Redesigning English

new texts, new identities

**Sharon Goodman and
David Graddol**
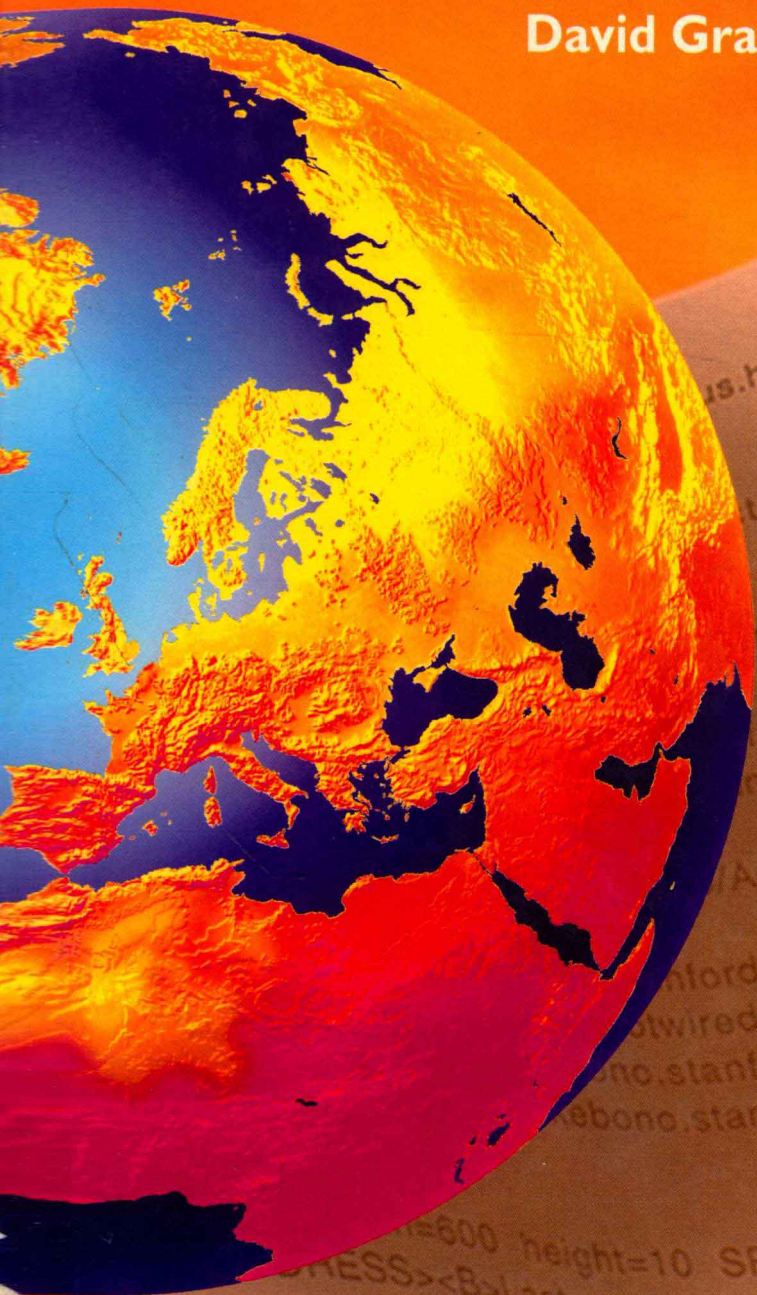
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Sharon Goodman and David Graddol

This book examines the new forms of text that have appeared in English in the twentieth century as a consequence of technological innovation and social change. A central theme of the book is the idea that new kinds of text reflect and help construct changing identities and social relations. The English language, indeed, plays a key role in the global restructuring of social and economic relations that has been collectively referred to as 'the postmodern condition'.

