount to a change in its culture, and that will be reflected in changes in language used to express it and vice-versa. That is, when alteration occurs in the social conditions or structures that support a given hierarchy of authority, the competence of social actors to produce language that is recognised as embodying that authority is itself varied, so that any 'collapse or crisis of language authority' is part of 'a disintegration of an entire universe of social relations of which it was constitutive' (Bourdieu 1991: 116). Perhaps 'collapse' of authority is rather too dramatic a formulation for the case at hand here, where the project is concerned with potential *shifts* in authority and status, but the general principle holds, although may be better conceptualised in terms of linguistic changes being manifestations of a redefined relation of authority between the institution and its clientele.

3.2 Register

Whilst Bourdieu makes reference to 'linguistic strategies' and their dependency on the author's situation in the social structure (1991: 64), and to 'form' of the discourse of authority (1991: 76), he provides no detailed linguistic description of how these might be realised. Once again, the work of Halliday and his followers in systemic-functional linguistics (SFL) (Halliday 1978, Halliday and Hasan 1980, Leckie-Tarry

1995, Halliday and Matthiessen 2004) provides a suitable complement to the somewhat more abstract theorising of Bourdieu. The concept of 'register' has been developed within the bounds of SFL as a means of theorising at least part of the link between text and context. Halliday himself developed register into a powerful model describing 'ranges of semantic potential' (Fowler 1996: 185), that is, modes of meaning. A register is a variety of language associated with a recurrent communicative situation or set of communicative roles (Johnstone 2002: 158). These 'situation types', which are often conventionally recognisable social events, practices or interactions such as church services, lessons, sports reports and so on, constrain or enable the kinds of meanings that may be appropriately exchanged in them.

Register provides a framework for detailed interpretative study of how language is used in situations and how that use might itself constitute those situations (Downes 1998: 308). As an illustration of how it fleshes out the abstract 'strategies' and 'forms' referred to above, register can be crudely considered as a well defined way of thoroughly specifying *styles* of language (such as those that Bourdieu related to authority). The core of the theory is that registers consist of certain textual patterns and features that vary systematically according to contextual values. This systematicity allows for analysis informed by explicit criteria relative to both textual and contextual variables (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 27). Halliday achieved explicitness in his model of context by developing a conceptual framework containing the three functional variables of situation: 'field', 'tenor' and 'mode' (Halliday,1978: 222). These elements of the context constrain or enable an author to use a certain type of language, or register, in creating the text. The field, or social action, refers to the institutional setting of the text, not just the subject matter but the nature of the social event being enacted, or 'what it is that the participants are engaged in' (Eggins and Martin 1997: 238). The tenor, or role structure, refers to the nature, roles and statuses of the participants relative to each other, both the immediate roles relative to the text and the 'whole cluster of socially significant relationships in which they are involved' (ibid.). The mode, or symbolic organisation, refers to the part language itself plays in the social event or situation: the organisation of the text, its function in the context, and the channel or medium of communication chosen.

This model of context fits congruently with Halliday's model of the organisation of language as a whole enshrined in SFL. As Martin (1997: 4) puts it, SFL is 'centrally concerned with showing how the organisation of language is related to its use…by modelling both language and social context as semiotic systems in a relationship of realisation with one another'. According to the SFL model, language is functionally organised into three semantic components, the 'ideational', 'interpersonal' and 'textual' metafunctions. Ideational meanings in language are those concerned with representation, interpersonal meanings are concerned with interaction and the organisation of social reality, and textual resources are concerned with organising the flow of ideational and interpersonal meanings into coherent texts. Halliday (1978: 116) points out that the situational elements, field, tenor and mode, interrelate systematically with the semantic components, ideational, interpersonal and textual respectively. In other words:

> The semiotic structure of a given situation type, its particular pattern of field, tenor and mode, can be thought of as resonating in the semantic system and so activating particular networks of semantic options…from within the corresponding semantic components. This process specifies a range of meaning

> potential or register: the semantic configuration that is typically associated with the situation type in question. (Halliday 1978: 123)

To conflate a series of Halliday's ideas, the discussion so far can be summarised as follows. A text is a linguistic form of social interaction and its environment is the context of situation, which is one instance of a situation type. A situation type is a semiotic construct, structured in terms of field, tenor and mode. By virtue of their relationship to the semantic components of language these arguably determine the register of the text by specifying the range of choices that can be made from the pool of potential 'ways of meaning' (Halliday 1978: 125). Register is thus not merely a style, it is a semantic concept.

