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ONLINE NEWS DISCOURSE

**Lexical and syntactic variation in headlines and leads / labels
in *The Guardian* and the *Guardian Unlimited***

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Introduction

When I started my PhD in English for Special Purposes I was very interested in Writing and the World Wide Web, probably thanks to my job experience – five years as Manager in Communication and New Technologies at Grundy Italia S.p.A., Fremantlemedia Ltd. Even though it took me time to focus on a specific topic within the virtual broken walls of the www, while preparing a seminar on journalism I realized how the online world was invading also the world of written journalism adapting it to new targets.

I have also had the chance to study the developments of linguistic analysis since the '60s. While reading the texts of many of the most important scholars in the world of discourse analysis, I have understood not only how each of them has been relevant and necessary to the following (Bathia 2004), but above all how important they are to the purposes of a complete linguistic analysis: the early attempts, from Halliday *et al.* (1964) to Barber (1962) and Swales and Bhatia (1983), mainly based on a lexico-grammar analysis, concentrated basically on a textual level of discourse and on statistically relevant features of lexis and grammar used in a number of texts associated with register within a specific discipline. Yet, the surface analysis of the text revealed not to be enough for a complete analysis.

Exploration in textual organization has been marked by attempts to identify patterns of discourse organization, i.e. attempts to identify the text within the walls of reality and consequently of social factors. Through the studies of Widdowson (1978), van Dijk (1977, 1988), Coulthard (1977), Swales (1990), Bhatia (1993), Miller (1984, 1994) and others, in fact, we are led to

[...] two somewhat overlapping directions: one towards analysing the real world of discourse, which was complex, dynamic, and continually developing, and the other towards the role of broader social factors such as power and ideology, social structures, social identities, etc. that were seen to contribute in significant way to the construction and interpretation of discourse [...] (Bathia 2004: 10).

While specialists in genre studies like Bhatia (1999), Hewings (1999) and Hyland (2000) were extending their involvement with professional and disciplinary contexts, other critical discourse analysts like Fairclough (1985, 1989, 1993, 1995), van Dijk (1993), Wodak (1994, 1996) and Wodak *et al.* (1999) were widening the role of context in a much broader sense, to include social context and its ideological nature, investigating language use as a powerful means of social control in different social situations. Moreover Widdowson (1998: 2), investigated the pragmatics of ESP, enlarging to some extent the meaning of the word “specific” and giving researchers in ESP a wider context area, that of a reality which is much more flexible than it is supposed to:

All language use is specific in a sense. In a pragmatic sense. By this I mean that people use the resources of a language to design utterances, spoken or written, which will achieve their intended purposes; and they do this in accordance with the principle of co-operation and least effort. Thus they design utterances which will key into the context of recipient knowledge in the most economical way. It is for this reason that what we mean is generally not recoverable from what we say. We use language *indexically*, to point aspects of knowledge assumed to be shared between us and our interlocutors. What we suppose is known already we do not refer to; all we need to do is to activate it and indicate its relevance. All this is simply to say that what language means semantically is not at all the same as what people mean *by* language pragmatically.

Another direction which I found worth exploring is pointed out by Scollon (1998) and Gee (1999), who concentrated on the analysis of mediated discourse as social interaction.

The object of my research study is then language as not simply performing the three macro-functions – ideational, interpersonal, textual (Halliday 1978), but as a powerful means of identity formation within a specific globalized social reality.

Moreover, the development of discourse analysis has led me to a multi-perspective model of discourse analysis, which analyses discourse as text, genre, professional practice and social practice (Bhatia 2004). Thus, the analysis of Online Journalism through the corpus for my research study follows four main steps as illustrated in the diagram below:

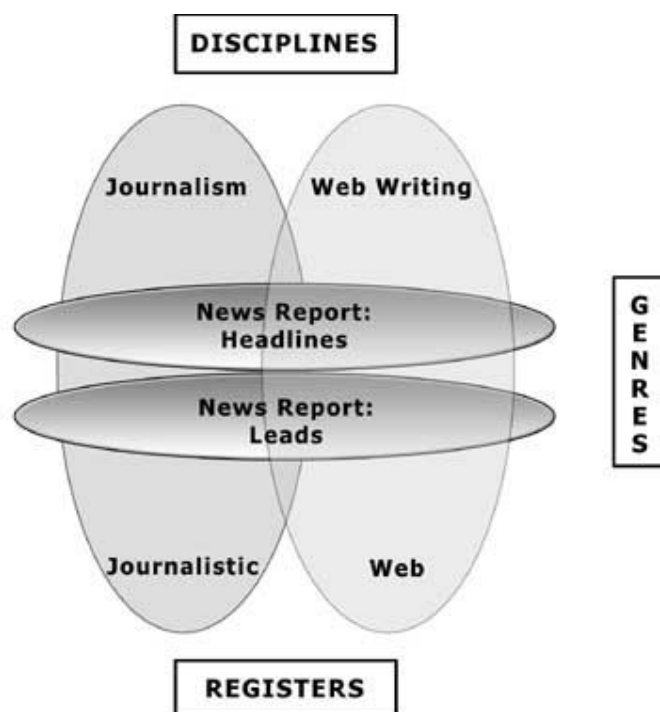


Fig. 1: Registers, genres and disciplines in Web Journalism

Adapted from Bhatia (2004: 31)

A first step of analysis is dedicated to the disciplines which control writing, underlining why Online Journalism socially redefines News

Reporting within the boundaries of a different tool, i.e. the World Wide Web, relating to a new, different recipient, i.e. the web reader, and how this new relationship can influence news making. Further, it has appeared necessary to investigate the impact of professional practice on genre knowledge. The professional expertise acquired working online caused the specific genres to vary according to specific needs, as journalists themselves and other professionals underlined.

Analysis at a second step concentrate on genres, the way they are “often interpreted, used and exploited in specific institutional or more narrowly professional contexts to achieve specific disciplinary goals” (Bhatia 2004: 20). This step of analysis will highlight News Report macro-rules through the studies of Bell (1984, 1991), van Dijk (1998b, 1993), Jucker (1992), Polese (2004), Fairclough (1995, 2003).

Analysis at a third step focuses on Web Writing and Online Journalism, thanks to the studies of the so far mentioned scholars, together with those of Nielsen (2000, 2006), Bernstein (2002), McAdams (2000, 2003, 2005 and 2006), and many other scholars of online media types.

Analysis at a fourth step focuses on the properties associated with the construction of the textual product, through the investigation of a corpus drawn from *The Guardian* and the *Guardian Unlimited* and presented in CD format. Even though Bhatia (2004: 19) defines this stage of analysis as “confined to the surface-level properties of discourse”, in terms of my analysis, this includes lexico-grammatical aspects of headlines and leads but it will also give the chance to verify if and to what extent the two disciplines of Journalism and Web-writing and the worlds they socially and professionally represent have embedded in each other in creating a new genre. As genres continually develop and change, they lose their pureness to be hybrid, mixed and embedded forms (Bhatia 1999) highlighted, even though social and

professional goals not always coincide: though serving socially recognized communicative purposes, they can be exploited to convey private intentions. Though having a given typical name, genres can be modified by the different perspectives of the discourse community; though cutting across disciplinary boundaries, genres often vary their identity.

My research study tries to go through all the aspects gravitating to Web Journalism to see how a new discipline is adapting language to its own needs. As underlined by Emily Bell (in hAnulain 2003):

Increasingly, newspaper journalists are not dismissive of the Web and they want to find out about the Web and they're quite interested about what they're doing. We're just another department of the paper in some ways. [Yet] There are dimensions to it that three or four years ago we would have never thought about, like how [the Internet] develops journalism, develops the dialogue the journalists have with the readership.

Hence, my research study will analyse a corpus of newspaper headlines and leads/labels, including both hard and soft news, drawn from *The Guardian* and the *Guardian Unlimited* to see how and to what extent the language used for Journalism has changed moving to the online world, underlying if and how it has been influenced by the interaction between the world of discourse of Journalism and Web-Writing, the expertise of the people working behind the Guardian Group and the readership.

CHAPTER I

News making in the World Wide Web: a general overview

1.1 Redefining news: Online journals

With the ever increasing growth of the World Wide Web (WWW) and of a new potential market consisting of web-users and mainly dominated by change, news and journalism had to shift their perspectives on to the future. The Web has had and still has, in fact, considerable influence on every field: each discipline seems to get a new shape online, not only affecting graphics. As Thalheimer (2004) points out, also “traditional journalistic values and norms are shattered by dynamic structural, economic and demographic shifts”. As the WWW and the new technologies required to set news online, in the field of News Reporting there has been “an underlying anxiety that news as we have known it is about to disappear” (Schudson 1996), to the point of leading the Radio-Television News Directors Association & Foundation to consider a new analysis of the phenomenon necessary. Yet, just as television and radio have challenged news but have not replaced the press, online newspapers have not replaced traditional ones – at least not yet –, but have adapted themselves to the online world. Online News Reporting seems to have grown and still grows as an aside and complex genre. With the development of technology, the Radio-Television News Directors Association & Foundation started a project to examine the impact of changing technologies on journalism. As one of the scholars sharing the above mentioned project, Schudson (1996) points out that in this shift to the online world, journalism still keeps its central paradox, i.e. “the news/business marriage”. As Schudson remarks,

[...] nothing in the new technologies alters the central paradox of American journalism: that independent, unlicensed professionals, entrusted with a vital public function, are employed by intensely competitive commercial organizations. [...] Journalists' own best judgement about their task regularly conflicts with business priorities. [...] It [the news/business marriage] is, at its best, a difficult contentious, but potentially enduring life partnership.

Even if the study by Schudson analyses an American reality, the “news/business marriage” can be relevant to an analysis of the British press and the WWW where competition is strong and most of the incomes are gained by selling advertising banners. Schudson's study shares with the *News in the Next Century*¹ project the analysis of a new medium and a new receiver of news and information. When the project started Schudson also felt the need “to help journalists understand and use new communication technologies effectively and responsibly” (RTNDF website 2005). What he did not share with the project, was its general anxiety about technologies and media and he predicted many of the future changes that the American press has undergone (Schudson 1996: 37):

There are already a proliferating number of jobs for journalists with computer savvy. Journalism schools are beginning to train students to work with equal ease on camera, on-line, and at a desk on deadline. New multimedia forms of journalism are emerging. The 1994 survey conducted by RTNDF found that managers “cited

¹ The *News in the Next Century* is an evergreen analysis. Since 90's it tries to fulfil its objectives, also considering that they might have changed in time – Main issues under investigation are: 1. *How will changes in communication technology affect journalists and news organizations;* 2. *How can the quality, integrity and usefulness of the news product be maintained;* 3. *How can journalists use these new communication tools to better serve the audience and our society; How will the audience react to this rapid pace of change* (RTNDF website) – carrying out original research, new publications and broad public education. The beneficiaries of these studies are first of all journalists and news executives, who face daily the impacts of the changes; but also journalism students and educators and those interested in the impact of these changes.

computer literacy as the top skill they looked for when hiring staff, followed by critical thinking and writing ability.” (The Future of News 3) One other significant reason journalists will have jobs in the next century is that there will be newspapers, magazines, television and radio producing news. The journalists who produce stories in these different media will, for better or worse, turn increasingly to virtual shoe-leather, pounding keys rather than pavement, gathering data through fingertips on a keyboard, not footsteps on marbled government or city streets. But consumers will still pick up newspapers at their front door, press buttons on the car radio, and channel-surf a their television or home computer or some combination thereof. They may even look forward to magazines printed on paper and shipped to them through the United States Postal Service.

In fact, new perspectives and expectations have arisen thanks to the web technology and its room for continuous and fast improvement and change. This has somehow constrained the reporter in telling stories: in newspaper websites, s/he has had to her/his job as the result of two embedded disciplines, and online news as the product of a new hybrid discipline which shares some issues of the traditional and the new way of considering news making. Another relevant aspect to this research study is the reader’s expectations when reading online news. The overwhelming figure of the readership in online communication, in fact, has made the journalist take them into deeper consideration respecting their need to get a new mix of “news” and “entertainment”. Yet, this has often wrongly led – and sometimes still does lead – journalists to blur news and entertainment without properly satisfying the reader’s requests:

The blur between “news” and “entertainment” is matched and supported by the blur between public life and private life [...] The

blurring of boundaries is a fundamental alteration of our culture. There is a genuine confusion now about what counts as entertainment and what counts as news, revealed very neatly in the neologism “infotainment” [...] (Schudson 1996:39)

This is the reason why many professionals like Nielsen (2000) have carried out studies about web-readership, shaping a well-defined targeted readership with objective characteristics. Since the Web is user-centred, web-readers have constrained web-writers to follow definite rules in their job. The online news reader has become so deeply involved in online news making that “online news media share production of the news with the audience for the news” (Schudson 1996: 36).

1.2 Online News evolution

Online journalism is a relatively new, faster and immediate way of reporting news in real time, with horizontally restricted and at the same time vertically unlimited space for graphics and targeted to a wider audience than traditional newspapers.

Since information started to move online, experts have tried to analyse the new medium to see if and to what extent it was going to change or even distort Journalism. Specialists from all over the world realized it was necessary to have experience of the new medium and at the same time to study and control its effects. A number of journalist associations like the Online News Association, the Community College Journalism Association, the Associated Press Managing Editors Association, the Online Journalistic Association, the Association of Online Publishers, and many others, exactly like the Radio and Television News Directors Association and Foundation started to imagine what the future of Journalism could be after the coming of the Internet.

Yet, the great chance the Internet offered to arrive anywhere in the world at any time was within reach for everybody. Moreover, the trust in the new medium soon meant problems of credibility for news. It is not a case, in fact, that a number of courses and projects to form students arose very quickly to encourage high standards of electronic journalism among news professionals and news organizations and to rebuild public trust in the medium through improved journalistic practices. The problems of credibility and ethics have also been dealt in symposiums and international conferences since the late 90s. One of the problems in organizing copy flow in the newsroom for Web purposes was that journalists did not fully understand what their product was going to be. They had suddenly many options for it, like adding multimedia, for example. They had options for interacting with readers, bringing their reporters and editors in to talk with the readers, defend their work, comment on their work,

[...] and consequently, they had lots of questions about the Web news cycle. When is it really important to get information onto the Web? Who says what goes on the Web and when? How to handle them? How to make payments? Is the journalist going to radically change? (Fidler 2004)

Reading the proceedings of conferences and symposiums it seems that their way of thinking has changed over the years. Online news makers feel like writing for a newspaper within a newspaper. They realized that in order to be successful journalism had to be a profitable business: in the news room, editors and reporters have had to change their attitude towards news making since the Internet was becoming a way of life and could be much more so in the future. Since a website is made of graphics, text and sometimes audio content, journalists have had to

cope with a new page. Consequently, the position of the journalists has changed in many ways. Moreover, competition has grown in a staggering way: there were – and still are – hundreds of websites on information and producing good news stories was going to be harder and harder.

At the beginning of 2001 feelings about online news story writing were changing: for some experts, in fact, the future of traditional journalism was generally hopeful because the skills that worked in print generally transfer well without much additional training or skills to the web. In other words, good reporting was what, according to some journalists of the major American newspapers, would draw people over time to news websites. Since 2001 studies and conferences were adapting news stories. rather than writing news ones. The only huge changes had been about space, delivery time and the relationship with the reader. As Gelb (05/02/2006) underlines:

Most of the changes journalists bemoan – unprecedented media consolidation under corporate ownership, increased competition, new trends in audience usage of news, fragmentation – reflect a transformation of the media environment, a change to which most journalists don't know how to respond. It is a fundamental change in the relationship between journalist and audience.

As some print publications and a number of television outlets are proving, the stereotype of the effect and cause relationship between declining journalism standards and economics is far from a universal truth: their success is not in complaining about what is happening but rather in embracing the changes and exploiting the new opportunities they provide. Moreover, exactly when the Internet crash was going to be officially announced in every field, the 11 September tragedy “has shown in many ways the necessity and the importance of giving

resources and attention to the Web and to Web Journalism” (Raphael 2001).

The tools proposed by Gelb (05/02/2006) are four:

Understanding the product – Each of the news organizations is very clear about what it does and the value proposition of its product. Understanding the origin of each product [...].

