Interpersonal meaning, persuasion and public discourse: Packing semiotic punch

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INTERPERSONAL MEANING, PERSUASION AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE: PACKING SEMIOTIC PUNCH

J.R. Martin

ABSTRACT
This paper considers the discursive deployment of modality in one public text, with a view to outlining the significance of grammatical metaphor as resource for expanding the meaning potential that can be brought to bear on the modal assessment of English propositions and proposals. The implications of this interpretation of interpersonal meaning for critical social literacy in Australian schools is subsequently discussed with reference to two pieces of expository writing from a senior secondary school context.

0. NEGOTIATION
There are many respects in which texts can be construed as social processes of negotiation. Fairclough (1989, 1992a), for example, has drawn attention to the contemporary foregrounding of certain interpersonal resources in public discourse – the 'synthetic personalisation' whereby authorities attempt to construct a patently coercive solidarity with subjects they are seeking to control (which might be glossed as an incursion of 'public' discourse into previously 'private' spheres; cf. Habermas 1991). Fairclough's work raises the complementary issue of to what extent interpersonal resources can be deployed to challenge authority. Can private discourse invade more public spheres; and if so, which interpersonal resources are mobilised, from which subjects, to which agents or agencies of symbolic control (Bernstein 1990:138-139)? In this paper a functional linguistic deconstruction will be offered of one challenge of this kind, and potential implications for teaching critical social literacy in Western secondary schools will be briefly reviewed (Christie et al. 1991, Christie 1993).

1 Fairclough (1993:140) actually refers to these resources as a colonization of the public sphere by the private and an appropriation of private resources by the public sphere; I think, however, that a case can be made for treating the appropriation as an incursion of public discourse into previously private spheres – a weakening of classification (in Bernstein's terms) designed by powerful public voices to colonize new frontiers.
1. INTERSUBJECTIVE MEANING

The semiotic excursion in question was published by the *Sydney Morning Herald* (one of Australia's three leading broadsheet newspapers) on page 1, on Thursday, August 29, 1991. It consists of a letter from a concerned citizen, Ms Vanessa Chang, to the then Premier of New South Wales, Mr Nick Greiner, accompanied by a picture of Ms Chang. Ms Chang's father, for many years Australia's most renowned heart specialist, had recently been murdered – apparently as the culmination of an unsuccessful extortion bid by his murderers. In the previous election Greiner's conservative party had won office, running on a platform which promised to repeal the stringent gun laws introduced by the Labor government prior to the election. In the election, the Labor Party lost a number of key seats in country areas which they had traditionally held, with the gun law issue a key factor in these electorates. The verbal part of this text is presented as text (1) below (with formatting and paragraphing as published by the *Herald*):

(1) Ms Chang's letter to Mr Greiner

Dear Mr Greiner.

WHY HAVEN'T GUN LAWS BEEN CHANGED?

THE SHOCKING AND SENSELESS KILLING OF MY OWN FATHER, VICTOR CHANG, FORCES ME TO WRITE THIS LETTER. I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT HIS DEATH AND THE MURDER OF SO MANY OTHERS IN THE LAST TERRIBLE WEEKS HAS NOT PROMPTED AN IMMEDIATE RESPONSE FROM THE GOVERNMENT!

After the needless killing of over a dozen people in the last two months I must emphasise the desperate need to review and reform existing policies on the possession of arms in this state. Policies which, at present, are not stringent enough to prevent the slaughter of innocents.

How many more tragedies will have to occur? How many families will have to live with the anguish of not only the death of their loved one, but the thought that it could have been prevented?

I appeal to you, Mr Greiner, to realise past mistakes and help rectify the existing situation now, before more lives are sacrificed. I know that criminals cannot be stopped but surely we can limit or stop their easy access to lethal weapons!

It would be irresponsible to ignore Australia's plea to reform antiquated gun law policies!

Sincerely,

VANESSA CHANG
In broad generic terms, the letter is a hortatory exposition (Martin 1985/1989, Martin and Peters 1985). As a first step, its structure can be displayed in stages, labelled according to the function they play in this text and the range of agnate² persuasive genres.

(2) The structure of Ms Chang’s letter to Mr Greiner

Salutation (greeting)
Dear Mr Greiner.

Issue (what’s at stake)
Why haven’t gun laws been changed?

Authority (why I matter)
The shocking and senseless killing of my own father, Victor Chang, forces me to write this letter.

Argument (rationale)
I cannot believe that his death and the murder of so many others in the last terrible weeks has not prompted an immediate response from the government!....

How many more tragedies will have to occur?....

Appeal (demand for action)
I appeal to you, Mr Greiner, to realise past mistakes and help rectify the existing situation now, before more lives are sacrificed....

It would be irresponsible to ignore Australia’s plea to reform antiquated gun law policies!

Valediction (leave taking)
Sincerely,

Vanessa Chang

Canonical staging of this kind tells us something about the social function of the text. However, to more fully appreciate its rhetorical force it is important to look closely at its construction of meaning – in particular at what systemic functional linguistics (hereafter SFL) refers to as interpersonal resources (Halliday 1967, 1970, 1978, 1982, 1985, He 1993, Martin 1991, 1992a, b, in press, Poynton 1985/1989, 1990). These resources comprise what in other schools of linguistics would be distributed across the pragmatics of illocutionary force, indirect speech acts, evidentiality and intensity or stance (cf. Biber & Finnegan 1988, 1989, Chafe 1986, Labov 1972, 1984). In SFL they can be usefully divided into those foregrounding intersubjectivity³, typically orchestrating dialogue at the front of the English clause (the systems

² The term is from Gleason (1965) and refers to paradigmatic relations among units of description; in terms of contemporary critical theory it is closely related to intertextuality, interpreted as a system of immanent meaning potential.

³ Cf. Fairclough (1993:136) on identity (interpersonal) and relational (Interpersonal) functions.
of MOOD and MODALITY; Halliday 1970, 1985), and those foregrounding subjectivity, typically encoding speakers feelings through groups and phrases, especially nominal groups (AFFECT, JUDGEMENT and APPRECIATION; Martin in press, Iedema 1994, Iedema et al in press, Rothery forthcoming). In this paper it is Chang's deployment of intersubjective resources that will be the focus of attention.

2. POSITIONING THE LISTENER

In order to explore the rhetoric of Chang's intervention, we need to introduce the fundamental discursive strategy on which she draws – referred to in SFL as grammatical metaphor (Halliday 1985, Halliday & Martin 1993). Text (3) below, from the detective fiction of P.D. James, provides the point of departure for this discussion. In this passage, Commander Dalgliesh is interrogating a local police inspector with respect to his preliminary investigations. The exemplary passage is highlighted in bold face.

