

**Bangor University**

## **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

### **Making sense of more bad news : membership categorisation and media reportage**

Sherrington, Matthew

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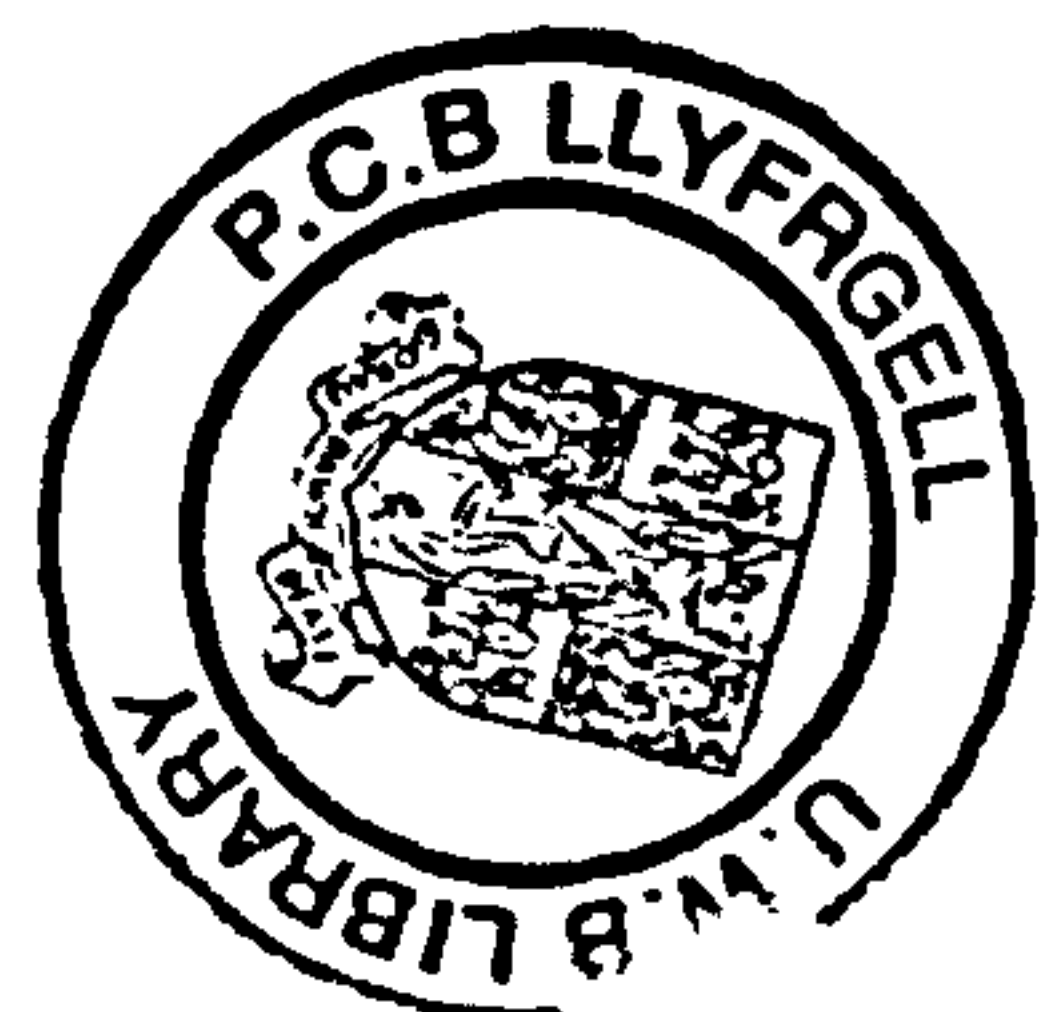
**Making Sense of More Bad News**  
**Membership Categorisation and Media**  
**Reportage**

WALLES BANGOR

2002

Phd.

**Matthew Sherrington**



# **Making Sense of More Bad News**

## **Membership Categorisation Analysis and Media**

### **Reportage:**

#### **The Case of Airliner Crashes**

## **Abstract**

This work is centred on the ethnomethodological concern that all texts can be respecified as situated accomplishments of members' practical action and practical reasoning. Using, as a foundation, the work of Garfinkel (1967) and Sacks (1992a; 1992; b) it undertakes the explication of members' methods of understanding and making sense of news reportage concerning airliner crashes. Methodologically it is grounded in Sacks' work on membership categories, devices and category bound activities. It is the assertion of this work that the study of the language of the news media should not be motivated by theoretical concerns and furthermore that the subject matter be considered as formally located in the occasioned particulars of its use.