Knowing what the target audience is – Since each product is clearly defined, the news organization must understand which audience its value proposition appeals to. That knowledge allows targeted marketing and shapes promotion strategies for the product's market space.

Resourcefulness – All three organizations have only a limited ability to take advantage of the distribution and marketing channels [...] [and] have had to devise unconventional strategies that leverage their competitive advantages as cheaply as possible, using such phenomena as viral marketing and earned media.

Competition – In the hyper-competitive journalism business today, no news organization can succeed without understanding and responding to the competition. [...] [which] comes not just from other existing outlets; news organizations must also anticipate the challenge of future technologies and not yet existent rivals, and find new ways to increase their audience and expand the relevance of their products.

Online news is still a downstream product. For the most part, the news text comes to the screen after it has been edited for the print and that means that the ‘extra’ reporting has been edited out already, although there are sometimes exceptions in newspapers news sites.

The Web has become an alert service, the place for users with very little time and a huge anger of news. When web surfers seek for news they find it themselves through site zapping. Moreover, news sites can take

advantage of the ‘give me more’ nature of the Web by packing related source materials, like related articles, or the entire text of an official speech, or video interviews, or galleries.

The news hole could also make it possible for news organizations to provide some transparency in their reporting. Reporters would let readers behind the scenes to hear how news was gathered. Much like the new trend in investigative reporting owing to which the methods for collecting and analysing data developed into interesting sidebar material, online news space allowed reporters to let people into the news process.

Text is considered by most experts one of the most important element to attract and try to keep the reader on a website. Most of the online users, in fact, surf the Internet to look for fast and clear information, mainly specific information. Yet, the Web is not structured like a report or a book, people do not read an online text in a linear way. A website is a container of information in electronic format which users read scrolling pages up and down according to their personal needs. Thus, the technique employed for reading online news reports is different. This will be dealt with in detail in Chapter 3.

1.3 Why analysing online news

It is very important to underline that the democratic tool that the Internet technology has represented so far created many disorders among professionals: the new broadband networks, while extending the reach of the Internet and enhancing the content, have initiated new ways for conducting business and providing services to the consumers. They have enabled the various media to leave their identities separate

and distinct and converge for transmitting information to the masses, involving them into the news, allowing them to create their own programming. Thanks to the evolving technology, in fact, people are able to type or tape their own news, edit it, beam it up to the net or on a satellite and broadcast it anywhere. This has led to changes in orientation. For instance, the propaganda-oriented News Reporting has been replaced by the information-oriented one and the area of News Reporting has been widely broadened. It is also true that these changes have brought about some negative effects, such as mediocrity, incitement and fragmentation, which can not be negligible and must be piloted to a correct road. After the tragic events of 11 September 2001, in fact, when the entire world was in deep need of news, “the Internet’s role as the ultimate source of unmediated news has been matched only by its notorious ability to breed rumors, conspiracy theories and urban legends” (Harmon: 2001). It is also very important to remember that since then journalists have been forced “to think more creatively, cogently, and critically about what journalism in this new century might look like” (Zelizer and Allan 2002: 22).

As John Ure (2005) points out, “The telecommunications industry is in transition, but to exactly where remains an unanswerable question” and it will still be an unanswerable question until technology remains an ever-increasing tool for information which pulls down the barriers of time and space. The new type of reader, who is no longer in a specific town, or country has inevitably brought about changes in values: the cultural values, community aspiration, sense of identity and historical legacy are no longer restricted to the specific context of the reader, but to a globalized readership. As Zhixi Qin (2005) points out:

The globalization is a dialectically united progress operated bi-directionally both by homogeneity & universalism and by

heterogeneity & particularity. The globalized journalism's journalism-value must pursue its common value under the precondition of respecting its diversification, and uplift its diversification based upon the common value. As Robert said, it is the inter-infiltration of the specialism generalization and the universalism specialization that makes the selection of the globalized journalism's journalism value dynamically tend to the unification of its diversification.

In adapting a text to the web, making it web-friendly is necessary: it is not just a matter of changing a text, but adaptation very often implies a socio-cultural change which should not be undervalued.

Dealing with global matters, it was necessary to restrict the object of my analysis to a specific area, choosing an online newspaper, within a specific reality, i.e. the British press, but with a large readership both in Great Britain and all over the world.

1.4 Selecting newspapers

The aim of this study is to carry out a comparative analysis of a selection of headlines and lead paragraphs / labels from *The Guardian* and its online version, the *Guardian Unlimited* to verify if and to what extent the new perspectives of News Reporting online have influenced the written language adopted in newspapers and in order to underline new rules which could help define Web-journalism as a new discipline or developing from existing Journalism.

The Guardian is a quality / up-market paper, “more widely read by readerships belonging to a higher socio-economic status” (Polese 2004). Moving to the online world, the socio-economic status of the readership has not changed, but, thanks to the World Wide Web, the reader has become globalised. As Simon Wildman, Director of Digital Publishing

at Guardian Newspapers Group stated in 2004 in an interview, “the reason why *The Guardian* has been a British newspaper is the restrictions of paper. Now we can build something beyond those restrictions”. And he was right since *The Guardian* was a national newspaper with a good distribution around the world, but not everywhere in the world. For example, even if it was not distributed there, as Wildman himself underlines, now it has regular readers in Seattle.

Yet, moving to the Web was not so easy as expected: using the material produced for the daily paper version revealed not to be enough. *The Guardian* had to gradually combine the disciplines of News Reporting and web-writing, adapting the original text by coping with three main and different variables: time, space and readership, which had profoundly changed. However, since the birth of the *Guardian Unlimited* a huge work has been done in order to improve the online version and let it be as credible and professionally recognized as *The Guardian* all over the world.

A first good reason for choosing *The Guardian* is social, starting to consider the need of an ever-changing and enlarging global society. As it has been clearly highlighted in the collection of works edited by Zelizer and Allan (2002), after the events of the Twin Towers and the consequential globalized trauma, journalism in the Western world has, in many ways, changed expectations. Journalism in the US underwent a deep crisis, in a post-traumatic age in which it was necessary to reevaluate priorities, goals, and interest. Yet, this crisis involved all the Western world, even if other countries – till the events of Madrid and London – were living Ground Zero from the outside.

Annabelle Sreberny (in Zelizer and Allan 2002: 220-234) goes through the neglected problems of defining people from US perception of

'inside and outside' the tragedy through the news media. At a certain point American people seemed to require a definition of "what we are" from the rest of the world's point of view. This is a good reason why the Commentary pieces of a newspaper like *The Guardian* became a significant way to propose an outside analysis of problems with a great incidence of "we-formation" as a result of a sense of collectivity, and consequently affiliation or dis-affiliation. This could not help affecting the figure of the prospective user. It is not a case, in fact, that *The Guardian* has become so 'surf-ed' even in the US having today between 5 and 6 millions unique visitors² from the US everyday, and many others from the rest of the world. Thus, many socio-cultural and linguistic aspects had to be considered in writing, and consequently in my analysis.

Another aspect which is worth of notice is marketing: online websites can be freely surf-ed. This means that there is no income due to the sale of the newspaper and that most of the expenses should be covered by selling online advertising. As we will see in detail in Chapter 3, online newspapers are more forced than paper versions to focus on entertainment rather than news: web users are fast readers and much more interested if news is written in an attractive way.

This is why credibility is a main challenge online. In fact the Online News Association at some point in 2002 thought it was necessary to

² "When tracking the amount of traffic on a Web site, it refers to a person who visits a Web site more than once within a specified period of time. Software that tracks and counts Web site traffic can distinguish between visitors who only visit the site once and unique visitors who return to the site. Different from a site's hits or page views -- which are measured by the number of files that are requested from a site -- unique visitors are measured according to their unique IP addresses, which are like online fingerprints, and unique visitors are counted only once no matter how many times they visit the site. There are some ISPs that use Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol, such as AOL and cable modem." (Webopedia.com). In the WWW the definition 'unique user' or 'unique visitor' corresponds to each computer visiting a site, no matter how many times during the day, the software providing counting systems recognise the IP of a computer. This means that even if you visit the same website a hundred times the IP of the computer is recognised and you will be counted just once.

investigate about credibility of online news among web-users and journalists. As Lasica (2002) points out:

The Online News Association folks unveiled the preliminary findings of its wide-ranging Digital Journalism Credibility Project, based on surveys of the online public and media professionals conducted in July [...]. The report's key finding, the study's authors suggest, was that online consumers have not yet made up their minds about credibility of online news. But an even more telling finding, in my view, was this: The public has a higher opinion of online news sites' credibility than our Old Media colleagues do.

Even if marketing holds a very relevant position, in fact, content is not being affected – as I will try to prove further in this study. The spaces provided for advertising online banners, in fact, are likely to be sold more easily if the website has many unique visitors: generally, the more often a website is visited the easier it is to sell advertising banners. There are many ways to ensure a wider number of unique visitors and some of these can influence the language used, for example the choice of key words for search engine. As it will be explained in detail in Chapter 3, there are some linguistic devices such as the choice of key words (Meta text) and the rules of key-word frequency in heads and subheads of web texts (Meta text and visible text), and others, which allow to reach top places in Web Directories or in Search Engine pages. When choosing a very successful website it is possible not to consider meta-text writing devices, since popularity is the best way to be at the top of search engines and web directories.

This accounts for selecting *The Guardian* and the *Guardian Unlimited*, the former being a national daily broadsheet which has in the latter one of the most worldwide successful websites of News Reporting. As hAnulain (2003) points out,

The Guardian newspaper in London is the second smallest national daily broadsheet with a circulation of 369,482. But this modest-sized paper's online edition, *Guardian Unlimited*, is the most successful newspaper site in the UK, attracting 7.5 million unique visitors a month – more than 2 million of them from the US and many others from around the world.

None could probably imagine that in less than three years the *Guardian Unlimited* would reach even more amazing results: one of the UK's most popular newspaper websites, with over 12 million unique users and 120 million page impressions³ each month. The *Guardian Unlimited* has grown dramatically since its launch in 1999, winning in 2005 the newspaper category at the prestigious Annual Webbys - dubbed the "Oscars of the Internet"- and beating the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post* and *Variety*. Its network of sites now covers news and politics – not only in the UK, but also in the rest of the world with a completely dedicated page – film, books, travel, shopping, jobs, money, science, football and sport, as well as stand alone sites like *MediaGuardian.co.uk*, *EducationGuardian.co.uk*, *SocietyGuardian.co.uk* and *Observer.co.uk*.

In web-marketing words, all this means that the *Guardian Unlimited* did not – and still does not – need to cope with key words for search engines: these have a spider gathering website keywords locked in html as meta-tag and put them in an order given by specific parameters.⁴

³ The exact number of times a specific Web site has been accessed or viewed by a user. A page impression acts as a counter for Web pages, informing site owners how many times their sites were visited. Page impressions are also referred to as hits. (Webopedia.com)

⁴ Here is an example of meta-tag keywords in the HTML (HyperText Markup Language) page *A global overview of intensive care medicine - Criticare management - Express Healthcare Management.htm*. Please note spaces are not considered in Meta texts: "<METAcontent="healthcare,india,mumbai,new delhi,calcutta,bangalore,hyderabad,chennai,hospitals,doctors,ceo,cio,cfo,coo,nurses,administrators,managed,reform,physician,marketing,medical,outcomes,outpatient,patient,information systems,records,fraud,medicare,medical,health,healthcare,healthy,sex,medication,pharmacy,pharma,

As the editor in chief of the online newspaper MediaGuardian.co.uk since 2001, Emily Bell stated in an interview that investments had been made in the *Guardian Unlimited* because it was the right place to be, but their way of adapting writing to the Web revealed successful abroad without any web-marketing technique: “we didn’t try to get 2 or 3 or 4 million overseas readers. It just happened” (hAnulain 2003).

When the *Guardian Unlimited* started in 1998, as Alan Rusbridger decided to give birth to a website which mainly concentrated on soccer, there was no trace of web-marketing for search engines, and there is none nowadays, even if the same website “employs 70 journalists including reporters, editors, copy editors, designer and production staff” (in hAnulain 2003). While the *Guardian Unlimited* was growing, Emily Bell started what did not have any shape yet. It seemed to be quite a risky challenge, but she firmly believed with reason that “written journalism will increasingly rely on the Web. And if you are not on the Web, then you are missing a vital phase in the development of journalism” (in hAnulain 2003).

As Ms Bell describes, when people visit the website they start to recognize *The Guardian* as a brand, a place to get quality news and information, but also a place to speak freely:

Since September 11, 2001, we produce a kind of journalism – from a slightly more liberal perspective – that isn’t that easy to find. And we encourage [readers] to talk about it on our talkboards – which is something else that a lot of the other publishers, including the BBC, do, but not in quite as free a way as we do it. (hAnulain 2003)

pharmacology,cancer,aids,hiv,prostate,women,diabetes,asthma,arthritis,nurse,nursing,breast cancer,hospital,nutrition,vitamins,allergy,impotence,diet,headache,pain" name=keywords>”. When we insert a keyword in a search engine like Google, this looks into a preformed database of keywords where the words inserted are and then gives an order according to specific parameters: popularity of the websites, meta-tag keywords, keywords frequency, door page named with keywords, etc. When popularity is so high as in the case of the *Guardian Unlimited*, the spider goes more often in the web-pages to gather itself keywords from headlines in the home pages and those directly linked to it.

In the structure of the newsroom of both traditional and online newspaper and their huge production lies another very good reason for choosing the *Guardian* brand: besides the production of *The Guardian*, in fact, the *Guardian Unlimited* covers 70 to 100 new news stories every day and there is a certain expectation for news to be updated during the day. In the morning news is mainly breaking news coming from *The Guardian*, but also breaking news coming from the *Guardian Unlimited*: the online version, in fact, gathers all the articles of the traditional newspaper but continuously updates its pages with ever recent news. However, for journalists as for readers, the *Guardian Unlimited* is *The Guardian*, but even if the cooperation between the two is so deep, when latest news arrives and is put online, it is written in a way that cannot always be used for the traditional newspaper. As Emily Bell stated (in hAnulain 2003):

Differentiating between the two makes no sense. That's an enormous tribute to everybody here and the quality of the work they do. But also it's an enormous headache as well. Things that have been good for the Web because they're dirty and fast, you now have to say, 'Hang on a second, let's just examine our process on this.'

You don't want to choke off what is vital and good with online journalism, but you don't want to be slapdash and haphazard and completely discordant with *The Guardian* philosophy.

It often happens online, in fact, that news is written in a user-friendly way which does not fit the traditional way of writing news stories. This is because the online readership is different and reads in a different way, and it interacts in a different way. It is, in fact, the reader one of the main variables for web-writing, as it will be further analysed (see Chapter 3).

CHAPTER II

News Reporting: Headlines and leads in the spotlight

2.1 Technological and sociological changes driving News Reporting to the global world

In the last decades, the incredible progress of technology and the development of the international trade have notably influenced and gradually changed the society we live in, our daily habits and the way we think and communicate. As Gotti⁵ points out:

[...] in recent years, the dismantling of cultural, disciplinary and national barriers, especially in the context of co-operation and collaboration in international trade, has accelerated moves towards the globalisation of socio-cultural, business and communication issues. This process of globalisation offers a topical illustration of the interaction between linguistic and cultural factors in the construction of discourse, both within specialised domains and in wider contexts. Domain-specific languages are prone to the pressures of intercultural variation, as it is not only the socio-cultural factors inherent in a text but also the interpretive schemata which deeply affect its realisation and interpretation within the host professional community.

Therefore, in a world running against time, which through the Internet is becoming faster and faster, and dropped into the era of information, which after 11 September has changed its shape in a rush, although it is true that most genres have an integrity of their own, we often have to cope with their ever changing and unstable identity. Genres vary not only according to disciplines and their relative registers, as it happens in

⁵ Gotti 2005. Abstract to the paper presented at the AIA Congress *Cityscapes: the island of the self*. Cagliari

News Reporting where the world of Journalism meets specific disciplines like Politics, Business or Education, but also according to the medium chosen, i.e. the press, online press, TV etc.