(3) Commander Dalgliesh with Inspector Blakelock. (James 1978:153)

Commander Dalgliesh: “You were watching her closely all the time, Inspector? Are you absolutely sure that Miss Foley couldn't have replaced the keys in the box without your seeing her?”

Inspector Blakelock: “No, sir. That would have been quite impossible.”

The phenomenon in question here has to do with the meaning of Blakelock's No, sir in response to Dalgliesh's query. In this context, what does No, sir mean? And why could Yes, sir have meant the same thing? The critical point here has to do with which part of Dalgliesh's query No, sir is actually negotiating. In context, it means ‘No, sir, she couldn't have replaced the keys', not ‘No, sir, I'm not absolutely sure...'. In Halliday's (1985) terms, it negotiates the projected (that Miss Foley couldn't have replaced the keys in the box without your seeing her), not the projecting (Are you absolutely sure) part of the clause.

In this respect it contrasts with the alternative Yes, sir, which to function in this context would have to be interpreted as negotiating the projecting (Are you absolutely sure), not the projected clause (that Miss Foley couldn't have replaced the keys in the box without your seeing her).

Why, in such contexts, are both projecting and projected clauses candidates for negotiation? Halliday's way into theorising these phenomena is through the concept of metaphor. Traditionally, metaphor refers to the use

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4 It is not being suggested here that 'subjective' resources have no affect on the listener, but merely that they are not being offered up directly for negotiation - i.e. not at risk as Subject, Finite or Mood Adjunct (= Halliday's 1985/1994 composite Mood function).
of one word or phrase in place of another, where the resulting expression has
to be read both literally and figuratively to make sense in context. For
example, if the poet writes that his love is like a red red rose, instead of that
his love is ardent, then he is invoking a reading which notes literally that his
love is similar to a red rose, and which at the same time has to be rendered
figuratively along the lines of his love being describable as ardent (or
however else the metaphor might be rendered, depending on reading
position). Significantly, the meaning of the metaphor lies precisely in the
tension between its literal and figurative interpretation – the literal plus (or
perhaps better, times) the figurative layer. Note as well that the relationship
between the layers is symbolic; there has to be some respect in which the
figurative meaning can be derived from the literal meaning of the word or
phrase in question.

Extending this traditional notion of ‘lexical’ metaphor, Halliday (1985)
introduces the concept of ‘grammatical’ metaphor to handle the phenomenon
of one grammatical structure standing for another. For example, if we say
‘I’m sure the Inspector was very nervous, we mean, epistemically, that there
is a very high probability that the Inspector was very nervous – that the
Inspector must have been very nervous, as opposed to would have been
(median probability) or might have been (low probability). In other words,
the projecting, first person, present tense, clause I’m sure, which attributes a
mental state, stands for a high valued modalisation, which might have been
more directly encoded as a modal verb (i.e. must); and it can stand for the
high valued modalisation because it is similar enough in meaning to it to be so
deployed. One grammatical structure (involving PROJECTION) is used to
stand for another (MODALISATION). Thus the more likely tag for this
example is wasn’t he, not didn’t I, even though the main grammatical Subject
is I, not the Inspector (cf. the non-metaphorical Dalgliesh is sure she’s
guilty, isn’t he?, not isn’t she?5).

Thus, in general terms, it is the phenomenon of grammatical metaphor
which gives the Inspector a choice of responding to the literal meaning or the
figurative (i.e. transferred or metaphorical) meaning in text 3. Responding
literally involves reading are you absolutely sure as a non-metaphorical
relational attributive process describing the Inspector’s mental state (and
agnate to were you sure, will you be sure, make sure, is he sure, etc.):

Responding metaphorically, on the other hand, involves reading are you
absolutely sure as a metaphorical relational attributive process standing for a
high valued modalisation of certainty (and agnate to is it absolutely certain

5 Isn’t she? could only function as a tag in this context with rising intonation, following
a break in the rhythm (a silent beat), and indicating a shift in the source of the
modalisation under negotiation (from how sure Dalgliesh is to how sure the speaker is).
The critical issue here is symbolization: first person, present tense projections are
similar in meaning to (in fact, they deconstruct the meaning of) modalisation, whereas
third person, past tense projections are not so close.
that she couldn't have, is it impossible that she could have, might Miss Foley have been able to, was Miss Foley possibly able to, etc.):

In fact the Inspector plays it safe; he responds first to the metaphorical reading (with No, sir) and then covers his tracks by negotiating both the metaphorical modalisation of certainty (Are you absolutely sure) and the literal modality of ability (couldn't):

In order to negotiate both modalities, Blakelock has to use a metaphorical modality himself (quite impossible), since modality can be expressed just once through a modal verb in a standard English clause. The degrees of certainty and ability chosen by the Inspector are worthy of note. For certainty, he selects a median value (probable, not possible or certain) realised through the modal verb would (as opposed to might or must); for ability, he nominalises, and is thus able to select a high value, realised in his British English through the intensifier quite (as opposed to almost or next to) submodifying the adjective impossible. Blakelock positions himself in other words as fairly sure that Miss Foley absolutely couldn't have replaced the key, in a context where Dalgliesh was asking about absolute certainty. This subtle renegotiation of the context is outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Blakelock's second move — responding to Dalgliesh's projecting MODALISATION with would and to his projected MODULATION with quite impossible

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6 Halliday (1970/1976:193) notes that speakers sometimes produce two modals, with the second verb always realising modulation (deontic modality): he might ought to be here meaning 'perhaps he ought to be here'. He suggests that the double modals noted in non-standard Southern American dialects by Labov may operate on the same pattern.

7 Cf. alternative responses such as Well, sir, that might have been quite impossible, though I need to check or Absolutely sir. That must have been quite impossible from all I've learned.
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As might be expected, the flexibility engendered in discourse by interpersonal grammatical metaphors creates opportunities for verbal play. Facetious responses to metaphors of MOOD are well known (e.g. Is your name Dalgliesh or Daglish? – Yes.); and metaphors of modality provide similar opportunities for speakers to unexpectedly reconstrue the context as a text unfolds. Consider Dalgliesh's most famous ancestor, in the opening passage of The Valley of Fear (exemplary negotiation in bold face):

(4) Sherlock Holmes with Dr Watson. (Doyle 1981a:769)

"I'm inclined to think---" said I.

"I should do so," Sherlock Holmes remarked impatiently.

I believe that I am one of the most long-suffering of mortals; but I'll admit that I was annoyed at the sardonic interruption. "Really, Holmes," said I severely, "you are a little trying at times."