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## **Chapter One:**

# **The Language of the News Media**



## **Introduction:**

The language of the news print media has always been of interest to sociologists, media analysts and linguists alike. However these studies have almost exclusively focussed on what the reports themselves can reveal about the writers and about whom they are writing. The approach has been to view such reports as a conduit to something more tangible or more objective, a window through which to view the 'real world'. Therefore such 'texts' are treated as unproblematic means to an end. This work seeks to redress the relative dearth of studies that examine texts as analytically valid phenomena by deconstructing newspaper reports on airliner crashes and examining their reflexive constitution as documentary realities.

Initially the inspiration for a study of this kind grew from an interest in the use of nationality descriptors by the media in disaster reporting. Essentially this was born from Garfinkel's (1967:37) policies both of 'making commonplace scenes visible' and taking familiar scenes and asking what can be done to make trouble in relation to the unproblematic adequacy of news reportage. The subject of airliner crashes was chosen due to the prominence of nationality descriptors within these reports, frequently the news worthiness of such an incident could be found in the consistency between the country of origin of the victims and of the newspaper itself. Having collected a broad corpus of data it became apparent that such reportage offered the opportunity to conduct a more comprehensive and detailed study of members' methods for making sense of disaster reports. It was without doubt the case that past studies had been remiss in their treatment of such data either as little more than unproblematic accounts of incidents or as evidence by which to construct theories of social relations.



The data collected focussed on four airliner crashes which were selected primarily due to their prominence and the subsequent ease of data collection this profile enabled. The data was sourced from online archives of both British and North American daily newspapers which enabled greater accessibility. In total 17 articles were selected covering the crashes of TWA Flight 800 in 1996, Swissair Flight 111 in 1998, EgyptAir Flight 990 in 1999 and Pan Am 103 in 1998. Although a far larger corpus of data was collected it was my belief that, since the intention of this work was not to generalise or to project theoretical constructs onto data beyond that which I choose to study, a small number of reports would be sufficient to allow an analysis of members' methods of routine practical accomplishment in this domain.

Two points seem pertinent at this stage in regard to this methodology. The first relates to the point of view of the writer, the news journalist. Surely if one is to examine members methods for understanding the news, consideration must be given to those who produce the reportage? My response to this is twofold: firstly, that this study aims to explicate the methods by which members make sense of the language of the news media. In essence the production methods are not important, at least for that which I intend to discuss. Whilst undoubtedly the process through which the news is produced is of significance, a discussion of such methods is the subject for another study. The second point relates to a quote from Sacks:

*"A culture is an apparatus for generating recognisable actions; if the same procedures are used for generating as for detecting, that is perhaps as simple solution to the problem of recognisability as is formulatable."* (Sacks 1992a: 226)

His argument is that the methods used to recognise, must logically mirror the methods used to produce. It can be no other way, both producers and receivers of information have access to the same cultural resources that typify the 'recognisable description'.

The second point refers to the structural presentation of the media report. My data was collected largely from online archives of news reports and as such the structure of their presentation differs significantly from the presentation received by the reader in his or her newspaper. Although the internet copies may faithfully reproduce the language and indeed the visual components of the article nonetheless on-screen presentation is different from its print original. It is my belief however that this study adopts a consistent approach to of the resources located in the language of the reports. I do not claim to explicate all the methods members' use to accomplish the natural intelligibility of the news report but simply the categorial resources located in the text itself. For this reason I am less concerned with the visual presentation and more with the categorially based intelligibility of the text as a routine practical accomplishment.

My work will be centred on the Ethnomethodological concern that all texts can be examined in terms of a stock of common sense knowledge, using as a foundation the work of Garfinkel (1967) and Sacks (1992a; 1992b) This knowledge is invoked in everyday situations and can be conceptualised through members' practical accomplishment of categorial order work. Therefore it is possible to unpack and respecify news reporting as a set of constructed relevances based around membership categories. Previous sociological work has not been concerned to



deconstruct the organisational and occasioned configurations present in society which enable members to make sense of situations, in situ. The aim of my work will be to explicate the self-organising and reflexively constituted character of plane crash reports.