We live in a world in which the validity or interpretation of communication depends crucially on an understanding of when and where the speaker/writer was when the text was created. Indeed, the word 'time' is one of the commonest words in the English language. Allan Bell, in Chapter 1, examines the changing structure of time as represented in one of the oldest of the 'new media' – news journalism. He shows how news stories abandoned a chronological narrative structure in the late nineteenth century, as a distinct genre of news reporting emerged which satisfied the new requirements of readers – who no longer had the leisure or patience to reach the end of a long story in order to discover the outcome – and the requirements of a more complex institutional production process, where sub-editing means news stories must be designed so that they can be shortened without losing key information. News stories illustrate a number of other textual qualities that became more frequent in other genres as the twentieth century progressed. Bringing together many voices – sources, witnesses, earlier stories on the same topic – leads to forms of heteroglossic text in which the concept of authorship is rendered problematic.

Sharon Goodman, in Chapter 2, discusses the increasingly visual nature of English texts. At the height of the eighteenth century the perfect serious text was a tombstone of elegant typography. Pictures, even simple engravings and line drawings, were a signifier of popular and lower class taste. This sense of the vulgarity of visual communication carried over into social anxieties in the twentieth century, first for comics and then for television. In the late twentieth century, developments in technology have brought about a reversal of fortune for visual communication. The increasing availability of tools for creating visual texts – and the means to disseminate them globally – have engendered a change in the status of the visual. Sharon Goodman discusses the return of the visual semiotic to English texts in the postmodern age, and the ways in which words, typography and pictures are woven together to form multimodal texts. One of the readings associated with the chapter, by Theo van Leeuwen, extends this discussion into the area of film.

When one thinks of new, global communications technologies it is likely to be the Internet which first comes to mind, and this is considered by Simeon Yates in Chapter 3. The Internet has spawned so many new genres – from asynchronous communications by e-mail to on-line interactions (Internet Relay Chat) between people scattered across the world who have never met, and who present themselves through imaginary identities – that it demands closer linguistic scrutiny. English was one of the first European languages to benefit most from standardization and the development of the new modes of representation provided by scientific English. Now English seems likely to benefit most from the creation of

the new genres associated with the new communications media. It may be possible, technologically, to communicate across the Internet in languages other than English, but will all languages be allowed to develop the linguistic resources required for the range of distinctive Internet genres? And, since people's identities are constructed in part through their interaction with texts, are English-speaking 'netizens' forming a global social elite who have privileged access and experience of the global village?

One often noted feature of the postmodern world is the blurring of boundaries – not just in geographical space but also in social identities. The trend towards a global market and consumer society is one that has had transformative effects at a cultural level, and no arena shows better the mixing of genre and conflicts of social identity than the kind of information texts produced to inform clients and consumers. Sharon Goodman, in Chapter 4, explores some of the hybridizing processes of 'informalization' and 'marketization' that have affected many genres of public language, and the contradictory effects on the producers and receivers of such texts, from university prospectuses to sales talk.

The thesis of globalization suggests that English – which is the first language of capitalism – will enter the linguistic repertoire of all parts of the globe but will enter new relationships with local languages and cultures, and meet new forms of local resistance, which in turn will lead to a redefinition and shift in status of both English and local languages. In Chapter 5 David Graddol explores some of the conflicting trends in global English, from the early twentieth-century aspiration that English could become a universal language bringing peace and wealth to all nations, to the global restructuring of social and economic inequality that is being brought about by global economic trends, assisted by communications technology. It shows that globalization, whatever else it might be, is not about the creation of a uniform global culture and language.

The readings which accompany each chapter's main text have been chosen to exemplify key points made in the chapters, often by exploring related kinds of data, or comparing English texts in different parts of the world.

Redesigning English: new texts, new identities is designed for readers who have an interest in English, but who do not necessarily have any detailed knowledge of linguistics or other forms of language study. It can be read independently but it is also the last in a series of four books designed for an Open University undergraduate course: U210 *The English Language: past, present and future*. We occasionally refer readers to these books, as well as to *Describing Language* (Graddol et al., 1994), for further discussion of topics touched on here.