This concern with meanings makes register relevant to consideration of authority. It was established in section 3.1 that the unequal exchange of meanings was indicative of the embodiment of symbolic and actual power in the text and its author. Investigations into registers can thus, according to Halliday (1978: 62), complement ethno-methodological techniques as a way of investigating social activity, making full use of the bi-directional relationship between language and social context that allows an analyst to 'make inferences from the situation to the text…and also make inferences from the text to the situation' (Halliday and Hasan 1980: 62). Halliday (1978: 231) also makes special reference to register in the context of language and institutions, suggesting that it is the ideal vehicle to reveal the hierarchical structure and controlling nature of an institution, as enshrined in its language use.

3.3 Register analysis in practice

In order to investigate the linguistic realisation of authority in local government discourse, texts produced by Norfolk County Council (NCC) during the period 1990 to 2005, were analysed with the aim of detecting any changes in register that may have been manifested in them over that time. The texts were selected from a small corpus of texts obtained from the NCC archive in April 2005. The selection was made so as to present examples from two genres of NCC communications, namely letters and press releases. Within each genre there were examples that allowed coverage of the widest time-span for which it was possible to collate material, and selection was such as to bring together texts whose broad topic area and types of participants were consistent. This consistency was part of a design to eliminate as many variables as possible relating to context, as was the inclusion of whole letters and press releases, (Ure's (1971: 444) 'whole language events') rather than parts of them lifted out of immediate context. This concern with the whole event or text was also reflected in the preservation of the texts in their form as archived. The texts were analysed in this form rather than as transcriptions so as to take into consideration the layout and visual design of each document as well as the wording it contained. The justification for this was that these features were deemed to be important when considered in relation to the *mode* variable of the context/situation (taking a reasonably broad definition of that variable). The register analysis was primarily structured so as to be contrastive of the texts within any one genre. This type of analysis is at the heart of the Eggins and Martin (1997) method and also aligns with the recommendations of Fairclough (1989:10) that changes in practice over time should be attended to as the soundest method of investigating context. The consistency of topic and class of participants was intended to ensure that any detected changes in register resulted from changes in the underlying context of situation rather

than variation caused by different 'absolute' distance in the social hierarchy between different classes of actors (assuming here that such absolute relations exist).

To illustrate the findings of the investigation I will restrict detailed commentary here to the findings of the analyses of a sub-sample, namely three letters written in May 1992, June 1999 and March 2005 respectively. These are presented as Texts 1 2 and 3 below, each followed by a register description. All were produced by officers of the Trading Standards Department of NCC, a branch of the institution with a statutory regulatory role enforcing laws concerning fair trade between businesses and their customers. The addressees were all owners of small businesses and their common topic was the instruction of the addressees to satisfy certain legal requirements at the behest of NCC. Evidence of an anonymisation process carried out by NCC as a condition of release of the documents is visible, although it is disregarded in the actual analysis. The evidence supporting the register descriptions comes from detailed linguistic analyses (fully reported in Pagani 2005) which focus upon: grammatical metaphor, especially nominalisation; use of verbs, especially agency attribution and passivisation; lexical choices and patterns, especially specialist, formal and informal vocabulary; representation of actors, considering pronouns and nomination; modality, considering how the text producers express certainty of knowledge; speech acts, considering directness versus indirectness, positivity versus negativity.

Analysis of Text 1 (figure 1) suggests the following register description (as modelled on the reporting approach of Eggins (2004)).

Field: regulation of food safety and how the addressee is required to act to achieve this under the instruction of the author. The author employs ideational resources that categorise some processes surrounding this incident as entities via nominalisation, for example; 'corrective action' (line10) to represent how the addressee will perform a process of putting things right. The role of NCC as an actor is foregrounded; passivisation is used to delete the agency of the complainant twice (lines 6 and 9) and that of 'the Department' once (line 6). These are features of bureaucratic language.