In this example Watson introduces a projecting clause (I'm inclined to think) standing for a median valued modalisation (it would probably be that...). But before we even learn what he is about to modalise, Holmes jumps in and reconstrues Watson's modalisation as literally a first person (I), present tense (I'm), modulated (inclined), mental process of cognition (think) by telling him to do just that for a change – to think! This process of renegotiation is itself deeply symbolic of the relationship between Watson and Holmes (i.e. very collegial, but with Homes in complete control) is outlined in Figure 2.

![Diagram](image-url)

**FIGURE 2**
Holmes' facetious reconstrual of Watson's aborted conjecture in text (4)
3. INTERSUBJECTIVE RESOURCES FOR ASSESSMENT (MODALITY)

Having established grammatical metaphors of modality as an important negotiating resource in conversation, we will review Halliday's (1970/1976, 1985) account of this system of interpersonal meanings in some detail. In light of the ineffability of the meanings involved (Halliday 1984a), and Halliday's incorporation of metaphorical realisations, his framework will be presented in some detail. The basic non-metaphorical grammatical resources in question involve modal verbs (including needs to, dares to, is to, has to, has got to, had better), modal adverbs (including probably, presumably, predictably, possibly) and related periphrastic expansions of the verbal group via the verb be and a following adjective or passive verb (be willing to, be prepared to, be able to, be anxious to). A survey of the more familiar of these resources is provided below (for grammatical details see Halliday 1970/1976, 1985).

Setting aside ability (modal can, could in the sense of 'able'), Halliday interprets the system as offering resources for negotiating degrees of polarity – the semantic space between positive (is, do) and negative (isn't, don't). His 1985:334-341 account of the semantics of the MODALITY system is presented in broad outlines in Figure 3, including the major dimensions of VALUE (how we grade our assessment), ORIENTATION and MANIFESTATION (how we assign responsibility for our assessment and how explicit we are about doing so) and TYPE (how we assess propositions with respect to probability or usuality and proposals with respect to obligation and inclination). Sample realisations for each system have been included; modulations of ability have been integrated alongside inclination under the superordinate feature [readiness] – following Matthiessen (in press).

Something of the richness of the system is exemplified below, with respect to short passages from texts taken from the late 19th, early 20th and late 20th centuries. In light of Bernstein's (e.g. 1990) work on coding orientation, one cannot help wondering about the genesis of the system and the role played in its genesis by Bernstein's old and then his new middle class.
The I/T superscripts linking ability type with low value provisionally block the possibility of grading ability; a more precise description would allow for grading through the nominal meaning potential of objective realisations (e.g. quite able, great ability).
(5) Examples from the second half of 19th Century (Doyle 1981b:942)

I have no doubt the connection between my boots and a Turkish bath...
and yet I should be obliged to you if you would indicate it.
...which I should illustrate if I were to ask you who shared your cab...
I don't admit that a fresh illustration is an explanation,
you would probably have had no splashes,
and if you had they would certainly have been symmetrical.
Therefore it is clear that you sat at the side.
Therefore it is equally clear that you had a companion.
That is very evident.
Absurdly commonplace, is it not?

(6) Examples from the first half of 20th Century (from J Priestley An Inspector Calls, quoted from Martin 1992a; see also Halliday 1982)

I think we've just about come to the end of this wretched business --
I don't think so.
It wasn't necessary.
And I thought it better not to.
I think you'd better look at it.
I don't see any particular reason why I should.
Probably not.

(7) Examples from the second half of 20th Century (from Educating Rita, opening scene in film; for analysis see Cranny-Francis and Martin 1994)

It's that stupid bleeding handle on the door -- you want to get it fixed.
Ah, yes, yes, I I I meant to.
Well, that's no good, is it -- always meaning to?
You want to get on with it,
the poor sod on the other side won't be able to get in
you won't be able to get out.
Well, that would at least constitute some sort of start, wouldn't it?
But you may call be Frank.
I suppose it is.
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3.1 Orientation and manifestation – what are we arguing about?

Halliday uses the terms orientation and manifestation to refer to the way in which speakers formulate ‘indicative’ and ‘imperative’ speech acts as negotiable propositions and proposals. At issue here is the rhetoric whereby modality and the source of the modal assessment (i.e. the speaker) is structured into or around the Subject and Finite MOOD functions (e.g. She must...), with attendant repercussions for tags (mustn’t she?) and elliptical responses (Oh, must she?)

3.1.1 Explicit subjective

Under the heading explicit subjective, Halliday places the grammatical metaphors typically involving first person, present tense, mental processes (or their relational clause agnates which attribute a mental state – e.g. I have a suspicion that...).

(8) I reckon Greiner is corrupt, isn’t he?  
   – He is.

These metaphors explicitly construct the speaker as the source of the assessment, and to some extent, as we have seen in the Holmes to Watson repartee, place the speaker’s authority to assess at risk. (cf. the marked response Oh do you? to the opening move in (8)).

3.1.2 Implicit subjective

Under the heading implicit subjective, Halliday places non-metaphorical realisations through one or another modal verb. Modal verbs implicitly construct the speaker as the source of the assessment, and place the speaker’s assessment, although not her authority to assess, directly at risk (cf. the modality adjusting responses such as he would be, he must be).

(9) Greiner might be corrupt, mightn’t he?  
   – He might be.

3.1.3 Implicit objective

Implicit objective assessments are realised through modal adverbs (for modalisation – probability and usuality) or periphrastic verbal groups (for modulation – inclination and obligation).

(10) Perhaps Greiner is corrupt, isn’t he?  
    – He is.
They have the effect of disassociating the speaker from the assessment, which has been removed from the verbal part of the Mood function. Thus in (10), the first move invites negotiation of polarity *(is he or isn't he)*, nudging aside negotiation of the modality *(perhaps)*.

3.1.4 **Explicit objective**

Like explicit subjective assessments, explicit objective assessments make use of grammatical metaphors. Instead of expanding the clause through projection, explicit objective metaphors make use of nominalisation to disassociate the speaker from the assessment, which is reconstrued as an aspect of ideational, rather than interpersonal reality. The assessment itself is only very indirectly at risk, and its source is not open to challenge. Thus in (11), the response negotiates the polarity of the proposed possibility *(it is or it isn't)*, not its modality *(cf. it might be possible that, it would be possible that, it must be possible that)* — the semantics of the last of which, with its contradictory high and low assessments of probability, is in need of considerable contextualisation. In order to get at the nominalised modality and negotiate, it is necessary to abandon the proposition to hand and replace it with an alternative one *(It's more than possible that; it's a dead certainty that...)*.

(11) It's possible that Greiner is corrupt, isn't it?
    - It is.