Features of each chapter include:

- *activities*: these provide guidance on the readings or suggestions for tasks to stimulate further understanding or analysis of the material;

- *boxed text*: boxes contain illustrative material or definitions or alternative viewpoints;

- *marginal notes*: these usually refer the reader to further discussion in other parts of the book, or to other books in the series, or to *Describing Language*; where necessary, they are also added to explain conventions used in the text;

- *key terms*: key terms in each chapter are set in bold type at the point where they are explained; the terms also appear in bold in the index so that they are easy to find in the chapters.

1 TEXT, TIME AND TECHNOLOGY IN NEWS ENGLISH

Allan Bell

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This first chapter considers some of the ways in which the English language is used in international news. English has been extraordinarily important in the development and diffusion of news practices and news conventions, as the forms of modern journalism were largely developed in the English language. It was the rise of daily newspapers in English-speaking countries that helped define the nature of modern news and news stories. Still more strongly, it was the emergence of international news agencies, overwhelmingly in English, that both defined and disseminated these forms throughout the world. Stories from these agencies make up a large proportion of the content of most newspapers, and the agencies are leading purveyors of news and custodians of news style. The English language dominates the exchange of news around the world, particularly through the major international agencies such as Reuters and Associated Press. Translation into other languages is time-consuming and expensive. Although the agencies do a lot of translation, the need for this cuts news flows by at least half, according to Oliver Boyd-Barrett (1980). In short, if you do not have access to English, you miss out on most of the news disseminated throughout the world.

The chapter deals with the way the English language is used in news stories, mainly as they are published in daily newspapers. It looks especially at the discourse structure of news stories – that is, how the various language elements that make up a news text are put together. In particular, it focuses on time as one crucial dimension of the news story, and how this is expressed in news English, through different levels of language structure. The chapter examines how the time structure of news stories is different from time in other kinds of story. It looks at how shortness of time affects the way news stories are actually put together, and how news workers embed stretches of text from a wide range of sources to produce a story.

1.2 ENGLISH, NEWS AND TIME

The first and most far-reaching change to the means of news distribution – the telegraph – became widespread in the mid nineteenth century and combined with other developments such as the creation of international news agencies. The telegraph has been a crucial technological influence on news practices and forms, establishing the period in which news and news work assumed its modern pattern: a quest to get the story first, before one's competitors, and the use of a nonchronological format for writing stories. Technological developments in the pursuit of timeliness continue to impel news coverage towards 'present-ation' – that is,

closing the gap between the event and its telling, with the goal of displaying events in 'real time'.

The pattern of news work operates to the rhythm of, usually, daily deadlines. On these are imposed shorter and longer cycles, with different hours of the day producing different mixes of news, and different days of the week producing differently defined news for publication or broadcast. In the western model that dominates world media, the basic cycle of news is a 24-hour one. Newspapers appear daily, and even broadcast media that transmit hourly bulletins also have flagship news programmes that serve as the main recapitulation of the previous 24 hours' news.

Time is a defining characteristic of the nature of news English. It is a major compulsion in news gathering, and has an influence on the structure of news discourse. The journalist's basic rubric of 'the facts' to be included in a story holds time as a primary element. *When* is high among the 'five Ws and an H' that journalists are taught to cover: who, what, when, where, why and how.

The news is one particular kind of story, and I approach it primarily in terms of the way news stories (particularly in the press) order the events they report. Time is a basic element of a story, and stories are arguably central to human experience. They come in many forms: romances, Westerns, fables, parables, gospels, legends, sagas. One feature of stories, however, appears to be so shared between cultures that it is practically a defining characteristic of what counts as a story: events tend to be told in the chronological order in which they occurred. Cognitive psychologists such as William Brewer, who study the ways in which people understand stories, make the distinction between event structure and discourse structure – that is, between the order in which events actually happened and the order in which they are told in a story (Brewer, 1985, p. 167). There is only one real-world event structure, but many possible discourse structures. Telling a story in chronological order is apparently the 'natural' way because it matches the discourse structure to the event structure.