Tenor: very high formality and a very high authority differential are constructed on expertise and institutional power bases. Formal lexis takes preference over everyday or colloquial choices that could have been used to realise interpersonal meanings For example, line 5 is a highly formal way of saying 'do you remember when we spoke about X the other day?' The author expresses certainty of knowledge, the only modal element introduced is in the indirect speech act 'I would be grateful if you…' (lines 9 and 10). This is a grammatical metaphor whereby a modulated declarative is used in place of an imperative clause, or two clauses, namely 'look into this' and 'inform me'. This command, and its disguise in this form, is indicative of high authority on the author's part in two ways. Firstly, indirect negative speech acts are typical of bureaucratic power with the underlying reason that the language they are dressed in is one of the symbols of institutional power and authority considered by Bourdieu. Secondly, the command is given without explanation of the author's justification for it. Iedema's (1997) work suggests that in a situation where the hierarchical gap between author and addressee was lower the author would need to include a clause giving background information, such as how he or she requires the action so as to achieve some larger goal such as 'sale of safe food'. The authority of NCC is also constructed via the representation of the participants. Within the body of the text the author and addressee are portrayed somewhat equally through personal pronouns, but the institutional power of the former is emphasised by the capitalisation of

'Department' (line 6) and, more importantly, by the use of the title 'Technical Officer' (line 13). Furthermore, the whole text is clothed in the institutional 'uniform' of the headed paper which includes reference to the titled authority figures 'Divisional Officer' and 'Chief Executive'.

Mode: the text is written to be read with no elements of spoken language, and is thus fully representative of the most formal medium, maximising interpersonal distance. Challenge or feedback is not invited and the only possibility of reply afforded to the addressee is introduced via a command rather than by the medium of communication itself. Typographically the size, font and style of the letterhead logo emphasises the major role of the institution, and of note is the line that divides it from the space in which any reference will be made to the addressee, whose name and address appears in standard typeface at the very bottom of the page.

Analysis of Text 2 (figure 2) suggests the following register description.

Field: regulation of trade in motor vehicles and how both NCC and the addressee might act to secure compliance with laws. The author represents processes through a mixture of nominalisations ('enquiries' – line 5) and congruent verbal forms ('you advertise' – line 5), uses proportionately fewer agentless passives than in Text 1, and uses four times as many animate subjects as inanimate or abstract ones whereas in Text 1 the numbers were close to equal. This approach portrays both parties as actors, although not necessarily equal in status.

Tenor: high formality and a high authority differential are constructed. Formal lexis again takes preference over everyday choices, but unlike Text 1 there are two examples to counter this trend; 'feel free' (line11) and 'happy to help' (line12) are relatively colloquial terms. No expressions of uncertainty appear, so authority of knowledge is maintained, but there is a lower authority realised in the directives that are given. Whilst those given in lines 7-8 and 9-10 are realised indirectly through metaphor as in Text 1, they are this time accompanied by background information and justification in lines 5-6 and 7-8 respectively of the sort that was lacking in the earlier text. As noted above, this indicates a lower hierarchical gap than was previously the case. Representation of participants follows a similar pattern to Text 1. 'Department' is again capitalised (line11), and, if anything, the use of 'we' and 'our' (lines 6,7 and 11) endows the author with more emphasised institutional authority than in the former text, although this may be necessary to counter the somewhat ambivalent title 'Trainee' (line14). As with Text 1 the headed paper invokes high authority, with the titled figures mentioned there being endowed with even more spectacular accreditations than before in the form of longer titles and letters after their names. At the very bottom of the page Trading Standards emphasises its institutional position as 'part of the Directorate of Law and Administration' and its approval by third-party auditors who have bestowed their logos upon it. Interestingly by means of one of these, it describes itself as a 'Quality Assured *Firm*' (my emphasis), thereby introducing the first signs of a marketised quasi-commercial identity.

Mode: the text is written to be read, does not invite feedback and thus maximises interpersonal distance. The typographic elements are very similar to Text 1, but of note is the promotion of the addressee's name and address to the upper parts of the page.

Analysis of Text 3 (figure 3) suggests the following register description.

Field: regulation of poor workmanship by specifying actions required of addressee. The author chooses to represent processes congruently as verbs with only one exception, and this lack of nominalisation is atypical of old-style bureaucratic language. Animate subjects are almost twice as frequent as inanimate subjects, but as with the increase in agentless passive constructions this is a regression from Text 2. NCC is the sole subject of only one sentence (line14) and its role as an actor is thus somewhat backgrounded compared to that of the addressee.