3.2 **Value — how strongly do we feel?**

The system of value focuses attention on the strength of a modal assessment. Setting aside ability, which is not gradable in verbal form, modalities of probability, usuality, inclination and obligation can all be scaled according to whether their value is low, median or high. Implicit objective realisations of modality are deployed in Table 1 to display the respective scales. Halliday (1985) makes the point that, interpreted in this light, modality can be seen to open up a semantic space between *is* and *isn’t* for propositions and *do* and *don’t* or *will* and *won’t* for proposals — in other words, it establishes the potential for degrees of polarity in both the indicative and imperative realms of negotiation.
INTERPERSONAL MEANING, PERSUASION AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

TABLE 1: LOW, MEDIAN AND HIGH VALUED REALISATIONS FOR MODALITY TYPES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>Probability</th>
<th>Usuality</th>
<th>Inclination</th>
<th>Obligation</th>
<th>Ability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>low value</td>
<td>possibly</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>be willing to</td>
<td>be allowed to</td>
<td>[be able to]9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>median value</td>
<td>probably</td>
<td>usually</td>
<td>be keen to</td>
<td>be supposed to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high value</td>
<td>certainly</td>
<td>always</td>
<td>be determined to</td>
<td>be required to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Type — what are we negotiating?

The system of type distinguishes between the system of modalisation, which opens up degrees of polarity for propositions (i.e. statements and questions) and modulation, which opens up degrees of polarity for proposals (i.e. offers and commands). Halliday (1970/1976) reviews the grammatical differences between the two systems. Here we will focus briefly on the semantics of the negotiation involved.

Modalisation (epistemic modality in formal semantics) is concerned with assessing states of knowledge. The two key systems are probability (how sure?) and usuality (how often?). Their implicit objective form of realisation involves modal adverbs, which may be used to reinforce the value of an accompanying modal verb as in Table 2.

TABLE 2: LOW, MEDIAN AND HIGH VALUED REALISATIONS FOR MODALISATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>value</th>
<th>Probability</th>
<th>Usuality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>must certainly</td>
<td>must always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>median</td>
<td>would probably</td>
<td>would usually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>might possibly</td>
<td>might sometimes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted above, modalisation enables the negotiation of propositions, defined by Halliday (1984b, 1985) as discourse moves which give (statements) or demand (questions) information. An exemplary proposition is negotiated via probability in (12).

Nominalised objective forms of ability do open up the possibility of grading, via nominal group resources, for example a low ability..., a median ability..., a high ability to conduct electricity.
You must be Greiner.
- Yes, I am.

Modulation (deontic modality in formal semantics) is concerned with assessing commitment to action. The two key systems are inclination (how willing?) and obligation (how obliged?). Their implicit objective form of realisation involves a periphrastic form of the verbal group – the verb be plus an adjective or passive participle as outlined in Table 3. The be plus adjective forms realise inclination, with the adjective allowing submodification (e.g. I'm very determined, rather keen, quite willing); the be plus passive participle forms realise obligation, which is not open to grading of this kind\(^\text{10}\) (*I'm very required to).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>value</th>
<th>inclination</th>
<th>obligation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>must, be determined to</td>
<td>must, be required to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>median</td>
<td>will, be keen to</td>
<td>will, be supposed to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>may, be willing to</td>
<td>may, be allowed to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted above, modulation enables the negotiation of proposals, defined by Halliday (1984b, 1985) as discourse moves which give (offers) or demand (commands) goods and services. An exemplary proposal is negotiated via obligation in (13). Note that to bring modulation into play, an indirect speech act must be deployed (in this case, a declarative clause standing for an imperative one), since grammatically the system of modulation is only available in the indicative. In Halliday's (1985) terms then, negotiating commands through the system of modulation depends on grammatical metaphor – in this case, interpersonal metaphors of mood.

(13) You must act now.
- All right, I will.

3.4 Modality metaphors
As just noted, deploying modulation to negotiate the semantic space between do and don't in commands (or will and won't in offers) depends on

\(^{10}\) Comparable grading is available for explicit objective forms: there is a strong requirement that..., he's under some obligation to..., it's with our explicit permission that... .
grammatical metaphors of mood (indirect speech acts in pragmatics). Grammatical metaphor is also required to open up the explicit objective and explicit subjective manifestation and orientation options reviewed above.

(14) Congruent: say = mean
MEAN: Greiner must be corrupt
SAY:  Grieener must be corrupt

Metaphorical: say stands for mean
MEAN: Greiner must be corrupt.
SAY:  I'm sure Greiner is corrupt.

As far as modalisation is concerned, subjectivity is regularly rendered explicit through first person, present tense mental processes of cognition (e.g. I think, I reckon, I suspect) or relational processes of cognitive state (e.g. I'm sure, I'm convinced, I'm uncertain). Here, ideational resources for projection (Halliday 1985) are deployed to symbolise assessments of propositions.

Objective modalisation is regularly rendered explicit through nominalisations of probability and usuality, either as a quality or a thing. Here, ideational resources for constructing participants are deployed to distance modalisations from negotiation. Adjectives such as possible, probable, certain, usual, typical, common and so on are commonly used to construe modalisations objectively as qualities; nouns such as possibility, probability, certainty, unusuality, regularity, typicality and so on are commonly used to construe modalisations objectively as things (this is the grammatical source of fields such as gambling, risk theory and statistics).

As far as modulation is concerned, subjectivity is regularly rendered explicit through first person, present tense mental processes of affection (e.g. I want, I need, I'd like, I'd hate). Here again, ideational resources for projection (Halliday 1985) are deployed to symbolise assessments of proposals.

(15) Congruent
MEAN: I would sack him.
SAY:  I would sack him.

Metaphorical
MEAN: I would sack him.
SAY:  I'd like to sack him.

Objective modulation is regularly rendered explicit through nominalisations of inclination and obligation, either as a quality or a thing. Here, ideational resources for constructing participants are deployed to distance modulations
from negotiation. Adjectives such as *willing, keen, ardent, permissible*, *requisite, compulsory* and so on are commonly used to construe modulations objectively as qualities; nouns such as *intention, desire, determination, need, obligation, regulation, compulsion* and so on are commonly used to construe modulations objectively as things (this is the grammatical source of the various fields of bureaucratic administration – public, private, military, paramilitary, etc.; see Iedema in press).

4. POSITIONING THE READER

As exemplified in section 2 above, modality is a fundamental resource in dialogue – as part of the ongoing construal and reconstrual of meaning in repartee. Its role in dialogic interplay is examined in detail in Halliday (1982) and Martin (1992a). In monologue, modality functions as an equally fundamental resource for positioning a reader/listener – as part of the dialectic whereby a speaker/writer rhetorically manoeuvres to naturalise a specific reading position (Halliday 1992a, Martin 1992a, b). As far as modality is concerned, this process of positioning seldom involves a single voice (cf. however the discussion of texts (20) and (21) in section 5 below), and this is one aspect of Bakhtin’s (e.g. 1981, 1986) insistence on the inherent dialogism of any text.