A useful way to begin examining news stories is to look at the extent to which they differ from other kinds of story. To do this, I make some comparisons with the way people tell stories of their own personal experience in face-to-face conversation. Personal narratives have been studied in particular by the American sociolinguist William Labov (Labov and Waletzky, 1967, pp. 12–44; Labov, 1972), who has analysed the structure of personal narratives and separated them into six elements:

Labov's study of conversational narratives is also discussed in Chapter 1 of the second book in this series, *Using English: from conversation to canon* (Maybin and Mercer (eds), 1996).

1   The *abstract* summarizes the central action and main point of the narrative. A storyteller uses it at the outset to pre-empt the questions 'What is this story about? Why is it being told?'

2   The *orientation* sets the scene: it addresses the questions 'Who, when, what, where?', establishing the initial situation or activity of the story, and some-times sketching out events before or alongside the main narrative events.

3   The *complicating action* is the central part of the story proper, answering the question 'Then what happened?'

4   The *evaluation* addresses the question 'So what?' Narrative has a point, and it is the narrator's prime intention to justify the value of the story he or she is telling, to demonstrate why these events are reportable.

5   The *resolution* – 'What finally happened?' – concludes the sequence of events and resolves the story.

6   Lastly, many narratives end with a *coda* – 'And that was that'. This is an additional remark or observation that bridges the gap between narrative time and real time, and returns the conversation to the present.

These six elements occur in the above order in personal narratives, although evaluation can be dispersed throughout the other elements. Only the action and some degree of evaluation are obligatory components of the personal narrative. By applying this framework, we can see the ways in which news differs from other stories. I will take as an example a typical story from an international news agency.

Figure 1.1 shows the text of a story from Reuters. The story originated in Peru, and is given here as it was published in New Zealand, in Wellington's *Evening Post* newspaper. The time structure of the story's events is listed in the column on the right. Time zero is the present tense of the story, which I define as the time of the lead event in the lead sentence: Higuchi's departure to hospital. Times prior to this are labelled Time −1 for the event immediately preceding, moving back up to Time −6 in this story, the earliest occurrence in the reported background. The story also reports on events subsequent to Time 0, labelled Time +1 (Higuchi's diagnosis), and so on.

Sentence number		Time structure
	Protest cut short	
S1	LIMA, Jan 18. – The estranged wife of Peru's President Alberto Fujimori was taken to	0
	hospital today just 24 hours after she began a	−2
	hunger strike to protest at her party's	
	elimination from congressional elections.	−3
S2	Doctors said she was suffering from tachycardia, or an accelerated heartbeat.	+1
S3	Earlier, [deposed first lady Susanna] Higuchi, sitting under an umbrella in a scorching summer sun outside the National Electoral Board's headquarters, had pledged to press on with her protest.	−1
S4	The electoral board said on Monday Higuchi's Armonia-Frempol party had not qualified	−3
	for the April Congressional vote because it	+2
	failed to present a full list of candidates for the 120-member legislature.	−4
S5	Board member Manuel Catacora said today	0
	that since Higuchi had presented her party's congressional slate just 10 minutes before the	−4
	filing deadline, a provision allowing parties five days to correct any error did not apply.	0
S6	Higuchi, a 44-year-old civil engineer, has been estranged from Fujimori since August when	−5
	she protested an election law that banned her from running from [sic] public office. – Reuter	−6

Figure 1.1   International news agency story as published in the Evening Post, *Wellington, 20 January 1995. (The text in square brackets in S3 is taken from the caption to the photograph published with the text of the story)*

Abstract

The first sentence of a news story – known as the 'lead' or 'intro' – functions as its abstract. It summarizes the central action and establishes the point of the story. The story in Figure 1.1 has a triple abstract. The lead sentence covers a sequence of three events, but in reverse chronological order. The result (Higuchi's departure to hospital) precedes the cause (her hunger strike), which itself precedes the prior cause (her party's disqualification from the elections). Double abstracts are frequent in news stories, and triple abstracts are not uncommon in the drive to pack maximum news impact into the lead sentence. They are typically linked by time expressions, usually *after* for a sequence (as in Figure 1.1) and *as* for simultaneous events. These time expressions commonly imply a cause-and-effect link. In S1 of Figure 1.1, this link is obviously justified – Higuchi's hunger strike is the cause of her hospitalization. In other stories, however, the causation implied through the use of *as* or *after* does not always seem warranted.