The analysis of newspaper reports as 'active' and self-organising phenomena that guide the reader to certain interpretations will not be considered as occurring in a social vacuum. It is only relevant when considered in regards to the practical, common sense procedures through which members invoke the machinery of categorial order to make sense of the world. In short I propose a comprehensive examination of the conceptual methods available to the social actors in order to respecify the reports that form the corpus of my data as topics of inquiry and problematic members' accomplishments. Given the significance of texts to both lay and Sociological members of society there is a clear need for them to be considered as 'analytically significant phenomena'. Neither Sociologists nor other academics can exempt their own writings from textual analysis. Therefore this research proposes a contribution to establishing a framework for the study of texts as members' phenomena and sharpening the focus of Sociological inquiry.

The language of the news media is rich in intriguing data for linguists, socio-linguists, sociologists and psychologists. Many writers have been keen to establish this approach under the wider rubric of mass communication studies (McQuail, 1987; Taylor and Willis, 1999) however the most complete work has attempted to set news broadcasting as a discursive rhetoric apart from other genres such as advertising (see Berkowitz 1997, or for a more specific case study Zelizer 1992). Perhaps one reason

why news reporting has garnered so much interest is that it claims some degree of objective facticity, specifically of reporting the news as it happens. It would however be naïve to classify news reporting as 'just the facts'. Clearly it is the methods by which the facts are presented, the accompanying rhetoric, discourse and contextual, implicative and ideological determinations which have captured the analytical concerns of social investigators.

As Bell (1991) notes there are recurrent themes throughout sociology's treatment of the language of the news media. Past work has focussed on the description of the language of the news, the narrative qualities of news reporting, attempts to decode what might be considered 'hidden' messages in reports and the activity of reading the news itself. The works of the Glasgow Media Group (1976, 1980, 1985) have been among the most prominent examples of sociological analysis of news reporting and their work will be discussed later. This chapter provides a brief examination of the diversity of approaches to studying my corpus of data. The purpose of this synopsis is to consider the possible roots and influences behind my intended approach but also the limitations which have led to my adoption of the Ethnomethodological project as the most appropriate foundation for the treatment of this research topic. This chapter provides a brief commentary on the history of media sociology with particular interest in more recent works where the previously clear distinction between ethnomethodology and media sociology has become increasingly less relevant.

## **The Language of the News Media**

An excellent account of some of the key approaches to studying the language of the news is provided by Graddol and Boyd-Barrett (1994).<sup>1</sup> News reporting is simply another aspect of the fascinating use of language and significantly it is a genre of discourse that touches the lives of most people and provides commentary to the 'important' occurrences of social life. Whilst studies of this type are often predominantly focussed on television increasingly the significance and indeed prevalence of the news text is being addressed. What follows are brief discussions of some of the key approaches for studying the language of the news media.

### **Content Analysis**

Content analysis has a long tradition in studies of media and of communication studies as a whole. Like much of the research discussed in this brief synopsis its motivation is predominantly the search for hidden messages of political or ideological bias and naturally the language of the news media has been subject to considerable attention for this reason. Essentially quantitative in nature it often forms the foundation of much research into news reporting but as Bell (1991) notes it is best accompanied by other methods that may provide qualitative data. See Van Dijk below for an excellent example of how content analysis can complement qualitative insights.

### **Critical Linguistics**

A form of discourse analysis developed by such writers as Fowler (1991), Hodge and Kress (1979), Trew (1979a; 1979b) and more specifically with regard to

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of a range of approaches to studying the language of the media see Davis and Walton (1983).



textual analysis by Richardson (1987), critical linguistics emphasises the role of the vocabulary and grammatical selections in the discourse of the news media as possibly containing or more specifically directing the readership to certain conclusions regarding ideology (see also Heritage and Roth 1995). For the critical linguist the news text operates on multiple levels. It simultaneously serves to represent the world, its ideational function, whilst enacting social relations and social identities, its interpersonal function (see Trew 1979b). Therefore the news text is constructed from a number of available options or choices in grammar and vocabulary. Thus linguistic and ideological processes are interwoven.