Since WWW came across, it has developed an identity of its own: the web is one of the most analysed and studied media at the moment, even if its ever changing nature makes everything more difficult. At the beginning the web was considered only in the aspect of web designing, but, since '90s theories and guidelines on writing for the web have developed, content has become its main concern: not only design but also and above all content makes a website work at its best.

At the beginning of the web world, as we have seen, journalists thought they could just use the pieces written for the traditional paper and put them online. Nowadays a lot has changed to the point that online journalism seems to have developed as a new branch, with a new working community, or as elbow to elbow community, in the news room: while some American newspapers have lately decided to join the two communities side by side, in the *Guardian Unlimited* the situation still remains divided, even if they broadly cooperate with each other. It is, in fact, possible to find the same pieces in *The Guardian* and in the *Guardian Unlimited*. Yet there is a great deal in the care of details in the whole site and, above all, in editing in order to make pieces written for the printed press fit the digital page. It is not by chance that the *Guardian Unlimited* has won many international publishing awards: Simon Waldman, a former freelance print, radio and trade journal reporter, now Director of Digital Publishing at Guardian Newspaper Group, applies and brings along his futurist's view about newsprint and online editions:

The value and relationship that printed newspapers have had with their audience has been just that single number of readers. Each

reader has brought one value, a value per head [...]. But newspaper industry is no longer about the print product, but about a tapestry of news products. When newspapers go forward with the Web and other new media, they create new types of values and relationships with people. [...] Each new value will be much different than in print. It may be much lower online but it ties the consumer closer to us [...]. The Web is just one step on this new value ladder.⁶

Journalism is mixing up with Web writing not only in editing news, but also in targeting readers and making news for them. News making seems to get a new life online.

It might be objected that News Reporting is a standardized genre with its own integrity, being “recognizable and [...] sufficiently standardized” (Bhatia 2004: 112). Yet, it is also true that the professional members around a specific genre share the set of conventions of the genre itself. Genres are, in fact, dynamic, in continuous evolution thanks to the expertise of the recognized professional communities, and to the disciplinary overlap within and across genres (Bathia 2004). In the world of reality, in fact, professional members live and develop their lives as well as their professional identity according to the outside world and the social and economic needs of the market.

In order to better understand the new aspects of online news, an analysis of how News Reporting and Web-writing work separately seems to be necessary both from a textual and a contextual point of view.

⁶ Interview to Mr Waldman (see Crosbie 2004).

2.2 The writer, the reader and their roles in communication

In direct communication we have sender and recipient exchanging roles and using language and paralinguistic features like gesture, voice and gaze in a specific place and time set. In indirect communication, instead, the sender and the recipient never exchange roles and there are no boundaries of time and space. In news making we can distinguish three actors: the source (the news agency), the medium (the press), and the recipient (the readership) (Polese 2004: 59).

This structure in news communication sets some limits: news makers gather news from the agencies located all over the world and then treat them according to their readership. Considering the huge socio-cultural differences in the audience, in fact, newsmakers have to weight news by their own audience size, following the features of mass communication suggested by McQuail (1969: 7):

- Large audience relative to other communication situations
- Public accessibility of mass media content
- Heterogeneity of the audience
- Simultaneous contact with widely separated individuals
- One-directional flow and impersonality of mass communication
- The mass audience as a creation of modern society
- The complex nature of media organizations.

Before the birth and development of the WWW, media were rather limited, since their technology tended to be inflexible in its location. In fact, printed presses and main frame computers did not move. Yet, the same technology has allowed freedom of movement to the audience.

Moreover, in mass communication the recipients were separated not only from the sender but also from one another, each remaining isolated from the other actors of communication.

The separation between communicator and receiver occurred not only in place, but also in time, especially in the case of the printed press.

Communicators have always written for an ideal audience, even when there was no certainty of selling copies, or attracting their attention on television or radio.

Yet, besides the inadequacy of their beliefs on readership, journalists have kept on producing news sharing common ground with the colleagues in the newsroom and trying to satisfy the expectations of the readership.

Communicators have always needed the readership's attention and approval, otherwise the process of communication would be incomplete. This is, probably, the reason why "[...] beliefs and stereotypes about recipients and their speech patterns are the only input to mass communicators' linguistic output" (Bell 1991: 90). Communicators, in fact, mainly relied and still rely on stereotypes based on inter-group dynamics of a society, i.e. the way social groups take each other into consideration. There was no certainty about the audience which has always made journalists work to stereotype its nature.

Bell (1991: 92-93) segments the media audience in addressees, auditors, overhearers and eavesdroppers, underlining afterwards how only the addressees constitute the target, although the boundaries between the segments are not well marked and the segmentation seemed not to be sufficient when applied to mass communication:

Audience roles have to be distinguished in terms of the communicators' expectations [...] The four-way division is not

entirely satisfactory for public gatherings or for media communication. [...] But in between the extremes we do not have the clearcut distinction [...] Between the addressee and the eavesdroppers is a finely continuum of audience segments.

Problems in defining the boundaries between the segments of the audience have somehow forced news makers to concentrate mainly on the addressees who represent a privileged group in the mass audience as co-responsible for the production of the message. News makers, then, not only produce news, but also facilitate the arrival of the news to the recipient. Professional figures between the journalist and the reader – in the case of the printed press – are fundamental to communication: editors and subeditors are the prime readers, whose task is to mediate, where in need, the journalist's message to the readership. They are the most important readers and at the same time producers. This is one of the reasons why editing is so important in the press. All media seem to be dependent upon an audience both omnipotent, thanks to the chance to refuse the product offered, and helpless, considering the need of a mass action to gather power over them.

All this allows us to understand how fundamental the reader is in news making: as Polese (2004: 60) points out,

The journalist has to select which of the events or facts that occurred has newsworthiness and thus can be covered, that is, which out of all facts that occurred can meet the readers' requirements and need of information, or stimulate their interest, help them come to their own opinions and verify their own expectations and evaluations.

Thus, news style somehow depends upon the readership which has never to be ignored: news stories are selected to satisfy the readers and written to persuade them that what is said is the truth. Moreover, it is of

interest to underline how advertising, show business and entertainment get into news more and more every day, making information, especially on politics, as important as entertainment to consumers.

Yet, journalists have to codify the message without ignoring not only the type of reader but also the type of medium. So, before going deeper into news style and news text, its capability to attract the readers' attention and meet their interest according to their socio-economic status, it is necessary to highlight some common ground in news values.

2.3 Content: news values and the institutional voice of the newspaper

In news selection it is absolutely necessary not to separate content from form. Apart from the choice of the content, also the form in which news is presented follows specific patterns which set their values in news actors and events, in the news process and in the news text (Bell 1991). Values in news making have to be considered like parameters of Evaluation, a common ground to all newsmakers, even when the results of their work are often very different.

Values in news actors and events, the news process and the news text set the degree of newsworthiness of the articles, their content and quality: the more a news story respects these values, the more it is good and successful. The values highlighted by Bell (1991: 155-160) in the three categories are the result of his study and that of Galtung and Ruge (1965), Labov (1972), van Dijk (1988), Tuchman (1978) and others and seem to be the most satisfactory list of values in news actors and events. Concerning the values in news actors and events, the first to be considered is 'negativity', the most attractive to the readers, dealing with damage, disasters, death, accidents, conflict and deviance.

The second is 'recency': the more recent a story is the more effective it is to the reader. The value of recency has changed in the last years with the development of new technologies and the shift to the online, since news up-dating can occur any time.

The third is 'proximity', dealing with the geographical closeness to the reader which adds value to a news story. Yet, geographical borderlines seem to have changed in the last few years owing to the development of new technologies and the new concept of space.

The fourth is 'consonance', dealing with the compatibility of a news story with a specific social reality, i.e. the reader's idea on a stereotyped reality.

The fifth is 'unambiguity', indicating that the clearer a story is the more effective it is to the reader.

The sixth is 'unexpectedness', dealing with completely new news, which is unpredictable and thus more attractive.

The seventh is 'superlativeness': the greater the event or the actor of the event is the more attractive a story is.

The eighth is 'relevance', dealing with the effects a news story has on the audience. It is the case of news concerning people's lives, for example the effect of a political event on their lives. In the global era 'relevance' has notably grown. Nowadays foreign politics involves the audience much more than in the past: terrorism, for example, is a global reality that nobody can ignore.

The ninth is 'personalization', since something expressed in personal terms is more attractive than something abstract and thus more difficult to understand.

The tenth is 'eliteness', dealing with the importance of the actors of the story: the more famous they are in the imagery of the reader the more attractive a news story is.

The eleventh is 'attribution', dealing with the quality of the source, which makes the story more or less credible.

The last is 'facticity', which is the degree of facts and figures contained in the story making it more credible.

Concerning values in the news process, Bell adds four new factors to Galtung and Ruge's (1965) 'competition' and 'composition', respectively indicating the necessity to be on the spot of a topic, and to mix up different kinds of news in the newspaper making-up.

Bell also speaks of 'continuity' and 'co-option': the first reveals that once a story is told, it is very common to find it the day after with some new details or comments; the second occurs when a new story relates in terms of high continuity to some other previously told.

Moreover, 'predictability' is a very important value to journalists since it helps them schedule events around news deadlines.

The last value pointed out in the news process is prefabrication, giving journalists the chance to gather ready-made text to rapidly make a new story.

Concerning the values in the news text, we have only three parameters which should be taken into higher consideration in the lead, as we will see afterwards: clarity, brevity and colour. These parameters are used primarily by editors, who, as we have already seen, have a role both as readers and producers.

Many of the parameters so far mentioned are related to one other and news seem to be more effective when more factors occur. News factors are not independent but cumulative. (Galtung and Ruge 1965).

2.4 Style in British daily newspapers

The communicative context of News Reportings in the press is reflected in its style. Many have been the studies on style and variety in

newspaper writing in the last decades: Crystal and Davy (1969), Carter and Ghadessy (1988), Bell (1984, 1991), Jucker (1992). They all reflect on the main difference in the British newspapers between quality and popular papers. This difference comes out not only in the graphics, layout and format appearance but also in the language used. Quality newspapers like *The Guardian* observe high standards of News Reporting, while popular papers like the *Daily Mirror* attract a far larger readership. Yet, this definition cannot be considered satisfactory, since it uses a term implying *quality* which is respected only in one category of newspaper, while we should consider that what is *quality* for one kind of paper may not be for another. Moreover, there are differences in quality between newspapers of the same category. Another dichotomy often used to underline differences in format is *broadsheets* versus *tabloids*, the former printed on a large sheet, the latter on a smaller one. In both cases, what is absolutely important is to underline the socio-economic difference in target readership. Jucker (1992) splits up the British daily newspapers into three groups: up-market, mid-market and down-market newspapers. The majority of the readership of the up-market newspapers belongs to the middle middle class and the upper middle class; the majority of the readership of the mid-market newspapers belongs to the lower middle class and the skilled working class; finally, the majority of the readership of the down-market newspapers belongs to the working class. This does not mean that people belonging to a specific social class only read the newspaper representing their own social status. Yet, it is easier to find the middle middle class represented in the mid-market papers and so on.

Something else has changed, i.e. the way newspapers are financed. Concerning up-market papers, they mainly live on the sale of

advertising spaces and thus have to attract above all people who can spend money.

The differences between the categories of newspapers are also reflected in language, as we will see further, providing style differences.

2.5 News text: categories and main components

Following Bell's division of the genres of press news, we can distinguish four main categories: hard news, features articles, special-topic news and headlines, crossheads or subheadings, bylines and photo captions (Bell 1991). Hard news deals with accidents, conflicts, crimes, announcements, discoveries or any amazing event, different from feature articles, or soft news, which are not time-bound and mainly deal with longer stories providing background. Yet, the boundaries between hard and soft news are not always so clear, since soft news are often proposed in terms of hard news, though keeping more liberty in journalist's style. Special-topic news deals with sports, racing, business and finance, arts and science, usually to be found in specific sections of the newspaper. Concerning the fourth category, i.e. headlines, crossheads and so on, it is important to underline that it is considered apart since it is added only at a second stage, being not the reporter's, but the subeditor's job. It is necessary to recognise different roles in the newsroom of the printed press: the roles we are interested in for this research study are the author, i.e. the journalist, and the editor, in the figure of the interpreter, the subeditor in the press, the one who produces headlines. Reporters, in fact, do not write headlines, nor decide the size or order of the stories, which is a task of the subeditor's (Bell 1991: 43). Editing is absolutely institutionalised and professional in newsrooms.

Each news story, whether it is hard, soft or special-topic news, follows a specific pattern which helps the reader get through: Abstract, attribution and story. The Abstract is both in the headline and the lead, or first paragraph, providing the main topic of the news story. In the attribution we generally find source, place and time references. The story provides a sequence of events told in a non-chronological order, which is not surprising if we consider that the main topic, hence the outcome of a news story is supplied in the lead.

Since the core of my research study focuses on the Abstract, I think it is necessary at this point to underline what it consists in deeper detail.

2.5.1 The lead

As already mentioned, the Abstract is both in the headline and the lead. In a news story the lead has the same function as in the personal narrative described by Labov (1972), i.e. “summarize the central action and establish the point of the story” (Bell 1991: 149). It is the primary Abstract of a news story for a journalist and it is obligatory in hard news. The lead represents the faster means through which a reader can get to the topic of the news story, so to decide whether to continue or stop there. Moreover, it has another very important function, i.e. providing the editor the main elements to make the headline. In fact, the headline derives from the lead itself but is the subeditor’s task, not the reporter’s. In order to make these functions possible, the lead provides Orientation and Evaluation: the first describes the scene, providing the actors, the place, the time setting and the event; the second provides “the reason why the narrator is claiming the floor and requiring the audience’s attention” (Polese 2004: 79). Orientation and Evaluation answer the five *wh*- questions: 1. ‘who are the main actors?’; 2./3.

‘where and when did the main event or fact take place?’; 4. ‘what is the initial situation?’; 5. ‘and so what is the point in telling the story?’. As Bell (1991) underlines, the lead is not merely a summary, but also a focus on the direction the story goes to, the way to make the news as newsworthy as possible. With its complex nature, the lead represents a micro-story and the most difficult task for the journalist: if the lead is not good, the news story is unfocused. It gathers the values and the expertise in just one paragraph which should contain elements not to be repeated afterwards in the story: in its small structure the lead reflects the news story’s, giving as much value as possible to the most newsworthy information. This means that each element of the lead is stressed with the use of news values: the main event majors on negativity and is told with the lexicon of newsworthiness, so to express Evaluation as well; the actors are often elite people – or supposed to be so – and consonance with stereotypes is always respected; background is expressed to underline continuity with previous events on the same subject; time and place are always used to stress facticity.

2.5.2 The headline

Besides the lead, we have to consider that the Abstract in news story includes also the headline which appears only after the news story has been written, edited and handed to the subeditor. Its telegraphic syntax has always been of interest for many linguists. Headlines are considered nowadays stand-alone units in the news story (Bell 1991). Being the first message the reader receives, they represent the newspaper’s chance to attract the readers’ attention, giving a news story its own individuality. They do not merely have to begin the story, but provide newsworthiness to a story. They are derived from the lead, often

keeping its syntactic structure, (Cf. Kniffa 1980 and van Dijk 1988a). It is important to underline how the viewpoint of the journalist and/or the newspaper is also set up in the headline. As Polese (2004: 77) points out,

Since form and content are interrelated, meaning is inevitably linked to presentation of facts from a certain angle entailing viewpoint, which is also operative in the macrostructural or thematical organisation of a news text and in the construction of headlines and leads.

Since in the headline the focus is on one event only, writing a headline means taking decisions concerning content, language and style besides graphics. The subeditor chooses words taking space constraints into consideration, but he never forgets his primary task: to write a headline which could attract the mass readership from a content and linguistic point of view. The accuracy of the linguistic choice seems to be fundamental at different levels, as Polese (2004: 110) underlines:

Words combine with one another at various interdependent and interrelated levels: at the phonological level [...] at the syntactic and morphological level [...] at the semantic level [...]. The communicative message which is conveyed by the headline of a newspaper text has no anonymous or aseptic character. Words themselves enter dynamic relations with one another.

Moreover, words choice may also vary at a pragmatic level: formal and informal words can appear both in quality and popular newspapers for many pragmatic purposes, such as adding official value to the news story, or nearing the distance between writer and reader.