In press news, there is also the headline – an abstract of the abstract. The lead sentence is the journalist's primary abstract of a story, although to the reader the headline appears as the first abstract. The headline is in fact a last-minute insertion, written by a sub-editor rather than the journalist. Time is virtually never expressed in headlines, so it is not surprising to find no time expression in *Protest cut short* in Figure 1.1.

Orientation

For journalists, the basic facts are: who, what, when and where; they are given in concentrated form at the beginning of a story, but may be expanded further down. Where other kinds of story routinely take time out at the beginning to set the scene, describing the characters and the setting, news stories present their orientation while they are already telling the story events.

In Figure 1.1, time zero is explicitly identified in the lead sentence, with other earlier or later time points specified in later sentences (see Table 1.1). Some time

Table 1.1

Time expressions in the story in Figure 1.1

Sentence	Story time	Time expression
Dateline	0	Jan 18
S1	0	today
	0	just 24 hours after …
	−2	… she began a hunger strike
S3	−1	earlier
S4	−3	on Monday
	+2	April
S5	0	today
	−4	just 10 minutes before the filing deadline
S6	−5	since August when she protested …
	−6	… an election law that banned her

references in news stories situate events in calendar time, by reference for example to a particular day or month: *on Monday* or *since August*. Others place events in relation to each other, such as *just 24 hours after she began a hunger strike* in S1 and *just 10 minutes before the filing deadline* in S5. Still others are **deictic** – that is, they refer to time in its relation to the present, such as *today* or *yesterday*. International agency stories such as that in Figure 1.1 are 'datelined' at the top for place and time or origin. So LIMA, *Jan 18* specifies the calendar time at which the story was reported, and the deictic *today* in the lead sentence locates the present time of the story at that same point of calendar time. Deictics take their meaning from the viewpoint of the speaker who uses them. It is noticeable that *today* in this story (and of course in many other international news items) has a different meaning for the journalist who wrote the story than for the story's readers in New Zealand. *Today* refers to 18 January, when the story was written, but the story was published in New Zealand two days later on 20 January (although because New Zealand time is 18 hours ahead of Peru, the events are in fact little over a day old). Because of the difference between time of writing and time of reception, a deictic like *today* can really only be used in the first sentence of a story near the specification of the date to which it refers. If it were further down the story, the reader would be confused as to whether it referred to time of writing (18 January) or time of publication (20 January).

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Activity 1.1 *(Allow 40 minutes)*

Choose a short news story (up to ten sentences long) from an English language newspaper you are familiar with. Identify and list the time expressions it contains in the way shown in Table 1.1. Try to establish the chronological order of the events in the story.

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Action

At the heart of a narrative is the chain of events that occurred: the action. This is always told in chronological order. (See Labov's definition of narrative below.)

Labov's definition of narrative

We define narrative as one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred. For example, a pre-adolescent narrative:

1 a   This boy punched me
   b   and I punched him
   c   and the teacher came in
   d   and stopped the fight.

An adult narrative:

2 a   Well this person had a little too much to drink
   b   and he attacked me
   c   and the friend came in
   d   and she stopped it.

In each case we have four independent clauses which match the order of the inferred events. It is important to note that other means of recapitulating these experiences are available which do not follow the same sequence; syntactic embedding can be used:

3 a   A friend of mine came in just
        in time to stop
        this person who had a little too much to drink
        from attacking me.

Or else the past perfect can be used to reverse the order:

4 a   The teacher stopped the fight.
   b   She had just come in.
   c   I had punched this boy.
   d   He had punched me.

Narrative, then, is only one way of recapitulating this past experience: the clauses are characteristically ordered in temporal sequence; if narrative clauses are reversed, the inferred temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation is altered: *I punched this boy/and he punched me* instead of *This boy punched me/and I punched him.*

With this conception of narrative, we can define a *minimal narrative* as a sequence of two clauses which are *temporally ordered*: that is, a change in their order will result in a change in the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation. In alternative terminology, there is temporal juncture between the two clauses, and a minimal narrative is defined as one containing a single temporal juncture.