Chang’s hortatory exposition is no exception to this principle, and its deployment of modality would appear to entwine Greiner in a rather uncomfortable semiotic web. An analysis of the modality in Chang’s text is presented below, with her grammatical metaphors of obligation, probability and ability unpacked.11

(16) Modality in Chang’s exposition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Why haven’t gun laws been changed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[unmodalised]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>The shocking and senseless killing of my own father, Victor Chang, forces me to write this letter.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[unmodalised]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

11 Chang’s modulated declaratives could be further unpacked as mood metaphors, since they function semantically as commands; this step has not been pursued here. For discussion of the semantic overlap between agency and modulation see Halliday (1985:264-266).

12 Note that Chang means that she is writing the letter because of her father’s death, not that she has to write the letter; so *forces* is not taken as metaphorical obligation here.
INTERPERSONAL MEANING, PERSUASION AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

I CANNOT BELIEVE that his death and the murder of so many others in the last terrible weeks HAS NOT prompted an immediate response from the government!

(median obligation: his death and the murder of so many others in the last terrible weeks ought to have prompted an immediate response from the government)

After the NEEDLESS killing of over a dozen people in the last two months I MUST EMPHASISE THE DESPERATE NEED to review and reform existing policies on the possession of arms in this state.

(median, then high obligation: Now that over a dozen people were killed who shouldn't have been in the last two months you really must review and reform existing policies on the possession of arms in this state)

Policies which, at present, are not STRINGENT enough to prevent the slaughter of innocents.

(ability: Policies which, at present, cannot prevent the slaughter of innocents)

How many more tragedies will have to (high obligation) occur?
How many families will have to (high obligation) live with the anguish of not only the death of their loved one, but the thought that it could have been prevented?

Appeal

I APPEAL to you, Mr Greiner, to realise past mistakes and help rectify the existing situation now, before more lives are sacrificed.

(high obligation: you must realise past mistakes and help rectify the existing situation now, before more lives are sacrificed)

I KNOW that criminals cannot (ability) be stopped

(high probability: certainly criminals cannot be stopped)

but surely (high probability) we can (ability) limit or stop their easy access to lethal weapons!

IT WOULD BE IRRESPONSIBLE to ignore Australia's PLEA TO reform antiquated gun law policies! [high obligation: you must reform antiquated gun law policies]

An overview of the process through which Chang positions and repositions Greiner is outlined in Figure 4. Her negotiation of obligation and ability is presented as one stream in this dialectic, on the left of the diagram; her negotiation of probability is presented to the right. Subjective and objective

13 Chang's explicitly subjective modulations, I cannot believe...has not and I must emphasise the desperate need both contain implicitly subjective modulations (cannot & must) which have not been separately analysed here; they function in the metaphor to push up the value of the obligation. Similarly the explicitly objective need is taken as part of the subjective metaphor I must emphasise the desperate need.

14 Needless (and need following) might have been treated as just outside the modulation system, in the border area between modulation and projection (cf. the cline between desire and modulation – I want you to go, I need you to go, I require you to go, you are required to go, you must go, go).
FIGURE 4
An overview of the dynamics of Chang's deployment of modality
realisations are aligned as implicit or explicit in order to present a rough picture of the flow of modalised reader positioning as the text unfolds.

As far as modulation is concerned, note that up to the last two sentences of the text realisations of obligation dominate. Three out of five of these are explicitly subjective (*I cannot believe..., I must emphasise the desperate need to..., I appeal...*), alongside two explicitly objective realisations of obligation which construe as ideationalised facts Chang’s view that the killings in question shouldn’t have happened (*needless killings*) and that Greiner’s gun laws weren’t capable of stopping them (*not stringent enough*). And up to this point in the text, there is no modalisation (i.e. no doubt). Chang, in other words, is very up front in individuating herself as the source of the demands she makes and objectifying the relationship between Greiner’s policies and the killings, and codes her demands as propositions whose probability is beyond question. This pattern clearly establishes Chang’s authority with respect to what she has to say.

The last two sentences of the text involve a more complex set of manoeuvres. Modalisation is brought in, subjectively, to acknowledge what cannot be done (explicit subjective modalisation: *I know that criminals cannot be stopped*), then objectively to suggest what can be done (implicit objective modalisation: *surely we can limit or stop their easy access to lethal weapons*) and finally subjectively again, mediating her invocation of ethics with the middle valued modalisation *would* (implicit subjective modalisation: *it would be irresponsible to ignore Australia’s plea to reform antiquated gun law policies*). The first two modalisations modalise modulations of ability (*I know...cannot; surely...can*); Chang subjectively grants what cannot be done (*I know...cannot*), then objectively invites the reader to agree with what can be done (*surely...can*). Chang’s subjective confidence in the truth of what she is asserting then decreases as she moves to her most strident modulation — an explicitly objective obligation, invoking ethical considerations (*would...irresponsible*). In a sense, then, the truth of what Chang is arguing becomes more negotiable, by way of rendering more plausible the irresponsibility of Greiner’s reactionary position on gun law reform.

We should also note here that alongside dynamically naturalising a complex reading position for Greiner and the Sydney Morning Herald readers in general, the metaphorical nature of the text allows for considerable discretion along the lines of the alternative readings reviewed in section 2 above. Chang’s modality in other words is not bluntly oppositional, but subversive; it is designed to engage Greiner in a silent dialectic of repartee, which his own coding orientation and that of fellow broadsheet newspaper readers will probably find difficult to refuse.

To further assess the impact of this modal rhetoric, we need to look briefly at the related interpersonal, ideational and textual meaning it positions the reader to believe and act upon since it is the dialogue among the various
modes of meaning in a text that fashions meaning above and beyond the sum of its semiotic parts (Martin forthcoming).

One striking feature that deserves comment is the construction of Chang's father, Victor Chang, as a martyred saint (a construction in which a broad spectrum of the Australian media participated following the murder). This prosody of unnecessary sacrifice is coded into value laden nominalisations (ideational metaphors for Halliday 1985), which like mood and modality have the speaker/writer as their source, and position the reader to assess the murder in a specific way:

Chang = martyred saint
The shocking and senseless killing of my own father, Victor Chang,
the needless killing of over a dozen people
the slaughter of innocents.
How many more tragedies
the anguish of not only the death of their loved one,
more lives are sacrificed.