Essentially the agency of a person's actions and the subsequent linguistic choices offered to the reader as representations of such have important ideological ramifications. Similar in form to content analysis in their stringent concern for the quantifiable frameworks of representation, critical linguists argue that the 'problematic' events covered by the news media are simply repackaged within pre-configured boundaries of ideological relevance (see Fairclough 1995). Thus the clauses used to codify events and the grammatical and vocabulary choices offered to the readership are crucial to the process of categorising the social actor. The news is not simply 'reported' but delivered in order to concur with a pre-existing framework of categorisation consistent with the ideological concerns and intentions of those with an interest in maintaining such systems; such examples as gender discrimination are often examined using this approach.

The language of the news media has been the subject of much discussion in regards to 'hidden' or 'coded' messages of a political or ideological nature (see

Eldridge 1993). Thus frequently such research is observably theory driven and judgements as to the adequacy, appropriateness, facticity or accuracy are naturally prominent. The work of Fowler (1991), who classes himself as a critical linguist, can clearly be characterised as political and indeed the rhetoric of his research indicates a strongly critical inclination. His work uses case studies to analyse a 'hysterical style' in the news for example in relation to food hygiene health scares and subsequent hospital admissions. His work aims to study the discursive style of the news media which serves to repackage those aspects of the news he terms 'bureaucratic' in language that can be interpreted as 'personal' or 'informal' by the use of 'oral modes'.

Essentially his thesis rests on the assumption that the news is presented in terms that can be readily observed as being part of a wider shared understanding, a commonly held view of society consistent with the notion of the properly oriented audience member. The regular and observably comparative use of such 'schemas' which serve to filter our perceptions of the text, prompts Fowler to question what reality the discourse actually represents. Similar in form to Garfinkel's (1967) documentary method of interpretation his notion of the inter-textuality of particular texts forms the basis for a case study of the 1989 salmonella scare. This principal case study addressed the issue of what reality Fowler argued was represented by the discourse. Examining noun phrases used to describe the 'scare' and building a framework of recurrent features of the reporting, this 'formula patterning' allowed Fowler to generate a linguistic conceptualisation of the 'hysterical' style of the press.

The validity of this approach has always been in question due to its apparent failure to consider audience response to the data. Primarily its critics argued that



rather than 'decoding' the messages of the media it merely served to identify nothing more analytically significant than a common vocabulary used to sell newspapers (Boyd-Barrett in Graddol and Boyd-Barrett 1994). The limitations of this approach have been widely discussed (see Fowler 1987; Kress 1989; Richardson 1987) but have often concluded that such research is one-sided insofar as it does not consider the role of the writer. Similarly attention to such details as grammatical issues relating to clauses and 'passive' or 'active' characterisations of the agency of a person's actions has been to the detriment of examining the wider structural and organisational properties of the text as greater than the sum of their parts.

### **Social Cognitive Analysis**

This approach is best illustrated through the work of Teun van Dijk. Van Dijk's (1988; 1991) work has been of significance to sociological scholars of the media for some time predominantly due to the fact that even when addressing such concerns as ideology in media discourse he does not rely on macro level analyses (see Van Dijk 1998). His work is more in keeping with the movement to retain the agency of members' methods both in the production and recognition of media messages. Like Bell (1991) whose work will be examined later, Van Dijk is concerned with all aspects of the media circuit: the production, the observable output and the reception by the audience. In this sense his intention is to provide some remedial counter argument to the previously decontextualised analyses of mass communication.<sup>2</sup> The focus of his work therefore is to address that which he argues has been largely neglected in past research, namely the connection between the contextual specificities

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<sup>2</sup> See Moores (1990) for more detail regarding the importance of context to reading texts.



of the textual structure, members' cognitive reasoning practices and the production of the news itself.

Van Dijk's work and his interest in both the structures of news production and comprehension and emphasis on processes of social cognition have added a new dimension to both discourse and textual analysis of news output (see van Dijk 1988a; 1988b; 1991). His conceptualisations of macrostructure and schematic structure provide a more comprehensive analysis than had been offered by critical linguistics. His intention is to remedy the previously distorted processes of news production by working backwards from members' cognitive reasoning processes, this was in direct contrast to previous authors whose traditional approach from production to reception established an undesirable distinction between the two. Nonetheless despite this more encompassing analysis of the language of the news media little attention is paid to the categorisations of social identities and the dynamics between them. Again, similar to the critical approach, van Dijk is concerned to 'decode' the media to establish that certain ideologies are reproduced through the production and comprehension of the news. Although there is a failure to consider the inter-textuality of the news text, that it is not read in isolation but remains part of a wider structure of comprehension involving other 'documentary realities', (see Atkinson and Coffey In Silverman 1997:45) van Dijk's work is undoubtedly of considerable significance.