The skeleton of a narrative then consists of a series of temporally ordered clauses which we may call *narrative clauses*. A narrative such as 1 or 2 consists entirely of narrative clauses. Here is a minimal narrative which contains only two:

5 a   I know a boy named Harry.
   b   Another boy threw a bottle at him right in the head
   c   and he had to get seven stitches.

This narrative contains three clauses, but only two are narrative clauses. The first has no temporal juncture, and might be placed after *b* or after *c* without disturbing temporal order. It is equally true at the end and at the beginning that the narrator knows a boy named Harry. Clause *a* may be called a *free clause* since it is not confined by any temporal juncture.

(Labov, 1972, pp. 359–61)

Labov found that a defining characteristic of personal narrative as a form is the temporal sequence of its clauses. That is, the action is invariably told in the order in which it happened – 'matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events' (Labov, 1972, pp. 359–60). Telling it in a different order would mean that it had happened in a different order.

News stories, by contrast, are seldom if ever told in chronological order. The time structure of the story in Figure 1.1 is very complex, with nine points in time identified in the analysis. The story as a whole divides into three sections: S1–2, S3–5 and S6. The lead sentence alone covers three events and times, as we have seen. Each of the three sections represents a cycle through events taking us further back in time, presenting in reverse order of actual occurrence (plus a couple of excursions into the story's future time) the chain of events that have culminated in the lead event of this story. The earliest events are reported last of all, with the final sentence describing events from some six months earlier, which are the antecedents to the present occurrences. The chronological order of events in Figure 1.1 is shown in Table 1.2. The glance forward to the future end-point of this process – the elections in April – is a completely standard representation of the ongoing nature of most news stories. So also is the official pronouncement (S2 Time +1) following the lead event, in this case the doctors' diagnosis.

Table 1.2
Chronology of events in the story in Figure 1.1

Story time	Calendar time	Action
−6	Before August 1994	The law bans Higuchi from the elections
−5	August 1994	Her protest estranges her from Fujimori
−4	Before Monday 16 January 1995	Her party files an incomplete candidate list
−3	Monday 16 January	Her party is disqualified from the elections
−2	Tuesday 17 January	Higuchi begins a hunger strike
−1	Wednesday 18 January	She pledges to continue her protest
0	Wednesday 18 January	She is taken to hospital
+1	Wednesday 18 January	Doctors diagnose her condition
	[Friday 20 January	Publication date in New Zealand]
+2	April 1995	Date of upcoming elections

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Activity 1.2 *(Allow 30 minutes)*

Analyse the time structure of the story you used for Activity 1.1 and list its events in chronological order in the way shown in Table 1.2. You may find that having to be explicit about the events and their ordering changes some of the chronology you outlined in Activity 1.1.

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Evaluation, resolution and coda

Evaluation is the means by which the significance of a story is established. In personal narrative, evaluation is what distinguishes a directionless sequence of

clauses from a story with a point and a meaning. In the case of the fight stories studied by Labov, the point is often the self-aggrandizement of the narrator. Evaluation pre-empts the question 'So what?' It gives the reason why the narrator is claiming the floor and the audience's attention.

News stories also require evaluation, and its function in them is identical to that in personal narrative: to establish the significance of what is being told, to focus the events and to justify claiming the audience's attention. Like all news stories, that in Figure 1.1 stresses repeatedly the importance of what has happened, particularly in the lead sentence with its vocabulary of news value: *estranged, President, taken to hospital, just 24 hours after, hunger strike, protest, elimination, elections.* The lead sentence is a nucleus of news evaluation, because the function of the lead is not merely to summarize the main action. The lead focuses the story in a particular direction. It forms the lens through which the remainder of the story is viewed.