Another remarkable feature of the text is its pattern of Theme selection (analysis here following Fries 1981/1983, Halliday 1985, Martin 1992a). Interpersonal and topical (i.e. experiential) Themes are outlined below, in order to display the angle on reader positioning and topic deployed by Chang. Note that most clauses have both interpersonal and topical points of departure — with interpersonal Themes foregrounding wh interrogatives (actually rhetorical questions functioning as mood metaphors for commands) and explicit subjective modalities alongside the invitational modal adjunct surely. The topical Themes foreground a number of the value laden nominalisations just reviewed and also have the effect of associating Greiner with killing, murder, tragedy and the criminals responsible for these crimes. Although not explicitly grammaticalised, Greiner is the implicit subject of two key non-finite clauses; if we strip away the relevant modality metaphors, Greiner emerges clearly as Theme (You should realise past mistakes...; You shouldn't ignore Australia's plea...). Gently then, under elision, Chang uses textual meaning to charge Greiner with her father's murder (and that of a number of other unfortunate victims, including those of a mass murderer run amok in a suburban shopping centre).

15 'Saint' in the sense of a publicly unblemished miracle worker; 'martyred' to the cause of multiculturalism, since the public celebration of his work was based in part on his ethnicity, and this fame played its part no doubt in attracting his assailants.
**INTERPERSONAL MEANING, PERSUASION AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE**

Greiner = Herod/Pontius Pilate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpersonal Theme</th>
<th>Topical Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(including metaphorical)</td>
<td>[for some reason]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why</td>
<td>The shocking and senseless killing of...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>his death and the murder of...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I cannot believe (= you should)</td>
<td>After the needless killing...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>[many more tragedies]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many more tragedies</td>
<td>[many families]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many families</td>
<td>(Mr Greiner – elided)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I appeal to you, (= you must), Mr Greiner</td>
<td>criminals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know (= obviously)</td>
<td>we</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but surely</td>
<td>(Mr Greiner – elided)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would be irresponsible (= you must)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a final step, consider the negotiation of person and Subject selection across the last three sentences of the text. In the sentence beginning I appeal to you, Mr Greiner, Chang uses an explicitly subjective modality followed by a vocative to establish herself in relation to Greiner, who is mentioned the first time following the letter’s Salutation; as noted above, Greiner is the implicit Subject of the projected non-finite clause. Following another explicitly subjective modality (I know), the if/you writer/reader inter-relationship is reconstructed as an inclusive we (but surely we can...), invoking joint responsibility for change (readable as Chang and Greiner, or perhaps as Chang, Greiner and other Australians – in transition to Australia’s plea). Finally, the source of Chang’s directive in reconstrued as the whole of the nation (Australia’s plea...), in the same sentence in which Chang construes Greiner’s obligation as an objective ideational fact (it would be irresponsible).

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16 In Halliday’s (1985) analysis, the wh phrase in wh interrogatives is treated both as an interpersonal and as a topical Theme.

17 Greiner is the elided Subject of the perfective non-finite clauses to realise past mistakes...and to ignore Australia’s plea...; he has been included in the analysis as an implicit topical Theme.

18 Note that the dislocated grammatical Subject of this sentence includes Australia’s plea – cf. [To ignore Australia’s plea to reform antiquated gun law policies] would be irresponsible, wouldn’t it?
plaintiff = Australia

I appeal to you, Mr Greiner, to realise past mistakes...
I know that criminals cannot be stopped
but surely we can stop their easy access to lethal weapons
Australia it would be irresponsible to ignore Australia's plea to reform...

There is a drift in modal responsibility – with respect to who is asking for change (the evolving source of the directive) and with respect to who is responsible for change (who the onus is on, i.e. Greiner). (See Figure 5.)

FIGURE 5
Reconstrual of responsibility in the culmination of Chang's text

In summary then, analysis of interpersonal and related meaning in Chang's text shows in part the way in which she was able to take advantage of the speaking position granted her as the Australian born daughter of a murdered heart surgeon, who had himself been nationally celebrated as one symbol of a brave, new multi-cultural Australia that had embraced ethnic diversity and was moving optimistically towards a prosperous Australasian future. Significantly, granted this opportunity, Chang had at her disposal the discursive resources to take advantage of her position – not as an end in itself (e.g. not to have people feel sorry for her) but as a springboard for moving

In contrast, Lucy Wang, de facto wife of the NSW Labor MP Mr John Newman, appeared only as the source of quotations in news stories following Newman's murder in September 1994; Ms Wang was a migrant to Australia, and native speaker of Mandarin.
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from the private into the public sphere; from personal authority to moral authority; from the 'I', to 'we' (Australians), to personified democracy (Australia's plea). In this process, Greiner is positioned either to join the commonweal or remain with the crims - a position Chang constructs not by charging him ideationally with murder (which would have been slanderous) but by constructing him interpersonally as modally responsible and positioning him textually in some bad company he would be loathe to keep.

Chang's intervention demonstrates one respect in which diverse subjectivity in a culture can be generative of resistance and social change. In several respects Chang's subject position is a non-mainstream one: ethnicity (Chinese, not Anglo), gender (female, not male), generation (adolescent, not mature). Her social class on the other hand (middle, not working), and her father's professional renown and symbolic ethnic status meant that under the circumstances, a powerful speaking position was made available. And Chang had the meaning potential to take up the speaking position and make her intervention a memorable one.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR CRITICAL SOCIAL LITERACY

Is it the case, on the other hand, that significant speaking positions arise, but cannot be taken advantage of – because the relevant meaning potential is not available? Around the time of Victor Chang's murder, two working class Australian men, both unarmed, were woken in the night by commando style police raids. One innocent Aboriginal man, who was mistakenly thought to be harbouring a suspect wanted by the police, was shot to death; in a separate incident, one innocent Irish Australian man, living in a house under surveillance for suspected drug offences, was shot in the face and required extensive of plastic surgery and rehabilitation. Neither the family of the dead Aboriginal man, nor of the badly injured Irish Australian in question took advantage of the speaking positions these tragedies afforded in the way Chang has done. In spite of the concerted efforts of relevant sympathisers, the position of those directly or indirectly responsible for the unwarranted attacks does not appear to have been significantly damaged in the public sphere. Those responsible, on the other hand, were more than able to manipulate the relevant meaning potential to defend themselves. As Superintendent Harding explained with reference to the killing of the Aboriginal man:

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20 Of course, Chang had her mainstream social class positioning to work with; but this simply means, from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, that she had control over a range of powerful discourses, which she mobilised to compromise Greiner.
J.R. MARTIN

(17) "A struggle took place and the officer was reacting to keep the peace and stop himself or others being hurt. The gun then discharged." (Sonya Zadel 1989:1 & 7)

There is no need to belabour here the ways in which agency (Medium: a struggle took place...the officer was reacting...the gun discharged; Agent: the officer... keep the peace and stop himself or others getting hurt) and modal responsibility (Subject: a struggle...the officer...the gun) have been aligned in this text (cf. Fowler et al. 1979, Kress & Hodge 1979, Fowler 1987, Kress 1991, 1993, van Dijk 1993). And in the event, it turned out that this kind of construal of events won the day; none of the police involved in these attacks were held criminally or morally responsible. And few citizens could have any confidence that the system has been renovated to prevent similar outrages from happening again.