As we have thus far seen, news stories behave in a different way comparing them to narratives. In the latter, in fact, the writer builds the story gradually describing an event, or a series of events told in chronological order with an ever increasing pathos, to arrive to an outcome, a conclusion. News story telling has changed direction in this pattern, starting with the main event and the outcome directly expressed at their climax. The pattern followed in news stories is very similar to the one used on the internet and brought about by Nielsen (1994b) as “the inverted pyramid theory”, as we will see in the next chapter.

Hence, the Abstract is necessary to the news story and it is expressed – even if in different ways – in the headline and the lead. Orientation and Evaluation find their natural setting in the Abstract, but we have to underline that we can often find traces of Evaluation further in the news story. The Abstract offers the journalist quite a wide range of syntactic and lexical possibilities to drive the reader to and through the news story embedding it in a socio-cultural context.

2.6 Non-linguistic and linguistic strategies in up-market headlines and leads

In News Reporting headlines and leads can be considered as parts of a bigger text, but can be treated as texts apart thanks to their own structure and their own features even if embedded in the news text as a whole.

A news text communicates through linguistic and non-linguistic devices: in headlines and leads words, in fact, are also selected according to space constraints, being subject to the limits of the print page. Graphic space, typographical character, format and colour,

position of the headlines and the articles within the page, pictures, captions, said and unsaid⁷ co-operate with and often modify language in the communication process. As Fairclough (1999) underlines, the analysis of the form and the organisation of a text are as relevant as that of its semantic content. Layout in printed news is crucial in the process of attracting the reader's attention as the language used is allowing a news text to be analysed as a multisemiotic text. As we will see in the next chapter, online layout and semiotic forms take on different shapes and roles if compared to the printed page, and space constraints have a primary role in the selection of words. Being forced in space constraints, the messages expressed by the headline and the lead have to be "filled with meanings and images which communicate sensations, emotions and concepts following the intentions of the text producer, the purposes of the message and the choices of the addressee and text receiver" (Polese 2004: 111). In a news text, in fact, both the headline and the lead are full of key words which convey a specific meaning within a specific context. Yet, not only space constraints imply lexical variation which is regulated by a number of other factors, some of them already mentioned: time constraints, the socio-linguistic area targeted, the section of the news story (political, economical, scientific, etc.), the need for brevity, superlativeness and colour, the use of language as a tool for exercising and maintaining power relations in society, and finally the need for haste and clarity to favour a user-friendly language. Words combine with one another at phonological, morphological, syntactical, semantic and pragmatic levels providing linguistic patterns to analyse. The above mentioned factors influence the language used for news stories, mainly key words which headlines and leads are full

⁷ The relationship between the said and the unsaid, what is explicitly expressed and what is absent but expected and implicit in the text enlarge the concept of interpretation and thus of discourse analysis. For further readings see Manoff and Schudson (1987) and Jucker (1992).

of. All these factors often give birth to new words or the use of neologism from other sections, favour anomalous compounds or blends (*flatpack* for a ready made flat furniture), ellipsis (*government [was] challenged to allow*), hyperbole to provide effectiveness (*the extraordinary*), metonymy or semantic transfer (*Met chief* for *The Head of Scotland Yard*, or *Government* instead of *the Prime Minister*, *Britain* instead of *British Government*, and so on), abbreviations (*US* for *The United States*), prefixes (*micro-*, *maxi-*, etc.), suffixes (*-gate*, *-ism*), stereotyped phrases (words and phrases from other sections which are short, easily understandable by the reader, like *vs*, *match*, *battle* and many others), quotations from films or literary works, and some syntactic features like adjectivation (for example, *price rise*), nominalization (for example *blaming*), the labelling of the determiner in news actors (*Prime Minister* instead of *The Prime Minister*), the use of passive voice (*it was announced today*), the omission of the verb phrase in headlines or subheads (*Green light for University of Cumbria plans*), the use of *to*-infinitive structures (*Big push to woo Us to Africa plan*), the use of modals – expressing time and underlining credibility of the news (*Cumbria is to get at last*), the omission of the verb ‘to be’ and of the auxiliaries ‘to be and ‘to have’, and a wide use of pre- and post-modification in noun phrases (for example *Tony Blair's government was left staggering months from a general election last night after the prime minister's hard-hitting ally, David Blunkett, resigned as home secretary*). All these linguistic devices, which concentrate in headlines with a higher frequency, may be difficult to understand if one does not know enough about what is going on in the country recently, but also if one is not used to the grammar of the headline. Some of these linguistic devices which help to cut words and avoid repetitions, instead, are used with a high frequency also in the online label. Going online, widening

or rather shaping a new its readership, *The Guardian* has had to face some objective linguistic variations, those provided by the Web, an ever changing and progressing media which has its own linguistic identity. Therefore, before getting into the core of the corpus, it may be necessary to underline the main features of Web writing.

CHAPTER III

The World Wide Web and the new perspectives of the World of information

With the development of new technologies and the consequent fast spreading of new production and distribution systems, the world of information received a great hit: since the last decade, and even more since September 2001, in fact, it has been facing all over the world the growth of Internet, the increasing affability to new technologies by common people and the necessity of a constant and never-ending flow of news and information.

As a consequence, new communication systems based on 'narrow-casting' came aside the 'broadcast' system of mass media bringing with them the necessity to set up again the products offered, and revise the traditional communication system in order to favour the individualization and personalization of the consume (Roberti 2002: 183). Journalism had to recontextualize its production within the new perspectives offered by the World Wide Web and the Internet and its democracy.

Every individual has the chance to communicate on the infinite space of the Web and be considered a provider of information. Considering how many videos and news provided by unofficial sources came around on the Web on 11 September 2001, it is easy to understand how different the new media is. The Internet has to be considered a net of people from all over the world, any social status and education level, in Lévy's words (1996) a 'co-ordination of intelligences in real time'. The Internet is not based on a one-to-all communication as traditional mass-communication media, but provides interactivity and all-to-all communication. (Cf. Roberti 2002: 188).

Journalists had to target their readership, offering a renewed product which could satisfy the new community of both producers and readers, a community with a more complex and flexible structure not supported anymore by a single centre but rested on a multi-centred structure.

Going online newspapers and Television had, in fact, to recognize one of the six fundamental principles of the ‘media-morphosis’ underlined by Fidler (2000 : 37), i.e. not to die they had to learn to cope to the new scenario, slowly transforming themselves. This transformation notably helped traditional journalism to overcome its boundaries in information supply: one-to-all directionality, asymmetry, verticality and absence of context (Tricoli 2002: 174). Yet it is important to underline how difficult and ever-changing the process of transformation is: if ten years ago the Web was something amazing, today it is a common tool, a ‘routine’ (Nielsen 2006 : XV). This means that web users, and also news readers, use the tool to their own convenience: if they find it useless, they do not use it.

It seems necessary at this point to introduce the concept of ‘web usability’ (Nielsen 2000, 2006), in order to better understand how complex writing for the web, and consequently writing for a web newspaper, is.

3.1 The concept of Web Usability

The Web is a user-centred medium and news online appears to be user-centred as well. This means that in the online environment users have a much greater direct effect on the news (Cf. Boczkowski 2003). People’s expectations have grown with the massive expansion of the Web: they use the tool with the awareness they will find what they need on it. Yet, the screen is not the printed page and as McAdams (1997: 33) notices

“It is not only that you *can* do different things on a screen. You *must*. Text on a screen is not newsprint, not a magazine, not a book.” Websites should be built and filled with content considering users, their needs, the way they read and the way they consider time and space, so to make the tool easy to be used, since people are less and less tolerant with bad design and bad content and they tend to leave sites if not interested.

“Usability” is defined by Nielsen (2006: XVI) as:

[...] a quality attribute relating to how easy something is to use. More specifically, it refers to how quickly people can learn to use something, how efficient they are while using it, how memorable it is, how error-prone it is, and how much users like using it. If people cannot or will not use a feature, it might as well not exist.

On the web it is necessary to consider usability the major goal of each site both to reach business goals and to make the technology easier and more pleasant to be handled, by empowering the humans behind it.

In the case of a widespread newspaper like *The Guardian* there is another very important factor should be considered: going online and becoming the *Guardian Unlimited*, the British newspaper has become an international worldwide and real-time newspaper. This means that the readership has notably enlarged their origin and culture.

It very soon appeared clear that moving the same content of the printed paper online was not enough, but it needed at least to be edited for the web. Yet, before exploring web writing, I will try to define the main characteristics of the web reader, together with some marketing and usability problems.

3.2 Defining the web reader

The web is not structured like a report or a book, people cannot read it in a *linear* way. The web site is huge container of information in electronic format and the users read it scrolling the pages up and down, according to their personal needs. Even if most of the time unconsciously, readers use different reading techniques online.

Many have been the studies on web users since the growth of the Internet, but results are very similar⁸: the online reader seems to be very impatient, spending about 27 second on each web page. The reason for their impatience could be because “there is too much irrelevant junk on the Internet” (Nielsen 2006: 22). If people read carefully all the content they find online they would probably not have much time for themselves. Therefore, content online is as relevant as graphics, or even more: the only way to keep a user on a site is to convince him/her with good, specific, appealing content.

Moreover, even if technology improves more and more and screens nowadays have a definitively better quality, reading on the screen is much more tiring than reading a book or a newspaper.

Thus the reading technique used online has to be different: while the reader of a traditional newspaper tends to skim the page, searching for the main ideas by reading the first and last paragraphs, noting other organizational cues used by the author, the reader of the online newspaper scans it, running his eyes up and down the page looking for specific facts or key words and phrases and, only if truly interested, going deeper into the news. Several are the reasons for scanning instead of skimming online. Reading from computer screens is tiring for the eyes and about 20% slower than reading from paper (Nielsen 1997a).

⁸ For further details, see Nielsen (2006), Boczkowski (2003), McAdams (2000)

Therefore, the reader needs to get to the information required in short time, delaying skimming to a second stage of reading only if necessary. But how does a reader use websites? From the most recent tests on users carried out by Nielsen (2006), it came out that on average they spend 1 minute and 49 seconds visiting a common website before abandoning it, and 3 minutes and 49 seconds if working on a task. Even if the time spent on a newspaper could be considered a little higher than the average, what is very relevant is the way people tested – from “low experience”, i.e. using the Internet for not less than two years, to “high experience”, i.e. using the Internet for at least four years – moved from a page to the other within the same website: people tended to enter a website first going on the homepage, and even when entering first an interior page, they tended to go on the homepage to have a general idea of what the site offered. If we consider that the structure of the *Guardian Unlimited* (for further details see Chapter 4), it is easy to understand how important the homepage and the sub-homepages are: the navigational tree of the online newspaper, in fact, foresees a general homepage gathering the most breaking news of the moment, but also a number of sub-homepages, divided according the subject (politics, business, media, world latest, UK latest, etc.), each of them having its relevance, even if the homepage of the site is the most important.

Since the Web in general and the online newspaper is a user-driven medium where users feel free to move on and click on things when in need, by searching for the news required by themselves, homepages need to be very well filled with content and useful links. People, in fact, expect to be active, or better, interactive when they are online. There are three main types of online ‘interactivity’: ‘navigational’, through ‘Next Page’ and ‘Back to Top’ buttons or scrolling menubars; ‘functional’, through direct mailto: -links, Bulletin Board Systems

(BBS) and moderated discussion lists, like forums; and 'adaptive', offering chatrooms and personal customization through 'smart webdesign'. In online newspapers, the reader is interactive, but to get what he/she needs in small time. This is why it is absolutely necessary to make the point very quickly in the homepages as all the site through. Messages must be ultra-lean: even if an adult is capable to read between 200 and 300 words per minute, the welcome message in the homepage of a site should be very short, so to allow the user understand what the site is about, how it works and if he/she is interested in it. Similarly, the reader of an online newspaper should very quickly receive the main information in the homepage and the sub-homes so to decide to get through them or not. This is even more relevant when readers come back to the site, since they already know how it works and they directly look for specific information, thus spending even less time on the homepage. As Nielsen (2006: 46-48) underlined in his study

Users are so busy and there's so much information on the Web that it's not worth it to them to dig into a Web page unless the information that's initially viewable clearly communicates that the page has value to them. [...] If a user spends 27 seconds looking at a product page, you don't want them to spend most of it wondering about your navigation design or puzzling over other user interface elements.

This is why the contents of an online newspaper have to be produced and organized by means of digital editing and design tools, coded in accordance with the HTML (HyperText Markup Language) protocol and not with the graphical imprinting on a paper surface. This change affects the ways in which linguistic elements can be represented. As Engebretsen (2000) points out:

Hypertext is a concept for organising and accessing information, based on a technology which offers the possibility of interconnecting text elements by means of electronic links. The elements can be independent documents (nodes) or different sequences of one and the same document. The concept may also be used non-generically (“a hypertext”), about a specific group of text elements interconnected as described above.

Hypertextuality can be internal, referring to other texts within the text's domain and opening up new content, or external referring to texts located elsewhere on the internet and leading to a spiralling down of content. In the case of the *Guardian Unlimited* hyperlinks regarding news are internal, providing access to information belonging both to *The Guardian* and the *Guardian Unlimited* archives. Information online is so varied, in fact, that giving the readers the chance to scan and prioritise is absolutely a major factor online. But how to concentrate all the content on a single page and at the same time provide priority and scannability? A proper text, interactivity and hypertextuality are the solution. Through interactivity and hypertextuality the reader is ‘explorative’ since he/she can choose the order to read the text surfing among several links, and ‘constructive’ since he/she can go deep into the news and correlated news through the hyperlinks, playing an active role in news-making not only participating in discussions, but also forcing the web-journalist to follow a user-centred pattern. Yet, people on the web do not have time to work too hard for their information. As mentioned above, web-readers are fast users, often connecting to the web from their desk: they are very busy people who want to follow the development of the news during the day in real time, without losing time by decoding difficult graphic and text contents. They do not want to be bothered by useless expressions, expecting to be informed fast.

This is why they are attracted by breaking news style and why news on the web appear almost all hard news. Pablo J. Boczkowskhai (2003) stated that “instead of being primarily, the news online appears increasingly to be also user-centered [...] in the online environment, users have much greater direct effect on the news”.

Moreover, we should never forget that the potential reader of a website, and in particular of an online newspaper can be from all over the world and that cultural misunderstandings could occur.

The new perspective of news report provided by the web has an influence on the written language adopted in online newspapers, as we will see further in this and in the next chapter.

3.3 The importance of marketing in the WWW: search engines, language and meta-language

As in many domains, nowadays marketing has a huge influence on websites, where the world of private intentions is important since online newspapers like the *Guardian Unlimited* offer free access to news.

The Guardian and the *Guardian Unlimited* share both political orientation and in a way also commercial marketing, but when offering free access to online news the *Guardian Unlimited* needs to sell more advertising. It might be necessary at this point to highlight how generally the more unique visitors a website makes a day, the more advertising it sells, and how this can influence the work of a Web Content Manager.

Considering that many users arrive to websites through search engines, it is necessary to briefly explain how they work and how a Web Content Manager can work on it.

Search engines, in fact, gather web pages in the WWW thanks to a spider which recognises and catches very fast the keywords (meta-language) of web pages or the first words of a paragraph of a homepage³. Every web-page hides another page which consists of meta-language providing links, hyperlinks, images, colours, keywords and so on, and of normal language providing content to be read online.

When we insert a keyword, or more than one as 40% of web users do when using search engines like Google for example, the Spider looks up in the Web gathering websites 'URLs' where keywords meta-tag matches the words inserted and then gives an order according to specific parameters: popularity, obtained through a high number of incoming links from other websites, as popular as possible, which deal with similar products and which have a relative small number of links to other websites; meta-tag keywords, keywords frequency, door page named with keywords, etc.

Since 90% of users read maximum the first 20 position in a search engine list, it is very important to rise up the search engines lists for a website. The most famous search engines, like Google, Altavista and Yahoo, for example, gather all the sites containing the keywords a user inserts into the engine. The order can be established mainly according to the following parameters: popularity and web content and design of a page.