### **Linguistic and Socio-linguistic Analysis**

These approaches concentrate solely on the language of the news media and are not concerned with the methods of its reception. As above, grammar, syntax, semantics, issues of clause and patterns of intonation are among the primary

interests.<sup>3</sup> Although it may be possible to classify the work of Bell (1991) under the rubric of socio-linguistic analysis he differs somewhat insofar as he is also a journalist. For this reason Bell's work is discussed below. The strength of this approach lies in the meticulous attention to linguistic detail which characterises the discipline as a whole (Bell 1984:145). Its limitations, however, are most notable in the lack of consideration of audience response and the somewhat narrow approach of failing to address the significance of context to media output. See Bell below for a more detailed account of socio-linguistic analysis.

### **Semiotic Analysis**

This focuses on the semiotic codes which are said to underpin both the linguistic and visual aspects of the 'news story' (see Barthes 1968; Hartley 1982; Silverman 1983). This approach is characterised by a close reading of the text to uncover the semiotic codes which contain the ideological frameworks hidden within the media messages. In its detailed appreciation of the text it is comparable to content analyses however it is ostensibly qualitative rather than quantitative. The advantage of semiotic analysis lies with its acknowledgement that different audiences will interpret the semiotic codes (see Scannell 1990) differently thus providing a remedy to critical linguistics which attempts to decode the message of a text without considering that it might be one of many.

I referred above to the work of Hartley (1978) which, while dated, is still an excellent example of semiotic analysis. His research concentrated on both the

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<sup>3</sup> A dated yet still valuable reference for linguistic approach in a more generalised sense can be found in Saussure (1966)



linguistic and visual aspects of news reporting. He considered such conventions as the individuals who presented the news to the audience (the news reader), the use of graphics, films or photographs as well as more technical details such as use of camera shots, framing and sequences of pictures. A more recent study that may be collected under the rubric of semiotic analysis and in this instance concentrating on the messages that the combination of audio and visual codes might convey was undertaken by Bjelicé (in Jalbert 1999:231). Influenced by the work of such writers as Baudrillard, Bjelicé explores the link between the media and 'reality' and the nature of the relationship as expressed through the visual and audio codes employed by the news reportage. This approach adopts the premise that media reports are effectively a simulation of the 'real'. Influenced heavily by Baudrillard's (1995a) controversial essay "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place" he investigates the adequacy of what he refers to as 'representational fixation' on the part of New French Theory that 'meaning is practice', whether the simulated (by the media) coherency of a reported event serves to cancel its meaning as a 'real' incident. Logically if the representation of an event is fake then the event too must be fake:

*"...the reality of an event- let's say a war- is given by the order of its representational practices, by the news; and that the reality of the news, by the rule of reciprocity of meaning, is given by the reality of the event: If one of the poles is fake, the other cannot be real. If the war is not a war then its representation is not a representation either; if the war is a referent and the news a sign, then the war is a referent of edited signs."*

(Bjelicé 1999:239)

Bjelicé's work analyses a news report from the war in Bosnia and how the images are aligned with the commentary of the journalist. Although he is approaching this

research partly from an ethnomethodological perspective it is nonetheless a good example of the value of semiotic analysis.

Semiotic analysis argues that texts are naturally orderly constructs and attempts to explicate the organising devices by which the text is structured. The concern lies with the language related codes employed in the conveyance of the news story. The typical focus is with the structure of categorisations or identifications which might carry ideological significance and the intent is to link the semiotic properties of the text with ideologies, power relations and the cultural and contextual particulars of their occurrence. Whilst such an approach does consider the importance of context and culture, it lacks the systematically comprehensive attention to the linguistic properties of the text in comparison with the other modes of analysis discussed here.