This raises the question of whether or not the meaning potential at stake here and its mobilisation for particular ends can in fact be differentiated according to social class? Suggestive empirical work is found in Cloran (1989) and Hasan (1989), reporting on studies of mothers interaction with pre-school children. Cloran (1989:141) notes that an imperative style of control is associated with a range of variables that include not expressing a point of view via projections (which would include not taking up subjectively explicit modality options). This style of control is more typical of working class than middle class mothers and of mothers of boys rather than mothers of girls. Hasan (1989:250-251) notes that middle class mothers' questions to children tend to be prefaced (e.g. Did you know that they're going to leave) significantly more often than working class mothers' questions; these prefaced questions again include a significant number of subjectively explicit modalities. And Williams (1994) confirms that prefaces involving subjective explicit modality (e.g. I think, do you think) are used more by middle class mothers and children than by working class mothers and children when mothers are reading to children. Results of this kind suggest that Chang's modality repertoire is a middle class one and has roots stretching back into her pre-school socialisation.

The movie Educating Rita, based on Willie Russell's play (1985) of the same name, dramatises the kind of tensions that arise when these divergent coding orientations contest. The first encounter between Rita (a working class student entering the Open University program) and Frank (her middle class tutor) includes several exchanges in which Rita attempts to share personal evaluative meanings with Frank. Frank tends to parry these exchanges, making use of interpersonal metaphors (e.g. I suppose, I don't think, I suppose) below. The following exchange is illustrative, with Rita getting so fed up with Frank's manoeuvring that she makes use of an explicitly objective modalisation (no suppose) to challenge his explicitly subjective prevaricating:
When Frank asks Rita to evaluate her own hairdressing, the contrast is striking, with Rita coming straight to the point – there’s no suppose about it (for further discussion see Cranny-Francis and Martin 1994):

(19) [exchange from Educating Rita]

FRANK: Are you a good ladies hairdresser Rita?

RITA: Yeah, I am.
potential of this kind has been a central concern of literacy programs informed by functional linguistics and critical theory (Christie 1993, Christie et al. 1991, Cope and Kalantzis 1993, Martin 1993a, b, in press, Rothery 1994), a project closely related to British work on critical language awareness (Fairclough 1992b). By way of exemplifying some of the curriculum issues surrounding this concern, consider the following two texts from a Year 11 senior secondary English classroom in New South Wales. The students involved are in their second last year of high school and have been set the task of writing a letter to the editor on the issue of violence on television. At this stage of their work, they had not been provided with critical or functional perspectives on the genre engaging them. Text (20) received 18 out of 20 marks, and text (21) received 9 out of 20, from the students' English teacher. Realisations of modality are highlighted in bold face.

(20) Dear Sir,

It is essential for the well-being of the Youth of Australia that we adopt a less tolerant attitude to violence in television. It has been known for some time that young children can be disturbed by the violent scenes presented by the television scene. No apparent effort, however has been made by either the producers of children's programmes or the programmers of children's programmes to take this into account one only has to look at the extraordinary popular cartoon "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles". At some schools it was necessary to ban the accessories associated with the programme because children were engaging in fights in the playground, emulating their cartoon heroes, this sort of situation is deplorable, this incident also highlights how impressionable young children are.

There is a definite danger that children, after years of exposure to violence on television come to accept that violence is an acceptable solution to conflict. It is of vital importance for the future of Australia that young people realise that violence is not to be condoned, nor applauded. It is also essential that young people do not associate violence with bravery and heroism which is an inevitable outcome if we persist in allowing our children to be influenced by the garbage that fills our screens every afternoon and evening, and succeeds in passing for entertainment. It is possible that children come to accept violence as an inevitable, but vaguely unpleasant part of the world we live in. If this unfortunate scenario becomes true, we will never combat violence.

It is of utmost importance then, that the television industry assumes a sense of responsibility by carefully regulating the materials that appear in children's programmes.

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21 I am indebted to Bill Crowley for these materials and for his insights into their significance in his English classroom.

22 The students involved in this exercise had not had the genre in question, nor the modality resources in question, modelled explicitly for them prior to writing.

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(21) To whom it may concern

Television, which now consumes so much of our daily lives, contains too much physical violence. There is almost always a scene in every program where violence is used. Even in the afternoon cartoon show for children, 'Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.' In this show the good prevails over the bad by using violence to fight them. How does this effect children's way of dealing with their problems? It tells them that violence is ok and that by using it, it can solve their problems.

The movies that are shown also contain a lot of violence. Movies such as the Rambo series, Karate Kid, and horrors are examples of this. They show the world as a frightening place where at any moment your next door neighbour can go mad and kill everyone. This does not help children in any way. Soon their games become more violent and will one day really happen. Not pretend shooting and killing each other but real shooting and killing each other.

Our job as adults is to protect our children, make them feel safe and secure in their own homes and lives. Let them discover life as it really is, not as a violent and bloody world as depicted on the television set.

One of the most striking differences between the texts is the amount of modality involved. The writer of text (21) modalises just three clauses:

- almost always [usuality; implicit objective]
- can [ability; implicit subjective]
- can [probability; implicit subjective]

This means that a entire semantic region through which writer and reader might negotiate consensus is set aside. None of the three modalities deployed are metaphorical; so the writer neither explicitly individuates himself as an authority, nor construes modality and modulation as ideational facts, nor allows the reader any discretion about how to respond (to the literal meaning, the figurative or some combination of the two; cf. section 2 above). And modulations of obligation and inclination are not negotiated at all; the writer simply asserts how things should be, take it or leave it — that's his point of view. In this respect the text positions itself as bluntly oppositional, which runs the risk of naturalising a reading position that can only be occupied by the already converted to one's cause (cf. Cranny-Francis & Martin 1991).