Tenor: relatively informal, the authority gap is not constructed as emphatically as in Texts 1 and 2. Formal lexis is more balanced by colloquial terms, for example; 'we spoke…about' (line 5) contrasts strongly with the opening of Text 1, and 'the end of the week' (line 6) contrasts with Text 2's 'as soon as possible'. The author retains a claim to authority of knowledge, the only modal element being in the indirect negative speech act (line14) which, as before, realises institutional authority. However, as with Text 2, this is mitigated by justificatory background information (line 6). Representation of participants in the body of the text grants more equality than either of the two previous examples. An individual exchange between 'I' and 'you' is represented, and the 'we' (line 5) is not an institutional one but a shared one. The title 'Senior Fair Trading Officer' (line16) maintains some status for the author, but there is no longer any institutional support from reference to other titled persons in the letterhead. There are, however, even more indicators of external approval than before in the shape of the four logos at the bottom of the page, of which 'investor in people' adds to the commercial identity conveyed by the still-present 'firm'. Note also how the main institutional logo now includes the strapline 'at your service' which seems to position the addressee as having some authority over the institution.

Mode: the text is written to be read, does not invite challenge or feedback, but interpersonal distance is lowered. The letterhead is less emphatic than in the earlier texts and, whilst NCC's name is still given most prominence in typeface and font, it has quite literally moved 'out of the box' that once contained it, and the deletion of the dividing line is mirrored in the more open layout, clearer font and user-friendly bullet points.

3.4 Conclusions of the analyses

Analysis appears to show a decline in the relative authority of NCC over its small business clientele, with textual realisations displaying changes in tenor, and with a promotion of the clientele's positioning in texts visible in the changes in the mode variable. Ideational representation also moved away from the highly nominalised form typical of traditional bureaucratic registers. The change in register between 1992 and 2005 is clearly a long-term process. There was no sudden change apparent, and the register of the 1999 letter seemed to fit between that of the others in terms of formality and authority, although its being closer to that of the 1992 letter suggests that the rate of change may have accelerated between 1999 and 2005. It is noteworthy that in all the texts there is very little evidence of a direct adoption of marketised discourse, for example from promotional registers. However, such little as there is does show a progression from no occurrences in the earlier letters to the occurrence of 'firm', 'investor' and the generation of a brand image by the strapline 'at your service' in the latest one.

Overall, the register analyses supported the hypothesis that the authority hierarchy pertaining between participants in local government discourse has altered, in the form

of a levelling-out of status that favours the addressees. However, some qualifications do need to be made. For example, the claims made about the context of situation of the texts have to be considered not as deterministic predictions but as probabilistic ones. The size of the sample of texts analysed here was too small statistically for this result to be considered anything more than indicative. A much larger corpus would need to be assembled and analysed for the probability of correct context 'prediction' to be maximised.

Register Theory was seen to flesh out some of the more abstract theorising of Bourdieu and Halliday relating to language and meaning, and to provide a framework for linking text and context. It enabled a focussed analysis of the texts under scrutiny whereby linguistic detail was used to justify claims about their contexts in terms of field, tenor and mode. Of particular interest was the contribution to the investigation of authority, which is usually associated with the *tenor* variable, which was made by analysis of a broadly conceived *mode* variable. Allowing mode analysis to become a way of introducing a consideration of spatial layout, visual design, textual logos and symbols and so on indicates that a certain multi-purpose flexibility can be ascribed to SFL tools such as register analysis, but also hints at a fruitful future direction for research into the discursive element of the relationship between states and citizens.

4. The 'critical' angle and register

Notwithstanding the findings and conclusions of the register analyses discussed in section 3, it is worthwhile to highlight an issue of concern previously articulated by Fairclough (1989: 21), namely that the detected change in register may be merely a superficial representation of an apparent process of levelling of authority. There may be a reduction in *overt* markers of power asymmetry in institutional situations and discourse but it may also be the case that this does not reflect a real elimination of that asymmetry, rather its transformation into *covert* forms. This is achieved by imposition of a new 'dominant register' to replace the old one (Fairclough 1988: 112). In this case the dominant register is now arguably a hybrid incorporating elements of the old 'bureaucratic' register together with elements of commercial and/or media discourse. Further work would be needed to establish whether or not the authors and addressees of local government discourse perceive that a real underlying change in authority relations between them has occurred over the past fifteen years. Only then could a more reliable suggestion be made that the register changes detected are either true or false reflections of shifts in the position of local government along the authority/power axis or the state/market axis.