Most kinds of story move to a resolution: the fight is won, the accident survived. News stories often do not present such clear-cut results (although journalists prefer the conclusiveness that a result offers). When they do, as noted above, the result will be in the lead rather than at the end of the story. In this example, the nearest thing to a resolution is Higuchi's departure to hospital. But this of course is only the latest step in a continuing saga: the news is more like a serial than a short story. While the beginning of a news story is everything, the ending is nothing. This is a challenge to the 'storyness' of news, because we expect stories in general to end at the end. Brewer (1985) found that narrative sequences that lacked an outcome were not even classed as stories by his (US) informants.

Nor is there a coda to the news story. In personal narrative, the coda serves as an optional marker of the story's finish, returning the floor to other conversational partners, and returning the tense from narrative time to the present. None of these functions is necessary in the news, where the floor is not open, and where the next contribution is another story.

The way it was

Labov's analyses show that in personal narrative if you change the order of narrative clauses, you change the order of events. In news English, order is everything but chronology is nothing. As news consumers we are so accustomed to this approach that we forget how deviant it is compared both with other kinds of narrative and with earlier norms of news reporting. Research on news narrative styles by the US sociologist Michael Schudson shows that the nonchronological format developed in American journalism in the late nineteenth century. Stories of the 1880s covering presidential State of the Union addresses did not summarize the key points at the beginning, but by 1910 the lead as summary was standard (Schudson, 1989).

The extract below is part of a story from the *New Zealand Herald* of 11 June 1886. It reports the eruption of Mount Tarawera, a volcano located near Rotorua, some 200 km to the south-east of Auckland. The eruption caused considerable loss of life and reshaped an extensive area of the New Zealand landscape. This is a typical disaster story (albeit closer to its readers than most), which might be found in any newspaper around the world today. But here it is narrated in absolute chronological order.

June 11, 1886

At an early hour on Thursday morning a noise as of the firing of cannon was heard by many Auckland residents.

From the continuousness of the firing, the loudness of the reports, and the apparent occasional sound resembling salvoes of artillery, many people both here and at Onehunga were under the impression that a man-of-war, probably the Russian Vestnik, had run ashore on the Manukau bar and that these were her signals of distress.

Vivid flashes, as from the firing of guns, were also seen both at Onehunga and also from the cupola of the Herald Office, which served to almost confirm the impression that there had been a marine disaster. At about 8.30 a.m., however, it began to be circulated about town that a catastrophe, far surpassing in horror even the most terrible of shipwrecks, had taken place.

The first news was, through the courtesy of Mr Furby, the officer in charge of the telegraph department, issued by us in an extra and consisted of the following message, sent from Rotorua, by Mr Dansey, the telegraphist there, who manfully and bravely "stuck to his instrument" in the face of the most dreadful danger:

"We have all passed a fearful night here. At 2.10 a.m. there was a heavy quake, then a fearful roar, which made everyone run out of their houses, and a grand, yet terrible, sight for those so near as we were, presented itself. Mount Tarawera suddenly became active, the volcano belching out fire and lava to a great height. A dense mass of ashes came pouring down here at 4 a.m., accompanied by a suffocating smell from the lower regions.

"Several families left their homes in their nightdresses with whatever they could seize in the hurry, and made for Tauranga. Others more lucky, got horses and left for Oxford."

The historical story begins at the beginning and proceeds with a straight chrono-logical narrative. Its lead sentence describes the first sounds of the eruption as heard by people living in Auckland, where the *Herald* is published. By contrast, the modern news lead sentence on such a story would run something like this: 'Mount Tarawera erupted last night sending residents fleeing …'.

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Activity 1.3   *(Allow 30 minutes)*

Rewrite the nineteenth-century story above in the order and style in which a modern journalist would write it.

Comment

The orientation of the Tarawera story to its readers' fragmentary experience of a distant news event is quite remarkable to the modern reader. Instead of going straight to telling what has happened at Tarawera, the story narrates how Aucklanders experienced the signs of the eruption – the sound and sight of explosions – and how they interpreted these phenomena. We learn of the actual cause only, so to speak, when the news arrives in town. This contrasts with the anchoring of the Higuchi story in the time and place where it happened and was