Text (20) on the other hand is heavily modalised, with explicitly objective modalities dominating. The relevant selections are outlined in Table 4. Almost half of the explicitly objective realisations involve theme predication (it is x, there is x), a structure which foregrounds the modality in question as both Theme and New (Halliday 1985). This writer, then, construes the context as one in which readers can be most effectively positioned by Construing obligation (and probability, inclination and ability) as ideational
facts for which he is not the apparent source (there is no explicitly subjective modality in the text), and textually foregrounding half of these as point of departure for the clause and as news. This means that compared with Chang's text, text (20) is relatively faceless; the student in question does not individuate himself as an authority. And the text is much less polyphonic than Chang's; it speaks with one voice, that of explicitly objective capacities, obligations and intentions, possibilities and certainties. The reader of (20) is not manoeuvred into position, but simply set up as someone who ought to know what the rules are – and pummelled with them. In Bakhtin's terms the text is monologic, not dialogic, reflecting perhaps the student's alienation from the agents of symbolic control with whom he might otherwise have tried to engage.

### TABLE 4: MODAL REALISATIONS IN TEXT (20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>implicit subjective</th>
<th>implicit objective</th>
<th>explicit objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>can [ability]</td>
<td>never [usuality]</td>
<td>it is essential [obligation]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has to [obligation]</td>
<td></td>
<td>– less tolerant [obligation]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is...to [obligation]</td>
<td></td>
<td>it has been known for some time [probability]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>– no apparent [ability]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>it was necessary [obligation]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>– deplorable [ability]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>there is a definite danger [obligation]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>– acceptable [inclination]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>it is of vital importance [obligation]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>it is also essential [obligation]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>– inevitable [obligation]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>– allowing [obligation]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>it is possible [probability]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>– inevitable [probability]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>it is of utmost importance [obligation]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>– responsibility [obligation]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>– regulating [obligation]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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For the marker of these students' texts, foregrounding explicitly objective metaphorical modalities is apparently considered far more appropriate than using a very few non-metaphorical modalities. Given the lack of critical language awareness in Australian secondary school English classrooms, it would be hard to argue that text (20) is actually considered more effective than text (21). In all probability, the assessment is based on the learned status of objective modality – a status it has accrued over the centuries through its association with elaborated modality repertoires such as Chang's, regularly deployed in contexts of domination by agents of symbolic control. In passing, it should perhaps be noted that learning the high status of these objective modalities in a traditional classroom may be more empowering for students of many backgrounds than having their subjective modalities (their voice) celebrated year after year in a progressive one.

But what really matters here is not appropriateness, voice or ownership, but critical language awareness – of the reading positions constructed by modal selections of these kinds. If Chang had been limited to non-metaphorical modalities, along the lines of text (20), could Greiner have been manoeuvred into the same uncomfortable position of irresponsibility?

(22) Ms Chang's letter to Mr Greiner, stripped of modality metaphor

Dear Mr Greiner,

Why haven't gun laws been changed?
The shocking and senseless killing of my own father, Victor Chang, forces me to write this letter.

His death and the murder of so many others in the last terrible weeks ought to have prompted an immediate response from the government. Now that over a dozen people were killed who shouldn't have been in the last two months you really must review and reform existing policies on the possession of arms in this state. Policies which, at present, cannot prevent the slaughter of innocents.

How many more tragedies will have to occur? How many families will have to live with the anguish of not only the death of their loved one, but the thought that it could have been prevented?

Mr Greiner, you must realise past mistakes and help rectify the existing situation now, before more lives are sacrificed. Certainly criminals cannot be stopped but surely we can limit or stop their easy access to lethal weapons!

It might be argued that the assessment is in part functionally motivated, since the writer of text (20) demonstrates that he can access more of the meaning potential at stake than the writer of text (21) (including metaphorical realisations); from a linguistic perspective, as opposed to a critical one, it may be that students of this kind are a step closer to critical language awareness than those who don't control the relevant meaning potential or recognise where agents of symbolic control put it at risk. ESL students are particularly vulnerable in these respects.
J.R. MARTIN
You must reform antiquated gun law policies.
Sincerely,

Vanessa Chang

If Chang had foregrounded objective modalities how much of her authority to speak and the empathy it generated would have been lost?

Chang's text, reformulated with explicitly objective modality

Dear Mr Greiner.

Why haven't gun laws been changed?

In light of the shocking and senseless killing of my own father, Victor Chang, it is essential that I write this letter.

It is necessary that his death and the murder of so many others in the last terrible weeks should have prompted an immediate response from the government! After the needless killing of over a dozen people in the last two months it is of vital importance to review and reform existing policies on the possession of arms in this state. Policies which, at present, are not stringent enough to prevent the slaughter of innocents.

It is essential to ask how many more tragedies will have to occur?

It is also important to consider how many families will have to live with the anguish of not only the death of their loved one, but the thought that it could have been prevented?

It is of utmost importance Mr Greiner, to realise past mistakes and help rectify the existing situation now, before more lives are sacrificed. It has been known for some time that criminals cannot be stopped but it is more than possible to limit or stop their easy access to lethal weapons!

It would be irresponsible to ignore Australia's plea to reform antiquated gun law policies!

Sincerely,

Vanessa Chang

Perhaps critical social literacy, as Christie et al. (1991) refer to critical language awareness, has a responsibility to guide students towards an appreciation of the constructive power of modality as far as positioning the reader/listener is concerned. Because of the ineffability of interpersonal resources involved, this would involve language awareness based on an explicit functional grammar; and because of the discursive power involved, it would draw on contextual theory that orients students to the kinds of social relations, institutions, space/time distanciations, genres, and hegemonic systems modality and inter-related linguistic resources engender (Martin 1992a, Matthiessen 1993). As Bernstein (e.g. 1990) has often pointed out,
the coding orientations evolved by agents of symbolic control are dangerous, because of their reflexivity — the same resources that are used to engender controlling discourse are also those to which the controlling discourse is most vulnerable. Thus the children of these agents of symbolic control have to be well insulated against reflexive deployment of these resources, and well rewarded for not doing so. What if, on the other hand, these resources are redistributed across familiar boundaries of insulation — to non-mainstream subjectivities? What kind of cultural renovation might these transgressive resources afford?

This redistribution of resources is a significant project to which critical discourse analysis can and is making an integral contribution. To end this paper on a hortatory note, I think it would be useful for the analysts involved to orient more positively to questions of resistance, subversion and social change than has been customary in the past (Cranny-Francis & Martin 1991). We know a lot about dominance and the co-option of projects intent on social change. We know much less of what we need to know about how domination can be and is continually being subverted — by feminists (e.g. Cranny-Francis 1990), by Irish Catholic Australians, by AIDS action groups, by Aboriginal land rights organisations and so on. Things do change, and we need to know more about how — so we can get more involved. Linguists are relative newcomers to the field. Will we avoid slipping into the complacent cynicism of the tired social theorists who are so fond of telling us how hard it is for things to change and how naive we are to try?

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