Thus, in relation to the meanings and representations conveyed by texts emanating from the public sector, a 'mystification' is arguably occurring. Public services are increasingly delivered under the banner of the private sector: described, liveried and otherwise semiotically represented as being provided through the workings of 'the market' rather than the state. Public sector discourse in a range of modes may be realised in a hybrid register that mimics commercial models. The traditional role of the state in providing, and thus directly or indirectly funding, public services or other facilities was, prior to marketisation/privatisation, openly declared in a range of discourses of nation/state so that the meanings of state and citizen that were made and exchanged were, arguably, accurately representative of the social structures then existing. In the present day the same range of resources is employed in creating different discourses; these tend to indicate that the state no longer provides, and thus no longer directly or indirectly funds, certain services or facilities. Unfortunately, this

may not be a totally accurate representation of the actual situation if many of these services and facilities continue to be fully or partially funded by the state. So, discourses of central or local government may well consist of texts that are mystificatory in that they misrepresent the meanings of the state (posing as 'market') and citizen (posing as 'consumer/purchaser') and the relationship between them.

At the outset and in section 2 we touched upon the topic of mental models, asking how and why people form and/or choose models to represent the state and their own citizenship of it. We saw there how Gramsci (1971) and Bourdieu (1994) suggested that people's 'mindsets' or 'mental structures' respectively are influenced by activities of the state - activities which include discourse practices. The mental models of state and citizen employed by the creators and addressees of the texts discussed here will both shape and be shaped by the kinds of meanings exchanged in those texts, in other words, by register. The mystification and misrepresentation that may be occurring through register variation is such that, through discourse practice, the general practice of the state is under-realised and under-represented whilst that of the private sector is overstated. If distorted meanings of the state enter circulation as a result of this then it is possible that they are able to affect the models of state and citizenship held by individuals and hence affect their notion of what it is that the state is supposed to be and what it is supposed to do.

Figures

Figure 1. Text 1 – Letter Dated 18 May 1992

NORFOLK
COUNTY COUNCIL
Trading Standards

J Barnard
Divisional Officer

Bethel Street
Norwich NR2 1NR

Tel : (0603) 666555
Fax : (0603) 765113

Chief Executive : B J Capon

My Ref : RMF\6111\JDR

Please ask for : Mr

Your Ref :

18 May 1992

Dear Mr.

With reference to our recent conversation regarding a complaint this Department has received about a pork cheese purchased from Norwich.