³ Here is an example of meta-tag keywords in the HTML page *A global overview of intensive care medicine - Criticare management - Express Healthcare Management*:

```
"<METAcontent="healthcare,india,mumbai,new_delhi,calcutta,bangalore,hyderabad,chennai,hospitals,doctors,ceo,cio,cfo,coo,nurses,administrators,managed,reform,physician,marketing,medical,outcomes,outpatient,patient,information_systems,records,fraud,medicare,medical,health,healthcare,healthy,sex,medication,pharmacy,pharma,pharmacology,cancer,aids,hiv,prostate,women,diabetes,asthma,arthritis,nurse,nursing,breast_cancer,hospital,nutrition,vitamins,allergy,impotence,diet,headache,pain" name=keywords>"
```

Looking at the two aspects of the web pages of the online newspaper, it is easy to prove that the *Guardian Unlimited* has no keywords in the meta language. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 here below are an example from the *Guardian Unlimited* dated December 13th 2004:

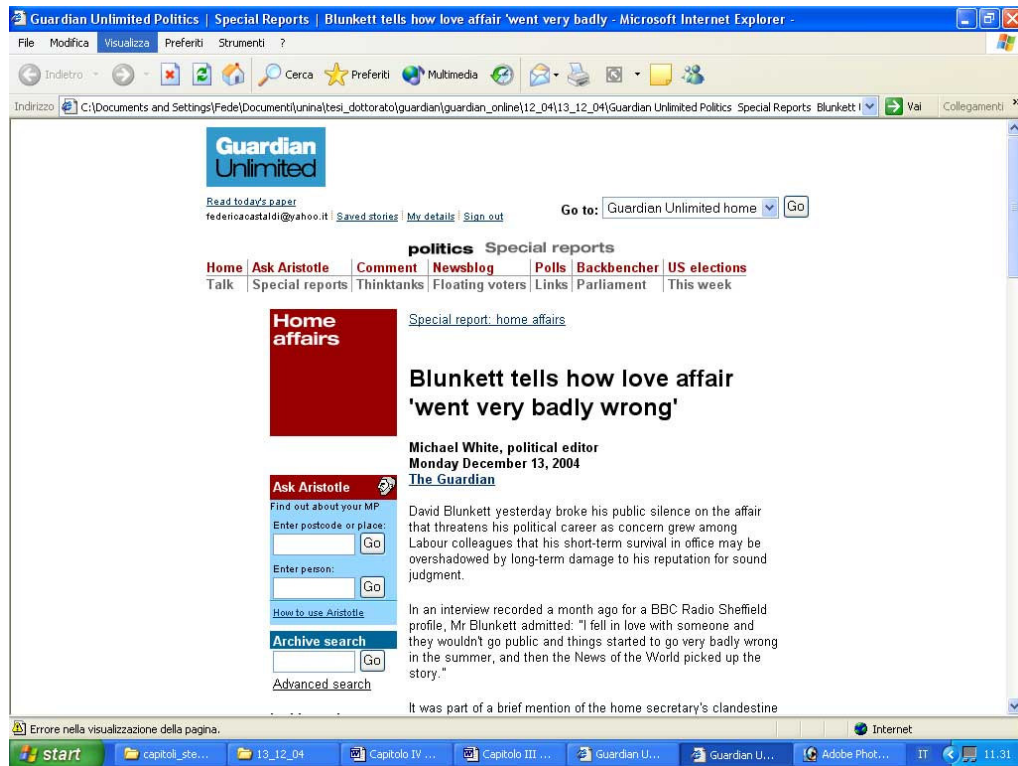


Fig. 3.1: A web page from the *Guardian Unlimited*

In HTML language the same page has this aspect:

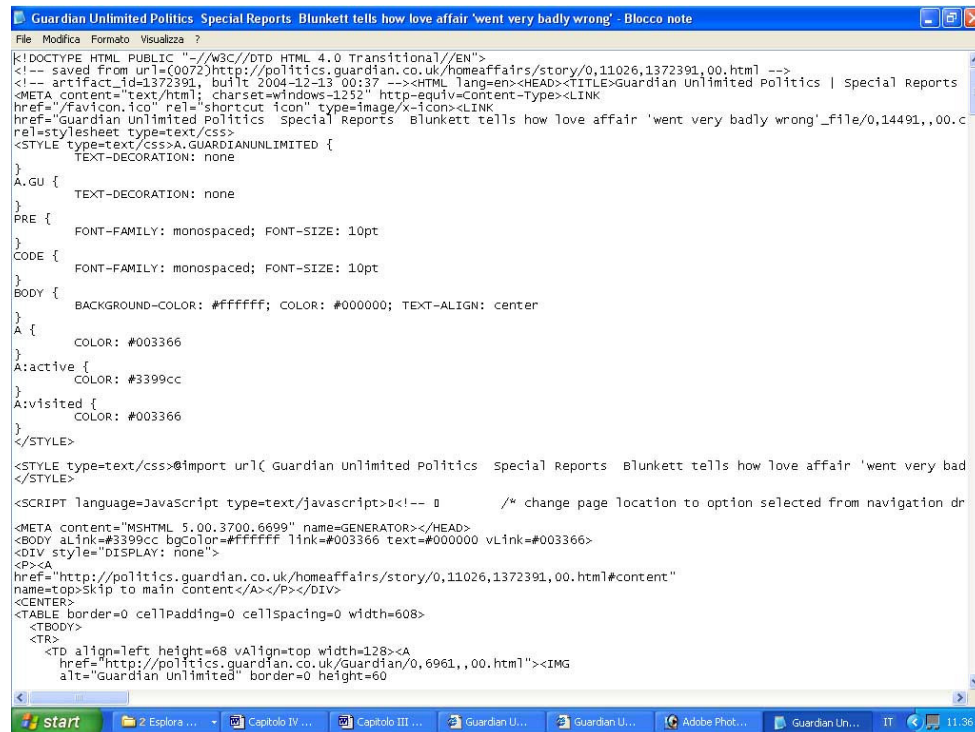


Fig. 3.2: The html page relative to Fig. 3.1

Although web content managers of any domain exploit meta-language and language devices to rise up search engine lists, through the choice of keywords and their frequency within the text of a page in order to provide that search engines gather some pages before others, it is important to highlight at this point that, when a website like the *Guardian Unlimited* has a very well targeted audience, a very high number of visitors a day and popularity, the web content manager has to work directly on the text to be read online. In fact, though not all spiders gather web pages and their meta-language content with the same parameters, two very advanced techniques can help the content manager: frequency and full body. Some of the most important search engines, for example Altavista, consider the frequency of updates of websites. Therefore, in a website updated approximately every 5 minutes like the *Guardian Unlimited*, the spider comes back into the homepage more frequently to update the content recorded. Moreover,

all spiders index the full body of a website homepage. This means that the better written a text is the easiest the rising up search engine lists will be. Yet, the adjective “good” seems to acquire a new identity online, which will be analysed further in 3.5.

3.4 Two main usability problems: dense content and unscannable text

Since the very first studies on usability problems of Web sites, it appeared clear that users avoid reading too much: they dislike long and dense text, preferring scannable text. Even if technology has notably improved and, thanks to present connection, long pages are easier to be loaded on computers, even if web designers have faced and reduced many usability problems, there are still two which are worth to be highlighted: dense content and unscannable text (Nielsen 2006: 81):

Dense blocks of text are a major turn-off for Web users. The plain look of a page packed with type immediately suggests to users that they will have to work hard to extract the information they want. [...] Web users often think that digging through dense type takes more time than it's worth.

If we consider the main page of a newspaper where only a few articles appear (three in *The Guardian*), it is easy to understand that it would be useless and absolutely failing to respect the same structure in the *Guardian Unlimited*. Yet, there is a huge advantage in the first page of a newspaper as in news report in general about this matter: the nature of the headlines and the theory of the ‘inverted pyramid’ leading the construction of the lead and the story telling, the pictures and the sections. Nevertheless, if we consider the homepage of the *Guardian Unlimited* (Fig. 3.1), we understand it is not enough: space and time

have a different concept online, and even if theoretically writing for a newspaper and writing for the web can seem very similar, not all the text provided for *The Guardian* can be suitable online. Though the headline could easily fit the graphic space of the homepage, the dense and long structure of the lead needs to be edited.

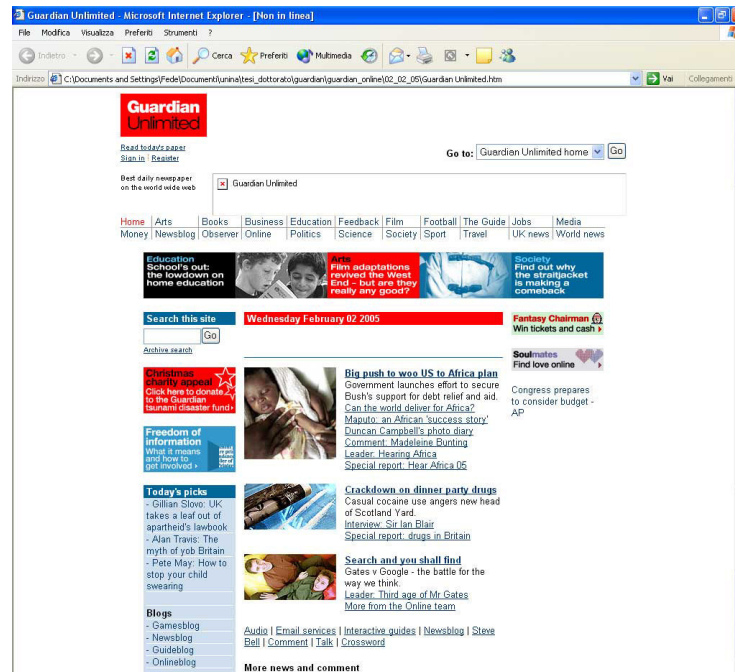


Fig. 3.3: The *Guardian Unlimited* homepage

Moreover, the sometimes complicated and culturally restricted language of the headlines needs to be edited too: online reader is not anymore exclusively British, but he can be from any country in the world.

Summing up, it is absolutely necessary to write clearly and concisely: generally half of the words needed for print would be enough on the web. Like in the printed press, it is best to start with the conclusion, but be tight so that people could get the point between the first and the second line. Web text, in fact should be short, scannable, and approachable (Nielsen 2006: 81) also for online newspapers. In 3.5 I

will try to define the main guidelines for writing for the web applicable also to online newspapers.

3.5 Writing for web readers

As I have already said a website can consist of graphic, audio and text content. Though graphics can appear the main element, text is considered by most experts one of the most important elements to attract and keep the reader on a website. Most of the online users, in fact, surf the Internet to look for information, not to watch its beauty. As plain but attractive graphics is an important element, but clear content is absolutely a major factor, since users *choose clarity over confusion* (Nielsen 2006: 253). The results of the eye-tracking studies conducted by the Poynter Institute (www.poynter.org/eyetrack2000) highlighted how for online news content, headlines and text are noticed first, even before images.

Therefore, if content is disorganized or bad written users (or readers) look for information somewhere else; on the contrary if content is organized and well written, users immediately find the information they are looking for, they judge the site reliable and revisit it again. From a marketing point of view, this goal is the best success a website could achieve.

But what makes a text good for the web? Content is good for the web only if user-centred, allowing people to get the information needed through visual cues. As already mentioned, people do not read in a linear way but scan the text, pointing out what they are interested in, leaving reading only to a second step. As Nielsen (2006: 258) advises:

Online content and printed material require different writing styles, and not all writers can successfully move between the two. Besides

checking grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure, Web writers can tighten content and make structuring suggestions that will significantly improve the readability of your Website.

When writing for a website, one should write for the way people read online, making content scannable and comprehensible. This is the reason why the content linearly written for *The Guardian* does not always fit the Web page of the *Guardian Unlimited*, and needs to be edited.

The first step for good writing, then, is know your readership: thanks to the interactive nature of the web, it is easy to keep in touch with users, their interests, culture, need and limitations. Information must be filtered in a form users can easily comprehend.

As we have seen in Chapter 2, *The Guardian* is an up-market newspaper. In its moving online it has not lost its original targeted readership, yet widened it: when talking about the World Wide Web, we have to think about a world wide readership, getting on the same political party and the same business need, but not necessarily native speakers, not necessarily British English speakers, not necessarily with the same education level. Linguistically this obviously means that misunderstandings can easily occur.

Several studies have been carried out in GB and USA, on the Web in general but also on News Reporting: from Bernstein (2002) to McAdams (1994, 2000, 2003d, 2006), Bolter (1991), De Wolk (2001), McMillan (1999), Fidler (2004), Nielsen (2000, 2006) and many others. They all agree, even if with slight differences, on the major rules for writing for the web of which may be relevant for the purposes of the present study.

The major rule is “write tight”, omitting unnecessary words, revising the text and considering about a more precise, clearer or richer word. It

is preferable to write per keywords: the homepage has a major importance since it serves for search engines listings. Using keywords (not in the meta text, but in the text to be read) readers would get soon what they are looking for. The headline should be tight, but also the label, or subheading should consist of about 70 characters, pointing the readers to the content they seek and reach in one click. These labels function as lead even if they do not always cover all the *wh*- questions of the journalistic lead, as we will see in detail in Chapter 4. Here below you can find an example of how news is represented in the very first lines of the homepage of the *Guardian Unlimited*:



Fig. 3.4: A detail of fig. 3.3

The news is presented like a small rectangle: on the left there is a picture, while on the right side we have the headline, which is bold and underlined since it is linked to the page of the article; the label, consisting in a couple of lines with a normal character focusing on the news content; a series of links to news stories or photo galleries related to the content of the above news.

News on the homepage of a newspaper should be structured to make an impact on the readers never forgetting they have to fast and easily understand its core and decide whether to go further or not.

Hence editors are required to use simple and factual language, remembering web users prefer a conversational tone to a formal one. Even if this might seem quite difficult for a newspaper like *The*

Guardian, it is not for the *Guardian Unlimited*. Considering the world wide readership of the online newspaper, in fact, it is also necessary not to confuse readers with complicated or sophisticated language which could be easily misunderstood by readers from a different culture: writing should match the readers' reading level to ensure readability. Sophisticated jargon and idioms should be avoided in headlines and labels as well, especially if not expected in a specific article, since they require to be decoded and they would not help crossing the borders, as Nielsen (2006: 262) advises:

Don't overwrite. Superfluous verbiage makes people work unnecessarily hard to find the information they need, and convoluted language and fancy words alienate users [...] Bar sarcasm, subtle word play, and clichés [...] Your reader is coming to your site for direct content, not for cleverness.

Directness, in fact, is preferred as well: people need to get straightforward information, with no meandering clauses distracting them from the sought focal point. Headlines and labels have to be clear and fulfil the readership's need to get to the focal point and let them decide whether to keep on reading or not.

Last but not least, attention must be turned to verb modes and tenses: even if it is easy to write with passive verbs, using active verbs makes the writer work harder, but the reader arrive to the content first. Moreover, present perfect, simple present and future reveal to be much more effective than past tense. This is also because it helps answering one of the *wh*- questions of the journalistic lead, i.e. *when*. Theoretically, the function of the headline and the label on the

homepage of a website, in fact, is exactly the same as the lead in a news story covering almost all the *wh*- questions, those absolutely necessary to the comprehension of the news story content.

News stories on the *Guardian Unlimited* coming from *The Guardian* archive are by and large exactly alike in content to news articles in the printed press, though graphically represented and introduced in a different way.

In Chapter 4, I will mainly focus on the corpus, so to highlight the linguistic elements characterizing the everyday work of the web-editor.

4. *The Guardian* and the *Guardian Unlimited*: a Corpus of traditional and online headlines and leads

4.1 *The Guardian* and the *Guardian Unlimited*: layout and content differences

Before introducing the core of my research study it is necessary to look at the structure and the organization of the content on *The Guardian* and the *Guardian Unlimited* (see Fig. 4.1). Looking at a sample of the front page of *The Guardian* and at the homepage of the *Guardian Unlimited* we can see how space and content are differently arranged. In the former, you can find one breaking news in the section *World news*, taking most of the space, with a big headline, a picture and a written text – generally only a fragment of the entire article; one report in the section *UK news*, with a bigger headline and a written text – generally only part of the entire article – with no picture; one or two news generally in the section *UK news*, with a smaller headline and a written text – generally only a piece of the entire article – with no picture (see Fig. 4.1). In the latter there are three main headlines – each of them preceded by a small picture and followed first by a couple of lines, i.e. a label, similar to a subhead, with the same function as the lead, and then by a number of links related to the subject – and other headlines, labels and related links. Thus, the amount of news in the homepage of the *Guardian Unlimited* is greater than in the front page of *The Guardian*, and to read the whole news report you only have to click on the different headlines. In the homepage of the *Guardian Unlimited* newsworthiness and recency of the news result from the order headlines appear in scrolling down the page (see Figure 4.2).

