**Discourse Analysis / Evaluation in Newspaper Discourse**

2019 / L3

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**References**

- Besnard, A-L., 2014, "*Be likely to* and *be expected to*, epistemic modality or evidentiality ? Markers of (non) commitment in newspaper discourse", International Conference on Evidentiality and Modality in European Languages, 6-8 October 2014, Madrid, Spain

- Breeze, R., 2017, "Exploring evidential uses of the passive of reporting verbs through corpus analysis", in *Evidentiality Revisited, functional and discourse-pragmatic perspectives*, edited by J. Arrese, G. Hassler and M. Carretero, John Benjamins, Amsterdam / Philadelphia

**Manchester Arena attack : what we know so far**

***The Guardian*, 23 May 2017**

For ease of reference you need to number the lines.

A suspected terror attack hit a pop concert in Manchester on Monday evening. Police have confirmed that at least 22 people were killed in the explosion at an Ariana Grande concert at Manchester Arena. Some of them are children. Officers said that a further 59 people were injured amid reports of at least one explosion that hit the venue after the concert finished. Greater Manchester Police say the explosion is being "treated as a terrorist incident until we have further information".

Police say the attack was carried out by one man who died at the scene of the bombing, and that their priority was to establish whether he was acting alone or part of a network.

*The Guardian* earlier established that the explosion was being investigated as a suspected suicide bombing. The police say they believe the attacker was carrying an improvised explosive device, which he detonated.

The blast was reported to have hit the foyer of the building at about 10.30 pm, British Transport police said.

Multiple witnesses said they heard an explosion, with one telling *The Guardian* the blast shook the whole building, before "everyone screamed and tried to get out".

Large areas around the arena have been sealed off and Victoria Station has been closed and is expected to be closed throughout Tuesday.

Prime Minister Theresa May has said her thoughts are with the victims and families of those affected in "what is being treated by the police as an appaling terror attack".

General election campaigning has been suspended.

Around 21, 000 people are reported to have been at the concert at the time of the explosion.

Chief constable Ian Hopkins said : "The attacker, I can confirm, died at the arena. We believe the attacker was carrying an improvised explosive device, which he detonated, causing this atrocity." His mother and father were both born in Libya but appear to have emigrated to London before moving to Manchester where they have lived for at least 10 years. It is likely that the bomber's communications will form a significant part of the inquiry, while investigators will also be checking if he was known to authorities in any way. As well as seeking to identify any potential accomplices in Britain, authorities will also be looking into the possibility of any link to international groups.

People outside the concert were visibly upset, as a cacophony of sirens were heard and police and ambulance vehicles arrived at the scene.

The terrorist threat level for Britain is at severe, meaning an attack is highly likely. Security is expected to be reviewed for major venues in Britain and elsewhere.

Police have appealed for concert-goers and witnesses to provide them with any footage they have from the scene if they believe it can assist the probe.

**Non-commitment in the media**

Non-commitment involves various attitudes towards knowledge. Included are linguistic forms that mark the journalist's source of knowledge : as something seen, heard, told, reported, inferred, ... . Events transferred to the reader may be intact, as recounted or witnessed, or may be manipulated. Many languages distinguish firsthand and non-firsthand information sources. English has a rich repertoire of non-commitment devices.

For example, epistemic modal expressions (*must, can't, should*, *probably, surely, (to) seem*, etc) are regarded as evaluating the reliability of propositions. Also, in English, different complement clauses distinguish an auditory and a hearsay[[1]](#footnote-1) meaning of the verb *hear* :

(1) *I heard Brazil beat France* implies actual hearing whereas

(2) *I heard that Brazil beat France* implies a verbal report of the result.

Non-commitment stance includes the journalist's comments on the certainty, doubt, reliability, or limitations of a proposition including comments on the source of information.

**Assignment**

- Is *The Guardian* a tabloid or a broadsheet ? (Broadsheets are more serious than tabloids that are typically popular in style and, most of the time if not always, dominated by sensational stories) Is it British or American ?

- List all the markers of non-commitment you can find in *The Guardian* article.

- Who is the source of knowledge/information ? the journalist(s) ?, a 3rd party ?, the police press service ?, or is the source unknown ? etc.)

- What are the means (linguistic forms / markers) used to transmit this knowledge/information ?

- What (types of) verbs are used by the journalist(s) ? Are they mental state verbs, sensory verbs of perception, etc. ?

- After reading the article, list all the factive vs. non-factive statements

- Quote instances

a) of unhedged statements that imply that the journalist has adequate evidence for establishing that those assertions are true

and

b) where the evidence is indirect - reports from others, some unspecified source, hearsay, etc -

- Explain in detail in what sense(s) reporting or lexical verbs and modal expressions - supply a few examples - are an important means of expressing non-commitment in journalistic discourse.

1. Markers of hearsay : *people say, they say, I've been told, X told me*, .... . [↑](#footnote-ref-1)