### **The Media Circuit**

The conceptualisation of the media as a 'circuit' or loop incorporating the elements sender-message-receiver received criticism for being overly linear or simplistic (see Hall 1980). Nonetheless more recent writers have attempted to study the language of the news media utilising these three themes. Most notably the work of Bell (1991) has been concerned with such fundamentals focussing less on cognitive elements and more on how the perceptions of audiences by the producers of media output might shape the language employed. Unlike van Dijk, Bell analyses the production of the news, considers audience response and then addresses the structure of the reports themselves. He is concerned with both the news print and the broadcast media.



Regarding production, Bell's primary concern is with the multiple authorship of each news output. This is in contrast to previous approaches whose conception of the media text as the result of a single voice was misleading. His meticulous analysis and deconstruction of the complexities of news output is insightful and comprehensive. With regards to audience response his approach is both varied and extensive and focuses on three key themes. Firstly the time lapse between production and reception, referring to the temporal and spatial differences between the events as reported in the news and their reception by the audience. Secondly the notion of the audience member, just as the production of the news has multiple authors, the differing roles of the audience are necessarily addressed. Finally the concept of audience design in which he examines stylistic preferences and how the media take into account the relationship between the 'design' of the news and the recipients of this information. The final aspect of his work centres on the structural and organisational properties of the news report itself. One aspect of news media analysis that has largely been neglected according to Bell, is concerned with the perception of news reports (in the print media) as 'stories' or of possessing story-able qualities or storied elements and he describes journalists as the professional story tellers of modern society. His narrative analysis is borrowed from the work of Labov and Waletzky (1967) who divide the storytelling in discourse into six elements: the abstract, the orientation, the complicating action, the evaluation, the resolution and the coda. He attempts to draw comparison between the observable features of personal narratives (as might appear in face to face interaction) and news narratives (see also Jacobs 1996). For Bell, the narrative structure of the story and its analysis is a dual task of considering the chronological construction of the article as opposed to the

order in which it is read by the lay member. He also discusses the observable construction of the news report (see also Fishman 1980:210) and issues of 'mis-reporting'. Bell's work in its entirety is again perhaps over-ambitious in its attempts to study every facet of the language of the news media. Nonetheless, each of the themes he addresses are approached meticulously and methodically with significant contributions to be taken from each and his work is free from the concerns with 'hidden messages' of ideological dominance which have served to colour past approaches.

## Media Sociology and Ethnomethodology

The approaches discussed above indicate a predilection within media sociology or more specifically sociological studies of the media towards viewing the language of the news media as a resource for investigation of something larger, something of a macroscopic nature.. More recent studies have begun to redress this and indeed the distance between the sociological and the ethnomethodological stance has been rapidly diminishing reflected by the increasing interest on the text itself and the notion of the active audience member. What follows is a discussion of work which indicates the progressive path taken by analysts of the media. It will indicate that there is a clear correlation between sociological studies of the media and the investigations of this work.

Much discussion was generated by Anderson and Sharrock's paper *Biasing the News: technical Issues in Media Studies* (1979). Anderson and Sharrock described their piece as a "general critique of radical/cultural studies" and argued that prominent and respected examples of media studies were "unacceptable to us, deficient in their methodology, insensitive in the treatment of their materials and dubious in their conclusions." (1979:1). They stated that whilst past analysis had declared the significance of the text their analysis had been little more than cursory. Sharrock and Anderson chose to focus on the issue of bias in the news and central to this paper is the argument that the alleged significance and extent of bias in the news is a production of the media scholars and not the media themselves. Essentially news reporting is embedded in the cultural particulars of its production and recognition, thus while the interpretations of past media researchers are not necessarily incorrect, they are not the only interpretations nor indeed do they carry any special significance.



Their paper comprises a discussion of two points, producing significance and locating bias. The second half is a consideration of a piece of media research. To begin they claim that media scholars are concerned with demonstrating that events accounted for in media reportage could be accounted for differently. The significance lies in the disparity between the possible accounts and the account of the news reportage, this produces significant bias. However Anderson and Sharrock argue that the possibility of an alternative account to that provided by the media does not invalidate it. Their discussion of how scholars locate bias is divided into what they describe as the four main sources of bias, the practices of news production, and the background to news production, the produced text and the reading of the text. In essence this paper is directed to establishing the methodologies of past attempts at media research as inadequate and lacking finesse. They criticise the poorly explained and crude attempts to explain news production, the conceptualisation of 'knowledge of the world as it is really' and knowledge of the world as it is presented' the former too often being based on what the theorists say it is. They accuse studies of characterising the reader as little more than a passive dope and the inadequacy of content analyses which give no concern to "the form which the medium expression will assign them". (1979:375) In the second half of the paper Anderson and Sharrock employ extracts from the work of Murdock to illustrate their earlier points regarding bias, or rather significant bias, being the production of the media scholar.