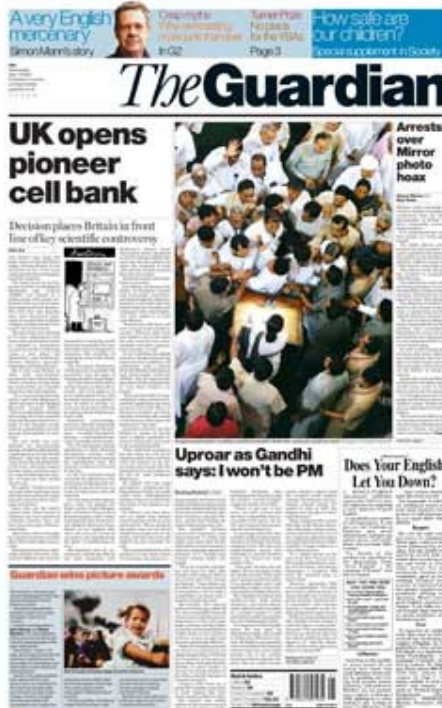


Figure 4.1: The front page of *The Guardian*

As underlined in Chapter 3, the homepage of the *Guardian Unlimited* is developed by means of digital editing and design tools and coded in accordance with the HTML protocol. Space is arranged according to layout, but it is vertically unlimited, so that the user can scroll up and down the page as needed, though horizontally limited; moreover, the space given to each headline, label and related links is constrained by the layout of the whole digital page.

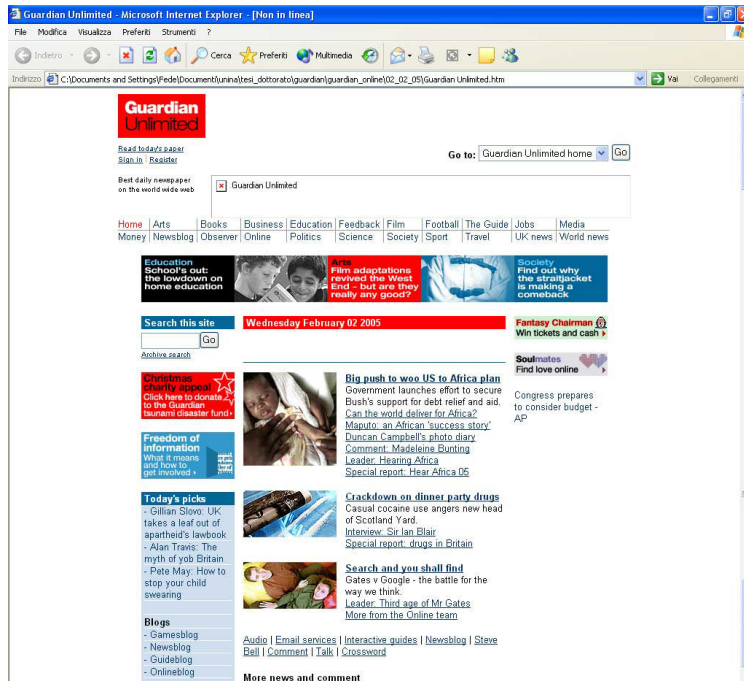


Figure 4.2 The homepage layout of the *Guardian Unlimited*

The homepage of the *Guardian Unlimited* has a fixed pattern, like a cage, where news reporting is modified not only in content, but also in graphics, and people expect to be active, or rather interactive when they are online. The homepage is divided into four areas, as shown in the Figure 4.3:

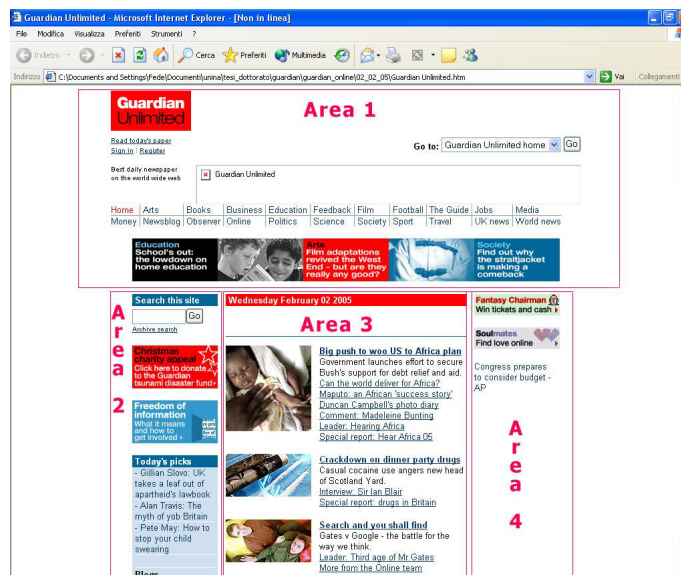


Figure 4.3: Area division of the homepage of the *Guardian Unlimited*

- Area 1: Horizontal, including the *Guardian Unlimited* Logos, commercial banners externally linked, Navigational bar internally linked.
- Area 2: Vertical, scrollable, including internal search engine and internal links to other sections of the website.
- Area 3: Vertical, scrollable, including news headlines and labels internally linked to complete news stories and internal links to other related news stories.
- Area 4: Vertical, scrollable, including commercials externally linked and instant news in brief internally linked.

Another important variable to be considered is time: *The Guardian* cannot vary during the day while the *Guardian Unlimited* is updated every five minutes, more or less. This means that, apart from the articles written for *The Guardian* and also covered in the *Guardian Unlimited*, there is an amount of articles written for and covered exclusively in the website. Though very interesting to the understanding of news making on the web, in selecting news reports for the Corpus, those specifically written for the *Guardian Unlimited* have been expressly excluded. This category of news report could be considered in a different research study.

4.2 The Corpus

My personal interest and expertise in Web Writing led me to investigate language variation in the domain of online news discourse. The scope of this research study is to analyze how web-editors work in the process of news making.

The Corpus of my research study was compiled on purpose over a time-span of almost four months: a first set of articles have been piled in April 2004, but most of the articles are dated from December 2004 to February 2005. The total amount of the articles is 1000. The Corpus is available as digital support to this thesis and it has been indexed per lexical, including noun-phrase, verb-phrase, pre- and post-modifiers, and syntactic variation, including verb constructions.

The Corpus is drawn from the *Guardian Unlimited* website – <http://www.guardian.co.uk/> – where it is possible to find both the online and the paper texts of the news reports.

The site is structured so as to have a homepage from where it is possible to arrive to twenty-one diverse sub-homes (Figure 4.4), each devoted to a different thematic field: the homepage gathers the most breaking news from the entire site, while each sub-home shows all the news labels of the devoted thematic field vertically arranged in order of importance.

The Corpus consists of headlines and leads of the articles written for *The Guardian* and adapted to the *Guardian Unlimited* homepage and sub-homes. Not all the thematic fields offered by the *Guardian Unlimited* have been taken into consideration, since some of them can be found only online. Figure 4.4 shows the thematic fields of the site and those explored for the Corpus are in bold type.

01.	Arts
02.	Books
03.	Business
04.	Education
05.	Feedback
06.	Film
07.	Football
08.	The Guide
09.	Jobs
10.	Media
11.	Money
12.	Newsblog
13.	Observer
14.	Online
15.	Politics
16.	Science
17.	Society
18.	Sport
19.	Travel
20.	UK News
21.	World News

Figure 4.4 Thematic fields in the *Guardian Unlimited*.

It has been sometimes necessary to consider different labels for the same news report, when it is presented in a way on the homepage, and in a different one on the sub-homes accordingly to the thematic field. For example, if a news story is newsworthy from a political and a global point of view, it may be covered in the Homepage, the ‘Politics’ and ‘World latest’ sub-homes, as in the example (1).

Example (1):

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Big push to woo US to Africa plan	<u>Big push to woo US to Africa plan</u>
Lead / Label In Homepage	Britain will warn the United States this weekend that the fight against terror will be hampered by poverty in Africa as the government launches a concerted diplomatic effort to secure George Bush's support for more generous debt relief and a doubling of aid.	Government launches effort to secure Bush's support for debt relief and aid.
Label in Politics		Britain will warn the United States this weekend that the fight against terror will be hampered by poverty in Africa.
Label in World Latest		Britain to warn that fight against terror will be hampered by poverty in Africa.

Following the selection of headlines, leads and labels, the distribution of the Corpus is, in detail, as follows:

<i>Text type</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>The Guardian Unlimited</i>	<i>Total</i>
Headlines	6.028	5.542	11.570
Leads	35.914		
Labels		23.640	
Sub-Total	41.942	29.182	71.124

Figure 4.5: Corpus composition per number of words.

The Corpus has been investigated to highlight language behaviour in headlines and leads in the paper and the online newspaper in two main aspects: syntax (4.3), and lexis (4.4). Not only the analysis of the

variation of these aspects but also the frequent loss of elements in the shift from the paper to the online proved an indispensable tool of investigation: as it is possible to notice from Figure 4.5 there is a sensible numeric difference between the words in the paper and the online versions. The Corpus has been explored by comparing the linguistic analysis of the texts drawn from *The Guardian* with those from the *Guardian Unlimited*.

Although headlines and leads should have been analysed separately because of the different nature of the genres, they have been analysed and indexed together since almost always cover the *wh*- questions of the traditional lead. Both the online headline and the label derive from the lead, and the information provided in the headline is very rarely repeated in the label.

The discourse analysis of the Corpus has been made with the support of Bell (1984, 1991), van Dijk (1988a, 1988b), Halliday (1994), Nunan (1997), Fairclough (2003), Bhatia (2004), Kroeger (2004), Kuiper and Scott (1996), Radford (2004), and Biber *et al.* (1999). As underlined in Chapter 1, in fact, the approach to the analysis will not only concern discourse as text (by considering the way text is constructed), but also “discourse as genre” (Bhatia 2004: 20), i.e. the way it is used and exploited in specific institutional contexts to achieve disciplinary and professional goals.

4.3 Syntax: Passive voice

Most of the aspects of news language investigated in this section reveal great similarities with News Reporting language in general. However, the language of Web Journalism displays some of its own distinctive features, more particularly related to the need of a new medium of mass communication and a new target readership. As underlined in Chapter 3, language has been and keeps on being modified according to new

needs and macro-rules. What happens, in fact, is that copies undergo a new editing session. As Bell (1991: 67) underlines, ‘Editing analysis offers us the rare opportunity to stop the production line and analyse language in the making.’ A rare opportunity since Bell has investigated editing in the language of traditional news making, analysing a very rare corpus. A comparative analysis of traditional and online texts, on the contrary, is based on the investigation of editing in a corpus which can be easily drawn from the *Guardian Unlimited* website.

The Corpus-driven analysis has led to the identification of some of the most recurring patterns in terms of syntax. The 372 cases of passive forms used in *The Guardian* have been modified in 137 cases when shifting online.

News Reporting shows a considerable use of the passive form, which is generally related in specialised discourse to the need to achieve impersonality and what is defined ‘writing quality’ (Dube 2005): “Passives are also common in news, occurring about 12,000 times per million words” (Biber et al. 1999: 476). However, in the small space reserved to news in the homepage or sub-homes of the *Guardian Unlimited* active forms are preferred as they are simpler and easier to be processed by a globalized readership with heterogeneous social and educational levels: though passive forms are linguistically more attractive, using active verbs makes the writer work harder, but the reader grabs the content first (Dube 2005). arrive to

As resulting from the Corpus data, there are different ways to turn passive into active forms in online news texts, as shown in examples (2) and (3) below:

(2)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	January 18 2005	January 18 2005
Headline	As sunbeds return to beaches, villages wait for help	<u>As sunbeds return to beaches, villages wait for help</u>
Subhead	Recovery Tourism aid 'at expense of fishermen'	
Lead / Label	The Thai government has been accused of repairing tourist resorts and helping hoteliers at the expense of fishermen in devastated communities out of sight of potential holidaymakers	Tsunami: Thai government accused of repairing tourist resorts at the expense of fishermen in devastated communities out of sight of potential holidaymakers.

(3)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	January 18 2005	January 18 2005
Headline	Chinese warily mourn purged leader Zhao	<u>Chinese warily mourn purged leader Zhao</u>
Lead	The Chinese government was challenged yesterday to allow the public an opportunity to mourn Zhao Ziyang, the purged communist leader who was kept under house arrest since his tearful appearance at Tiananmen Square in 1989, until his death yesterday, aged 85.	Chinese government challenged to allow public an opportunity to mourn Zhao Ziyang, the purged communist leader.

In (2) the verb 'has been accused' in the lead from *The Guardian* (now on *TG*) has become 'accused' in the label from *Guardian Unlimited* (now on *GU*). In (3) the verb 'was challenged' in the lead from *TG* has become 'challenged' in the label from *GU*. Though changing the construction of the verb to ensure a smaller and more direct label, in both examples of ellipsis coherence is respected, since both past participles perfectly match the text and the context. This kind of modification has occurred in 99 cases out of 137.

Another though less common change is from the passive into the active voice, as is shown in examples (4) and (5) below:

(4)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	Guardian Unlimited
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	£1bn a year - that's how much is lost to scams	<u>Scams cost Britons £1bn a year</u>
Subhead / Label	Conmen widen the net to catch out record numbers.	Conmen widen the net to catch out record numbers.

(5)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Promise to preserve the Proms	<u>Promise to preserve the Proms</u>
Lead	The Last Night of the Proms is viewed by some as a vulgar exercise in flag waving, by others as the jolliest party night in the classical music. But one thing is certain: under the regime of the BBC Symphony Orchestra's new chief conductor, Jiri Belohlavek, it will not be changing. "It is very special," Belohlavek told the Guardian. "For me it ... mirrors the wonderful quality of the British sense of humour." calendar.	the BBC Symphony Orchestra's new chief conductor Jiri Belohlavek has promised to keep The Last Night of the Proms. By Charlotte Higgins.

In (4) the headline structure in *TG* is much more complex than the one in *GU*: the numeric element ‘£1bn’ is put at the very beginning followed by the temporal reference ‘a year’ to attract the reader’s attention, a dash and two sentences of which one is passive ‘how much is lost to scams’. In *GU* headline the numeric element is at the end of a single sentence in the active form. The headline can be considered less attractive, but coherence has not been lost and the information arrives

direct and fast to the reader who can delay reading ‘good writing’ to a second step, after having clicked on the link.

In (5) the very long lead of the soft news in *TG* is reduced to a short, very direct and simplified label in the *GU*: ‘The Last Night of the Proms’ which is the subject in the first sentence and in ‘it will not be changing’ after a couple of lines becomes the object in the second sentence of the label of the *GU*. Once again the information provided by the label is essential and user-friendly and the reader has the chance to get the information very quickly and decide whether to go farther or not.

These kinds of changes have been revealed in 38 cases out of 137.

It is important to underline that not all passive forms change in the shift from the paper to the online, but nearly 40% of them have appeared to be modified, or rather simplified.

4.4 Lexis and syntax

The Corpus-driven analysis of traditional and online headlines, leads and labels has led to the identification of some most recurring patterns also in terms of lexis:

- Verb tenses and adverbials conveying time (4.4.1);
- deletion of the determiner and the quantifier (4.4.2);
- metonymy (4.4.3)
- reduced personal reference and abbreviations(4.4.4);
- post-modification and pre-modification (4.4.5);
- subordination and complex post-modification (4.4.6).

Yet, as Bell (1991: 72) underlined, it is difficult to find a reason why editing has been processed, since the editor is ‘largely unaware of the precise operations performed’.