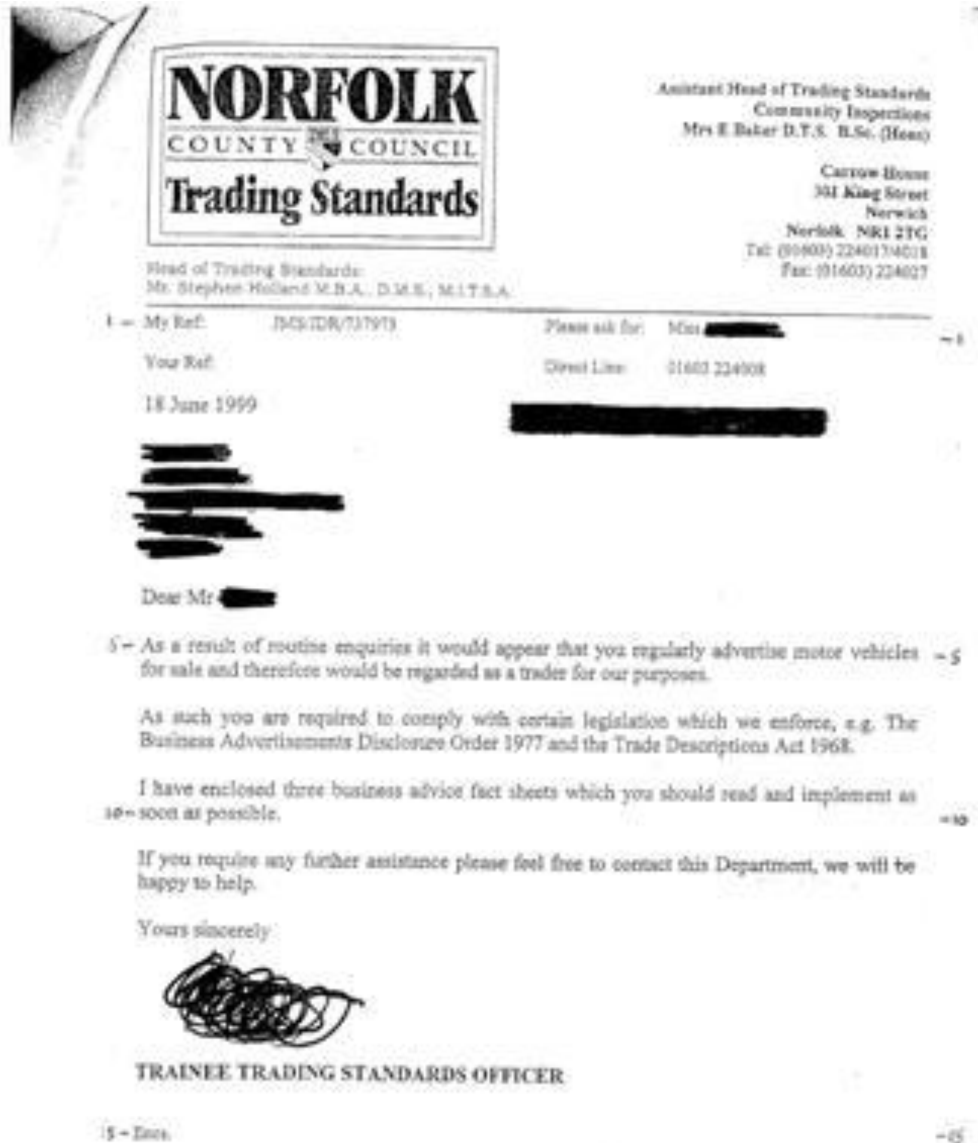
The complainant alleges that a number of bones (please find enclosed) were found in the product. I would be grateful if you could look into this matter for me and inform me of any corrective action you have taken to stop the incident happening again.

Yours sincerely

TECHNICAL OFFICER

47

Figure 2. Text 2 – Letter Dated 18 June 1999



NORFOLK
COUNTY COUNCIL
Trading Standards

Assistant Head of Trading Standards
Community Inspections
Mrs E Baker D.T.S. B.Sc. (Hons)

Carrow House
301 King Street
Norwich
Norfolk NR1 2TG
Tel: (01603) 224017/4018
Fax: (01603) 224027

Head of Trading Standards:
Mr. Stephen Holland M.B.A., D.M.S., M.I.T.S.A.

My Ref: JMS/TDR/737973 Please ask for: Miss [redacted]

Your Ref: Direct Line: 01603 224008

18 June 1999

Dear Mr [redacted]

As a result of routine enquiries it would appear that you regularly advertise motor vehicles for sale and therefore would be regarded as a trader for our purposes.

As such you are required to comply with certain legislation which we enforce, e.g. The Business Advertisements Disclosure Order 1977 and the Trade Descriptions Act 1968.

I have enclosed three business advice fact sheets which you should read and implement as soon as possible.

If you require any further assistance please feel free to contact this Department, we will be happy to help.

Yours sincerely

TRAINEE TRADING STANDARDS OFFICER

Encs.

Figure 3. Text 3 – Letter Dated 23 March 2005

Trading Standards Service
County Hall
Martineau Lane
Norwich
Norfolk NR1 2UD

Tel: 0844 800 8013
Fax: 01603 222999
Email: trading.standards@norfolk.gov.uk

My Ref: Your Ref:

23 March 2005

Dear Mr

Re: Your customer,

We spoke on the telephone last week about the unsatisfactory work you carried out for your customer. You confirmed that you would address the problems by the end of this week.

The problems include: -

- Scratches on the new marble hearth
- Scratches to the skirting board
- Realigning the join throughout the centre of the room
- A poorly joined landing carpet
- Various lumps in the hallway.

I would be grateful if you could now get this work rectified as promised.

Yours sincerely

Senior Fair Trading Officer

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