4.4.1 Verb tenses and adverbials conveying time

As already mentioned in Chapter 2, the lead provides answers to the five *wh*- questions, one of which is ‘When did it occur?’. A time reference, almost always an adverbial conveying time, in fact, usually occurs in the lead in traditional daily newspapers. An analysis of the online headlines and labels has revealed that adverbials conveying time are rarely used, whereas time reference is provided by an appropriate use of verb tenses. The Internet as a medium provides up-to-date information; thus, time references may be omitted if the event has happened very recently or will happen in the very next future.

Thus, as shown in example (6) to (12) below, apart from cases in which the lead and the label are alike, every time a label has been derived from its paper version – 210 times as resulting from the Corpus data – time adverbials like ‘today’, ‘yesterday’, ‘last night’, ‘this weekend’, or the like tend to disappear, and tenses are used accordingly:

(6)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Concern as Pope is rushed to hospital with flu	<u>Pope in hospital with breathing problems</u>
Lead / Label	Pope John Paul II, the leader of the world's one billion Roman Catholics, was rushed to hospital in Rome late last night in circumstances that raised serious concerns about his health.	World: Pope John Paul II is rushed to hospital in Rome in circumstances that raise serious concerns about his health.

(7)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005

Headline	Blair pledges backing for welfare reforms	<u>Blair pledges backing for welfare reforms</u>
Lead / Label in Homepage	Tony Blair yesterday pledged his government to help up to one million people on incapacity benefit back into work through a series of "firm	Politics: Government to help up to one million people on incapacity benefit back into work through 'firm but fair' reforms.
Label in Society	but fair" reforms which will be announced today.	Pledge to help up to one million people on incapacity benefit back into work through series of 'firm but fair' reforms.
Label in Politics		Tony Blair has pledged his government to help up to one million people on incapacity benefit back into work through a series of 'firm but fair' reforms which will be announced today.
Label in UK Latest		Government pledges to help up to one million people on incapacity benefit back into work

(8)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	ATM firms deny profiteering	<u>ATM firms deny profiteering</u>
Lead / Label	Four of the biggest operators of fee-charging cash machines denied exploiting customers and profiteering as they were grilled by MPs yesterday over their "aggressive" expansion strategies.	Operators of fee-charging cash machines deny exploiting customers with "aggressive" expansion strategies.

(9)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	King of Nepal seizes power	<u>King of Nepal seizes power</u>
Lead / Label	The King of Nepal seized power yesterday when he sacked the government, put senior politicians under house arrest, declared a state of emergency and put the army on the streets.	The King of Nepal has sacked the government, put politicians under house arrest and declared a state of emergency.

(10)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Low-cost housing planned on public land	<u>Low-cost housing planned on public land</u>
Lead / Label	John Prescott, the deputy prime minister, promised yesterday to build affordable housing on a string of redundant airfields and other Ministry of Defence land on the back of a deal to acquire 100 former hospital sites for lower-cost homes.	Deputy prime minister promises to build affordable housing on Ministry of Defence land.

(11)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Doubts persist on foot and mouth	<u>Doubts persist on foot and mouth</u>
Lead / Label	Britain is still not prepared for any new foot and mouth epidemic, four years after the disaster that led to a cull of 6m animals and postponement of the last general election, the National Audit Office reveals today .	Britain is still not prepared for any new foot and mouth epidemic, the National Audit Office has revealed .

(12)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	January 18 2005	January 18 2005
Headline	Britain's seas in a shameful state, says WWF	<u>Britain's seas in a shameful state, says WWF</u>
Lead / Label	Trawling the sea bed, dredging for sand and gravel, exploring for oil and gas and developing the seaside are causing a crisis in UK's seas, according to a report published today .	Trawling the sea bed, dredging for sand, exploring for oil and developing the seaside are causing a crisis in UK's seas, says report.

In examples (6) to (12) adverbials used in *TG* in the leads convey a very recent past or present time reference like 'yesterday', 'last night', 'today'; accordingly the verb tense used in the *GU* leads is either the

past tense, which locates the event in past time, or the ‘historic present’, which provides narrative vividness. In the labels, where time adverbials disappear the verb tense is either the ‘historic present’ – as in examples (6), (7) in UK Latest, (8) and (10) above and (16) below – or the present perfect, which focuses on recency – as in examples (7) in Politics, (9) and (11) or an untensed verb form, (*to*-infinitive) expressing futurity – as in examples (9) in the Homepage and Society above and (15) below:

(13)

	The Guardian	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Big push to woo US to Africa plan	<u>Big push to woo US to Africa plan</u>
Lead / Label World Latest	Britain will warn the United States this weekend that the fight against terror will be hampered by poverty in Africa as the government launches a concerted diplomatic effort to secure George Bush's support for more generous debt relief and a doubling of aid.	Britain to warn that fight against terror will be hampered by poverty in Africa.

(14)

	The Guardian	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Kilroy-Silk promises surprises with his new party	<u>Kilroy-Silk promises surprises with his new party</u>
Lead / Label	Robert Kilroy-Silk will today unveil his second attempt to capture the heart of Eurosceptic Britain as he launches his "straight-talking" new party Veritas.	Robert Kilroy-Silk launches his "straight-talking" new party Veritas.

In the above examples (13) and (14) adverbs used in the leads convey a very next future or present time reference like ‘today’ and ‘next weekend’, and the verb tense used is the future with will. In the labels,

where time reference disappears, verb tense is either present – as in example (13) – or changed into an infinitive letting the ‘to sentence’ express future – as in example (14).

4.4.2 Deletion of determiner and quantifier

Though being a peculiarity of mid-market newspapers, once again owing to space constraints, the determiner and the quantifier are deleted with a frequency of 39% cases in online news labels as shown in the examples below:

(15)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Father wins benefits appeal	<u>Father wins benefits appeal</u>
Lead / Label	A rule which means separated fathers can claim...	Rule which means separated fathers can claim...

(16)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Crackdown on dinner party drugs	<u>Crackdown on dinner party drugs</u>
Lead / Label	The new head of Scotland Yard took a swipe at...	New head of Scotland Yard threatens to arrest...

(17)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	ATM firms deny profiteering	<u>ATM firms deny profiteering</u>
Lead / Label	Four of the biggest operators of fee-charging cash machines denied...	Operators of fee-charging cash machines deny exploiting customers...

(18)

	The Guardian	Guardian Unlimited
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Big push to woo US to Africa plan	<u>Big push to woo US to Africa plan</u>
Lead / Label in World Latest	Britain will warn the United States this weekend that the fight against terror will...	Britain to warn that fight against terror will be hampered by poverty in Africa.

(19)

	The Guardian	Guardian Unlimited
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Low-cost housing planned on public land	<u>Low-cost housing planned on public land</u>
Lead / Label	John Prescott, the deputy prime minister, promised yesterday to build affordable housing...	Deputy prime minister promises to build affordable housing on Ministry of Defence land.

(20)

	The Guardian	Guardian Unlimited
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Row may halt cervix cancer jab	<u>Cancer hopes and fears</u>
Lead / Label	A vaccine against cervical cancer could be available within five years...	Vaccine against cervical cancer could be available within five years...

(21)

	The Guardian	Guardian Unlimited
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Shia group claims sweeping victory	<u>Shia leader claims sweeping election victory</u>
Lead / Label in World Latest	The leader of a powerful Shia coalition claimed "a sweeping victory" in Sunday's...	Leader of powerful Shia coalition pledges to include Sunni Arabs in running of Iraq.

(22)

	The Guardian	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Buying a house? Pick up a flatpack at Ikea	<u>Coming soon: flatpack homes</u>
Lead / Label	...From this spring, if an Anglo-Swedish project takes off...	Anglo-Swedish project hopes to offer cut-price 'instant homes'.

(23)

	The Guardian	Guardian Unlimited
Date	January 18 2005	January 18 2005
Headline	As sunbeds return to beaches, villages wait for help	<u>As sunbeds return to beaches, villages wait for help</u>
Lead / Label	The Thai government has been accused of repairing tourist resorts....	Tsunami: Thai government accused of repairing tourist resorts...

(24)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	January 18 2005	January 18 2005
Headline	Chinese warily mourn purged leader Zhao	<u>Chinese warily mourn purged leader Zhao</u>
Lead / Label	The Chinese government was challenged yesterday to...	Chinese government challenged to allow public an opportunity to...

As can be noticed in examples (15) to (24), the determiner or the quantifier are deleted before the head noun at the beginning of the main clause in the labels.

Following Web-writing rules underlined in Chapter 3, two can be the reason for this kind of change: the need for a less formal and more direct language which is more easily scannable by web users; and space constraints which confines language in a smaller cage.

4.4.3 Metonymy

The semantic transfer through metonymy is widespread in online News Reporting as in traditional one, or even more if considering the need of being short and direct.

There are different types of metonymy in the *Guardian Unlimited* as shown in the examples below.

(25)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Blair pledges backing for welfare reforms	<u>Blair pledges backing for welfare reforms</u>
Lead / Label in Homepage	Tony Blair yesterday pledged his government to help up to one million people on incapacity benefit back into work through a series of "firm but fair" reforms which will be announced today.	Politics: Government to help up to one million people on incapacity benefit back into work through 'firm but fair' reforms.

(26)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	A huge donor going its own way.	<u>A huge donor going its own way</u>
Lead / Label	Washington has publicly welcomed the British Africa initiative, and the Bush administration says it has already started working towards the same goals. But on the road to African development, the US is clearly going its own way	The US: Washington has publicly welcomed the British Africa initiative. But on the road to African development, the US is clearly going its own way.

(27)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	January 4 2005	January 4 2005
Headline	Bush plea tries to rebuild US image	<u>Bush tries to rebuild US image</u>

Subhead / Label	Presidents make joint appeal for disaster funds	Tsunami disaster: Presidents' joint appeal for funds.
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In examples (25), (26) and (27) drawn from the homepage of the *GU*, the *internal* metonymy indicates the section : ‘Politics:’ and ‘The US:’ and ‘Tsunami disaster’ (after the Tsunami disaster of the 26 December 2004, the *Guardian Unlimited* dedicated an entire section to the topic). This kind of metonymy occurred in 284 cases (in the homepage, in nearly all the labels there has been found an instance of metonymy).

Example (25) shows another type of metonymy in the label, i.e. ‘Government’, which stands for Tony Blair. This kind of metonymy has been used 37 times as revealed by the Corpus data. Metonymy here is exploited to reduce the number of words and simplify the lead providing the label with some headline-like features.

Another interesting case of metonymy in the shift from *TG* to *GU* is shown in the example below:

(28)

	The Guardian	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Search and you shall find	<u>Search and you shall find</u>
Subhead / Label	With the launch yesterday of MSN search, Bill Gates is taking Google on at its own game. But it's not just a fight for web hits and advertising dollars: it is also a reflection of how a simple tool has become essential to the way we live our lives. Oliver Burkeman and Bobbie Johnson report	Gates v Google - the battle for the way we think.

In example (30) the surname ‘Gates’ in the label is used to express the world created by Bill Gates through Microsoft and the new search

engine in MSN site. Metonymy here is exploited to reduce the number of words and simplify the subhead, providing the label with some headline-like features. Though the label has been notably reduced, coherence has not been lost and the information arrives direct and fast to the reader.

In the label of the example (29) we stand in the middle between personal reference used as metonymy: in (29) ‘Former president’ stands for Nelson Mandela and his battle to solve Aids and other important social problems in Africa, suggesting a paradox for the loss of his son.

(29)

	The Guardian	Guardian Unlimited
Date	January 7 2005	January 7 2005
Headline	Former South African president's last son dies of Aids	<u>Mandela's last son dies of Aids</u>
Lead	Nelson Mandela broke one of South Africa's great taboos yesterday by admitting his oldest and only surviving son had died of Aids.	Former president breaks one of South Africa's great taboos by admitting his only surviving son died of Aids.

4.4.4 Abbreviations and personal reference

Examples (29) to (31) also show another frequent phenomenon concerning personal reference: in the shift from *TG* to *GU* the first name of the actor is very often dropped., leaving the surname or the professional reference alone. This device has occurred in 256 cases, and is generally exploited to avoid repetition or to reduce the number of words used, as shown also in the example below:

(30)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Big push to woo US to Africa plan	<u>Big push to woo US to Africa plan</u>
Lead / Label in Homepage	Britain will warn [...] government launches a concerted diplomatic effort to secure George Bush's support for more generous debt relief and a doubling of aid.	Government launches effort to secure Bush's support for debt relief and aid.

(31)

	The Guardian	Guardian Unlimited
Date	January 4 2005	January 4 2005
Headline	Kelly woos parents with talk of choice	<u>Kelly woos parents with talk of choice</u>
Lead	Ruth Kelly , the education secretary, declared herself...	Education: Education secretary puts choice at...

Another very frequently occurring variation in passing from *TG* to *UG* is abbreviation in 73% of the cases, in red in the following examples:

(32)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	January 3 2005	January 3 2005
Headline	\$2bn pledged, but will the world keep its promises?	<u>Will the world keep its promises?</u>
Lead / Label in Homepage	The United Nations yesterday warned that huge...	UN warns that promise of \$2bn in aid from rich countries ...
Label in Society		· \$2bn pledged · UN warns west could renege on aid · 125,000 dead, 5m homeless

(33)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	January 3 2005	January 3 2005
Headline	US plans permanent Guantanamo jails	<u>US plans permanent Guantanamo jails</u>
Lead	The United States is preparing to hold terrorism suspects indefinitely without trial...	World: US to hold terrorism suspects indefinitely without trial and...

Metonymy, reduced personal reference and abbreviations are often used in online news reports to cut the number of words used without damaging the quality of information.

4.4.4 Pre- and post-modification in noun phrases

The variable nature of noun phrases reveals very useful online in packaging informational content in as few words as possible: complex noun phrases, in fact, convey much more information through the use of pre- or post-modification. Yet, it is pre-modification that allows to provide more information with a reduced amount of words: determiners and preposition can thus be avoided.

In example (34) in the shift to *GU* any reference to the victory appears unnecessary, but the geographical reference providing the location in the lead is found relevant. Hence the head noun ‘county council’ is pre-modified by ‘Buckinghamshire’ in *GU*.

(34)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Protesters' win over bypass injunction	<u>Protesters' win over bypass injunction</u>
Lead / Label in Society	Protesters against a planned bypass in the Buckinghamshire countryside won a partial victory in the high court yesterday when the county council lifted parts of an injunction preventing demonstrations in the local area.	Buckinghamshire county council lifts parts of an injunction preventing demonstrations in local area.

The headline in (35) provides additional information thanks to pre-modification in *GU*, a numeral and an *s-genitive* structure.

(35)

	The Guardian	Guardian Unlimited
Date	January 3 2005	January 3 2005
Headline	Files show extent of Murdoch lobbying	Murdoch's Five lobbying revealed
Lead	Tycoon won ministers' assurance that he could bid for Channel Five Freedom of information files released to the Guardian reveal...	Rupert Murdoch got reassurances from ministers he would be able to...

In (36), an *s-genitive* structure is embedded in the prepositional phrase.

(36)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	Guardian Unlimited
Date	January 3 2005	January 3 2005
Headline	Witness says Thatcher had role in coup plot	<u>Witness on Thatcher's role in plot</u>
Lead	The star witness against Sir Mark Thatcher...	Star witness against Sir Mark Thatcher...

In (37), the prepositional phrase acting as a post-modifier in *TG* becomes a noun phrase with no post-modification in the *GU*.

(37)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	January 3 2005	January 3 2005
Headline	BSkyB offers prospect of ad-free viewing	BSkyB offers ad-free viewing
Lead	The satellite group BSkyB has...	The satellite group BSkyB has...

In (38), an entire sentence is reduced to an *s-genitive* structure ‘thinktank’s’ as the pre-modifier to the head ‘claim’.

(38)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	January 3 2005	January 3 2005
Headline	Experts deride report on crime and moral decline	Experts deride report on crime
Lead	Leading experts on law and order have dismissed a claim that Britain has one of the highest crime rates in the developed world, caused by a decline in faith and moral values.	Leading experts on law and order dismiss thinktank's claims .

In (39), the condensed structure with verb deletion in the *GU* label looks rather like a subhead.

(39)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	January 4 2005	January 4 2005
Headline	Bush plea tries to rebuild US image	<u>Bush tries to rebuild US image</u>
Subhead / Label	Presidents make joint appeal for disaster funds	Tsunami disaster: Presidents' joint appeal for funds.

Example (40) is an instance of complex post-modification which allows to reduce the forty-eight-word lead to a nineteen-word label.

(40)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	January 4 2005	January 4 2005
Headline	Bank's 'technical glitches' dampen shoppers' sales spree	<u>Bank's 'technical glitches' dampen shoppers' sales spree</u>
Lead	<p>For a nation in the grip of a January sales epidemic it came as a most unwelcome antidote.</p> <p>Yesterday, customers of HSBC, one of the country's largest high street banks, found that "technical glitches" had conspired to prevent them from spending on the final day of the holidays.</p>	<p>Owners of HSBC's Switch/Maestro cards unable to withdraw cash from ATMs or use their cards to pay for goods.</p>

The *TG* headline in (41) becomes a schematic structure with verb deletion in *GU*, where 'investigation' is the head of a complex pre-modified noun phrase.

(41)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	January 4 2005	January 4 2005
Headline	Experts from around the world join largest ever forensic investigation	<u>World's largest forensic investigation</u>
Lead	China to become key location in mammoth task	China key location in mammoth task.

The complex noun phrase in the online example (42) allows the headline to provide essentially condensed information.

(42)

	The Guardian	Guardian Unlimited
Date	January 4 2005	January 4 2005
Headline	Oil down, dollar up as Wall St re-opens	<u>Oil price fall raises hopes on Wall St</u>
Lead	There were renewed signs of confidence in the American economy...	There were renewed signs of confidence in the American economy...

There are two instances of pre-modifications in the *GU* headline and label of example (43), allowing to reduce the number of words used in the *TG* headline and the subhead from ten to four. In *GU* the deleted message of the *TG* headline is conveyed in the label where the ‘nazi tirade’ is clearly expressed. The second instance of complex pre-modification is in the label and allows to reduce the number of words from thirty-six to twenty-nine.

(43)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	April 23 2004	April 23 2004
Headline	Nazi Tirade	<u>Desmond abuse provokes walkout</u>
Subhead	Stream of abuse by Express owner provokes walkout	
Lead / Label	Richard Desmond, the proprietor of the Daily Express, launched an extraordinary tirade against Germans yesterday when he accused them all of being Nazis as he goosestepped around a boardroom to the astonishment of fellow newspaper executives.	Daily Express proprietor Richard Desmond launches an extraordinary tirade against the Germans, accusing them all of being Nazis while goosestepping around a boardroom to the astonishment of fellow executives.

In the *UG* headline in (44), there is another case of pre-modification which simplifies the information provided in *TG*.

(44)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	December 13 2004	December 13 2004
Headline	Eta bomb scare clears Madrid stadium as Real play Basques	<u>Eta bomb scare clears Real Madrid stadium</u>
Lead / Label	About 70,000 football fans were forced to evacuate Real Madrid's Santiago Bernabéu stadium last night when the police stopped a league game because of a bomb threat purporting to come from the Basque separatist group Eta.	Spain: About 70,000 football fans were forced to evacuate Real Madrid's Santiago Bernabéu stadium last night because of a bomb threat.

In the above example, as in many other provided so far, it is possible to highlight another type of variation: complex post-modification, as well as subordination, are often avoided and reduced to simpler clauses online, as underlined in 4.4.5.

4.4.5 Subordination and complex post-modification

As shown by Figure 4.5 there is a considerable difference in the total number of words used in headlines, leads and labels in *TG* and the *GU*. The syntactic and lexical variations so far underlined justify only in part of this numerical difference, which finds a good acceptable reason in web content managers dislike for long and dense text and preference for scannable text. Hence excessive subordination and complex post-modification are to be avoided online, as outlined – in blue for subordination and in red for post-modification – in the examples below which represent the 483 cases revealed in the Corpus analysis.

(45)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	December 13 2004	December 13 2004
Headline	US tapped ElBaradei calls, claim officials	<u>US 'tapped ElBaradei calls'</u>
Lead / Label	The Bush administration has been listening in on telephone conversations between the director of the international nuclear agency and Iranian diplomats with the aim of gathering evidence to remove the UN bureaucrat from his post, it was reported yesterday.	Calls with Iranian diplomats monitored in hope of removing nuclear agency director from his post, claim officials.

(46)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Concern as Pope is rushed to hospital with flu	<u>Pope in hospital with breathing problems</u>
Lead / Label	Pope John Paul II, the leader of the world's one billion Roman Catholics , was rushed to hospital in Rome late last night in circumstances that raised serious concerns about his health.	World: Pope John Paul II is rushed to hospital in Rome in circumstances that raise serious concerns about his health.

(47)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline / Homepage	Careers and guidance service may be replaced	<u>Connexions may be replaced</u>
Lead / Label in Homepage	Connexions, the careers and guidance service for young people set up less than four years ago and costing more than £450m a year, is facing the axe in its current form under reforms to be published next month.	Education: Careers service set up less than four years ago and costing more than £450m a year is facing the axe.

Examples (45), (46) and (47) above show omission of irrelevant information, i.e. ‘of gathering evidence’ in (45), ‘the leader of the world's one billion Roman Catholics’ in (46) and ‘in its current form under reforms to be published next month’ in (47); and of two repetitions, i.e. ‘between the director of the international nuclear agency and’ in (45), ‘Concerns as’ in (46) and ‘the careers and guidance service for young people’ in (47).

An interesting example of avoided repetition is offered by (48) where the noun phrase in *TG*, i.e. ‘The straitjacket’, is omitted letting the related apposition become the noun phrase in the subject position in the *GU*.

(48)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Straitjacket may be brought back into NHS	<u>Straitjacket may return to NHS</u>
Lead / Label	The straitjacket , the restraining garment that came to symbolise the harsh treatment of mental health patients, may return, with the NHS considering its reintroduction in a modern form.	The restraining garment that came to symbolise the harsh treatment of mental health patients may return, with the NHS considering its reintroduction in a modern form.

Example (49) is another instance that whenever possible irrelevant details are omitted for the sake of clarity and immediacy in processing the message.

(49)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Blair pledges backing for welfare reforms	<u>Blair pledges backing for welfare reforms</u>
Lead / Label in Homepage	Tony Blair yesterday pledged his government to help up to one million people on incapacity benefit back into work through a series of "firm but fair" reforms which will be announced today.	Politics: Government to help up to one million people on incapacity benefit back into work through 'firm but fair' reforms.
Label in Society		Pledge to help up to one million people on incapacity benefit back into work through series of 'firm but fair' reforms.
Label in UK Latest		Government pledges to help up to one million people on incapacity benefit back into work.

In (50), the headline has been completely reformulated in order to generate suspense and invite the reader to click on it, which compensates for dramatization provided by conversational style in the *TG* headline.

(50)

	The Guardian	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	I'm a celebrity ... get him out of here!	<u>The celebrity secret is out</u>
Lead / Label	The mysterious angry young man who has taken internet gossip about the stars to a new, much ruder level with his Holy Moly! site talks to Caroline Roux	The mysterious angry young man behind internet gossip newsletter Holy Moly! talks to Caroline Roux.

Examples (51) to (59) show how entire sentences can be omitted to simplify a message to be processed by a globalised readership.

(51)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Protesters' win over bypass injunction	<u>Protesters' win over bypass injunction</u>
Lead / Label	Protesters against a planned bypass in the Buckinghamshire countryside won a partial victory in the high court yesterday when the county council lifted parts of an injunction preventing demonstrations in the local area.	Protesters against a planned bypass in the Buckinghamshire countryside have won a partial victory in the high court.

(52)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Kilroy-Silk promises surprises with his new party	<u>Kilroy-Silk promises surprises with his new party</u>
Lead / Label	Robert Kilroy-Silk will today unveil his second attempt to capture the heart of Eurosceptic Britain as he launches his "straight-talking" new party Veritas.	Robert Kilroy-Silk launches his "straight-talking" new party Veritas.

(53)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Doubts persist on foot and mouth	<u>Doubts persist on foot and mouth</u>
Lead / Label	Britain is still not prepared for any new foot and mouth epidemic, four years after the disaster that led to a cull of 6m animals and postponement of the last general election, the National Audit Office reveals today.	Britain is still not prepared for any new foot and mouth epidemic, the National Audit Office has revealed.

(54)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Father wins benefits appeal	<u>Father wins benefits appeal</u>
Lead / Label	A rule which means separated fathers can claim no benefits for their child even if they share almost equal care is "grotesque", "degrading", and brings the law into disrepute , according to an appeal court ruling.	Rule which means separated fathers can claim no benefits for their child even is 'grotesque', appeal court rules.

(55)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	King of Nepal seizes power	<u>King of Nepal seizes power</u>
Lead / Label	The King of Nepal seized power yesterday when he sacked the government, put senior politicians under house arrest, declared a state of emergency and put the army on the streets.	The King of Nepal has sacked the government, put politicians under house arrest and declared a state of emergency.

(56)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	A huge donor going its own way.	<u>A huge donor going its own way</u>
Lead / Label	Washington has publicly welcomed the British Africa initiative, and the Bush administration says it has already started working towards the same goals . But on the road to African development, the US is clearly going its own way	The US: Washington has publicly welcomed the British Africa initiative. But on the road to African development, the US is clearly going its own way.

(57)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Lib Dem attack on terror changes	<u>Lib Dem attack on terror changes</u>
Lead / Label	The Liberal Democrats will today strike out against the government's plans for the house arrest of suspected terrorists by saying they will oppose the measure in the Lords, arguing that it requires derogation from the European convention on human rights.	The Liberal Democrats will today strike out against the government's plans for the house arrest of suspected terrorists.

(58)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	How Blair got NHS up to par	<u>How Blair got NHS up to par</u>
Lead / Label in UK Latest	Has Labour delivered? In the last of three extracts from their new book, Polly Toynbee and David Walker examine the state of the health service and assess whether second-term promises have been fulfilled	Extract: Has Labour delivered? Polly Toynbee and David Walker examine the health service.

(59)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 04 2005	February 04 2005
Headline	Ulster standoff after new IRA threat	<u>Standoff after new IRA threat</u>
Lead / Label	The renewed political crisis in Northern Ireland intensified last night when the IRA brushed aside British and Irish allegations of criminality and warned the two governments: "Do not underestimate the seriousness of the situation."	IRA warns British and Irish governments: 'Do not underestimate the seriousness of the situation.'

In soft news, the numerical difference of words is even more relevant, as shown in examples (62) and (63).

(62)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Promise to preserve the Proms	<u>Promise to preserve the Proms</u>
Lead / Label	The Last Night of the Proms is viewed by some as a vulgar exercise in flag waving, by others as the jolliest party night in the classical music. But one thing is certain: under the regime of the BBC Symphony Orchestra's new chief conductor, Jiri Belohlavek, it will not be changing. "It is very special," Belohlavek told the Guardian. "For me it ... mirrors the wonderful quality of the British sense of humour." calendar.	the BBC Symphony Orchestra's new chief conductor Jiri Belohlavek has promised to keep The Last Night of the Proms. By Charlotte Higgins.

(63)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Buying a house? Pick up a flatpack at Ikea	<u>Coming soon: flatpack homes</u>
Lead / Label	<p>Young house-hunters trying to grab the first rung on the property ladder are about to face a new challenge to add to the headaches of finding a mortgage and somewhere more roomy than a shoebox to live.</p> <p>From this spring, if an Anglo-Swedish project takes off, it will be possible to buy an entire home from the furnishing superstore Ikea with the option - though this would be the hard part - of following the flatpack instructions and assembling it yourself.</p>	<p>Anglo-Swedish project hopes to offer cut-price 'instant homes'.</p>

Example (64) and (65) are other instances that whenever possible irrelevant details are omitted for the sake of clarity and immediacy in processing the message. Yet, in these cases subordinate sentences are raised to become main clauses. Moreover in (64) the metonymy 'Met chief' in *TG* subhead disappears in *GU* headline and label. This lexical substitution occurs to provide 'clarity' and accessibility for non-native speakers.

(64)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Crackdown on dinner party drugs	<u>Crackdown on dinner party drugs</u>
Subhead	Casual cocaine use angers new Met chief	
Lead / Label	The new head of Scotland Yard took a swipe at London's white collar and celebrity drug culture yesterday by threatening to arrest weekend consumers of cocaine at dinner	New head of Scotland Yard threatens to arrest weekend consumers of cocaine at dinner parties and in clubs and bars.

	parties and in clubs and bars.	
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(65)

	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Guardian Unlimited</i>
Date	February 02 2005	February 02 2005
Headline	Father wins benefits appeal	<u>Father wins benefits appeal</u>
Lead / Label	A rule which means separated fathers can claim no benefits for their child even if they share almost equal care is "grotesque", "degrading", and brings the law into disreputle, according to an appeal court ruling.	Rule which means separated fathers can claim no benefits for their child even is 'grotesque', appeal court rules.

In all the examples so far produced, the changes highlighted above are, in fact, inspired by the lexical necessity to *choose clarity over confusion* (Nielsen 2006: 253), making the text tight and scannable, even if sometimes online style markers seem not to coincide with those of the up-market newspaper.

The significant presence of lexical variation, accompanied by syntactic elements, is designed to confer more flexibility and readability to the online text. However, language variation within web-walls has to be interpreted as an organizational necessity to ensure success in reaching the new readership, i.e. use the homepage and the sub-homes as containers of fast tools.

In fact, all the variation so far produced are not the result of editing, which “in mass communication [...] is institutionalised and professionalized, offering an ideal site to study the process” (Bell 1991: 66). In the shift to the online, traditional news undergoes an additional editing phase: web-editors have an important role since they vary the language so as to provide the best presentation for an online medium. The “information deletion, lexical substitutions and syntactic editing

rules” pointed out by Bell (1991: 70) are applied to the traditional news texts in order to tighten, clarify and ‘maximize’ online ‘news value’.

CONCLUSIONS

In my research study I have tried to explore Online News Reporting as an hybrid genre characterised by the embedding of news and web discourse, i.e. language use in a specific social context (Bhatia 2004). It appeared necessary to define the new globalised readership, which plays a leading role in news editing in the shift from the traditional daily newspaper *The Guardian* to the online *Guardian Unlimited*. In the distinction of the various roles of news making professionals, the interpreter more than the author revealed fundamental, since s/he is 'responsible for the prominence a story receives and how it is displayed' even though they 'do not generally interfere with the main news text, the 'body copy', apart from cutting to fit available space or time.'" (Bell 1991: 43). Moreover, it was necessary to highlight the main linguistic features ruling headlines and lead making in News Reporting and headlines and label making in Web writing.

A number of headlines and leads from *The Guardian* and their relative adaptations for the *Guardian Unlimited* have been examined as far as concerns editing, i.e. their being 'transformed into another text which is different in form but congruent in meaning' (Bell 1991: 66).

The language of the World Wide Web has become a way of communicating with a new readership, forming the web Community. Used to regulate already existing genres like News Reporting, Web language can be ranked among the categories of specialised discourse. Through a corpus-based investigation, some specific linguistic patterns regulating the language shift from the traditional to the online newspaper have been identified at the level of lexis and syntax.

As far as textual organisation is concerned, online news seems to follow a path towards simplification and systematisation. Scannability of news texts is improved by the use of devices like the schematic disposition of news in the Homepage and the Sub-homes. However, most of the lexical and syntactic features occurring in online news texts may be ascribed to those normally characterising general news discourse, such as the use of metonymy and pre-modification, and the deletion of the determiner.

This study has also investigated the issue of obscure and dense text. The importance of a simpler and smoother communication between reporters and readers cannot be underestimated, also in view of the above mentioned scannability. From the analysis carried out, a general process of linguistic and textual simplification emerges, also as a result of devices such as the use of simple present and present perfect replacing time adverbials, the simplification of subordinate clauses, complex post-modifications and the deletion of superfluous information. Generally, sentence length is reduced lightening the amount of words used and consequently of textual information.

To conclude, it can be said that Online News Reporting is a vehicle of linguistic interaction with a globalised readership, who, thanks to the technology of the medium, has become interactive and has gained a new role within the news making process. Moreover, the World Wide Web has defined and keeps on defining new professionals who can adapt the real world to the virtual one, including language.

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