As mentioned much discussion was generated by this paper not least from Murdock (1980) himself who felt compelled to defend both his own work and that of his field. His reply to Anderson and Sharrock's paper criticised the narrowness of



their approach and argued that they misrepresented both his work and media sociology as a whole. His reply is concerned with their identification of the problem of 'bias' as a central and recurring theme of analysis of the news by media sociologists. Murdock describes their assertions and preoccupation with this issue as a misleading oversimplification.

*"Indeed, for the last three decades sociologists interested in news have been attempting to go beyond the restrictive notion of bias and to develop more adequate accounts of why news takes the form that it does."*

(Murdock 1980:458)

Similarly he counters Anderson and Sharrock's claim that media scholars have failed to consider the contexts in which the texts were produced. Indeed he cites the work of several researchers who demonstrate the increasing concern of the discipline with the economic and ideological contexts which might influence and constrain news production. He argues that whilst it is undoubtedly the case that the field is concerned with understanding the selective nature of news accounts in relation to the social world in which they appear, the problem is rarely defined as an issue of 'bias'.

Murdock's most consistent and recurring criticisms are concerned with what he sees as Anderson and Sharrock's failure to consider to any degree of adequacy the immense corpus of research on which they comment. He is especially critical of their failure to incorporate a historical dimension to their critique (p.460) and also notes that they have neglected to take account of the large body of empirical data which supports the evidence and research they dismiss (p.461). He argues that as a consequence their criticisms of past methodologies, which are at the heart of the

paper, are “ill-formed and grossly misleading”. Another key aspect of the paper was concerned with the lack of interest in the audience member in media sociology. The criticisms of the Glasgow Media Groups’ *Bad News* are generalised across of all sociological media literature stating that the recipient of media output is characterised as a ‘passive dope’. Murdock counters this claim by asserting that the notion of the active audience has been at the forefront of media sociology for some time. Indeed, he argues, that contemporary researchers have stressed the “active and negotiated relationship between consumers and texts.” (1980:463)

In conclusion Murdock argues that Anderson and Sharrock’s selective analysis of his work is mirrored in their presentation of the field as a whole. He notes that their claims are, in failing to consider the comprehensive body of major studies and the intellectual roots from which they came, rendered unsupported and unwarranted.

McKeganey and Smith’s (1980) paper *Reading and Writing as Collaborative Production* is a further reply to Anderson and Sharrock’s work. Their argument rests on the distinction between where Anderson and Sharrock, and where the media sociologists they discuss, situate themselves in regard to the news text. They claim that media sociologists locate themselves within the view that there exists the world as the media present it and the possibility that it could be otherwise. There is a demonstrable commitment to the possibility of alternative presentations. They contrast this with their perception of Anderson and Sharrock’s viewpoint that they argue is firmly committed to the possibility of a ‘non-evaluative reading’, they orient themselves to “the possibility of a perfect correspondence between the activity of reading and the text to be read. (1980:616) They assert that Anderson and Sharrock’s



paper claims to provide a reading closer to the original writing than that of past media scholars. Their arguments imply that such researchers as Murdock read the news through a framework which triggers recognition of significant bias or more specifically interprets what Anderson and Sharrock say is really insignificant bias as being significant. In essence McKeganey and Smith state that although Anderson and Sharrock imply that the significance of bias can be located in the reading practices of others, in doing so they present their own account as an “omniscient perspective over viewing the text” (1980: 617). Their criticism is that Anderson and Sharrock are guilty of the very practices they accuse media sociologists of, namely producing evaluative dialectical readings of a text. Finally McKeganey and Smith address the criticisms levelled at the Glasgow Media Group’s *More Bad News* (1980) in regard to a perceived failure to consider the reader. They argue that to attempt to produce a notion of the generalised reader is misleading and disingenuous. To this end I would agree that if the researchers’ version of reading is considered sufficient then this is legitimate grounds from which to theorise about the language of the news:

*“In this sense at least, as readers of texts, media sociologists approximate closer to the concrete reading of texts than any notion of a reading not locatable in one’s practices of reading.”*

(McKeganey and Smith 1980:620)

Attempts to incorporate ethnomethodology into aspects of the sociological analysis of the media were increasing. Jalbert’s (in Davis and Walton 1983) work on constructs for analysing news is evidence of the discussion of news media presentations and media discourses using ethnomethodological techniques. Jalbert aimed to examine the ideological work involved in news discourses. The devices and procedures he described to deconstruct the media presentations are membership

categories and their selection, the exploitation of the reifying character of synecdochic and metonymic reification, *de re/de dicto* transformations, the juxtaposition of transparent descriptions for opaquely true descriptions and the analysably distinct orders of pre-supposition (1983:282). Jalbert's work is extremely complex in places and the linguistic techniques he employs in his analysis of the news report of a 'massacre' in Zaire in 1978 are at times dense yet it provides an excellent deconstruction of the impact of selecting words and categories and the ideological import that such routine features of news stories contain.

A consistent theme of this work is the reference to Sacks' conceptions of categories and devices, and the rules of application. A significant point Jalbert discusses is the 'ascribed attributes' of members of a given category in the consideration of the production of ideology in news accounts. He refers to the inferred categorisation of the Palestinian people as terrorists, terrorist being an ascribed attribute of this membership category or device. Jalbert describes the use of such categorisations as a descriptive preference that is "a function of those very same categorical selections to which recipients of media presentations are routinely exposed." (Jalbert 1983:286) His work examines in detail the literary, linguistic and categorically based devices routinely employed by news reports to 'say more than they do'. Essentially Jalbert strives to demonstrate though clear analytical constructs the ideological presentation of news. He notes that because such ideologies are implicit they are frequently only identifiable though the discrepancy between the perspective of the author and that of the reader.



More overtly ethnomethodological but indicative of the concern with news texts is Schenkein's (in Psathas 1979:187) paper on the *Radio Raiders Story*. Schenkein's analysis of a news story about a robbery is an attempt to deconstruct the methods of practical reasoning utilised by the news reader. He is particularly interested in how an event 'in the world' becomes, and recognisably so, an event 'in the news'. He considers the use of membership categories especially in regard to the referential preferences of the news report and the temporal structure of the 'story' and observed that content and structure served to assemble 'facts' in a manner which was both naturally intelligible and observably authentic. Whilst Schenkein's work is brief and lacking a comprehensive explication of the data he discusses, nonetheless it serves to demonstrate the significance of motivated inquiry into this domain of phenomenon.

The work of the Glasgow Media Group has always been to the forefront of media sociology. *More Bad News* (1980) represented a comprehensive sociological analysis of British television news. The chapters 'See it that way' and 'Hear it that way' indicated a strong awareness of Ethnomethodology and the news text as the central topic. In this respect it was becoming clearer that some degree of convergence between ethnomethodology and media sociology was possible. Its key theme remained that the television news was fundamentally biased on two counts. The Group argued that that news is a 'cultural artefact', essentially that news reportage is culturally biased and that the socially constructed messages comprising the news report are imbued with the culturally dominant ideologies of our society. Secondly, they identify political bias, and again this is concerned with the economic and industrial contexts within which the news text is constructed. The Glasgow Media

Group does not argue that these are intentionally or rather consciously motivated acts intended to force the ideologies of the dominant classes on the masses. Rather they see them as the unavoidable result of production mechanisms, professional practices and the social, economic and political contexts in which the news is produced.

Methodologically *More Bad News* is based on content analyses but adopts a range of approaches to media studies such as socio-linguistics and text linguistics. More importantly it achieves a successful amalgamation of media sociology, linguistics and semiotics. This work draws attention to the significance of the various components that comprise the news report and highlighted the importance of both visual and language aspects. They reached a number of conclusions regarding the media as an analysable phenomenon drawing a distinction between the story, language and visual elements of news reportage. They used comprehensive content analysis to argue the existence of an underlying code inherent to each of the components and finally that such codes serve to reinforce each other, being largely homogeneous.

*More Bad News* carries undoubted significance for media sociology and indeed for ethnomethodology. For this work the findings of the Glasgow Media Group and their methodologies are of particular interest. It represents a comprehensive study of ideological content through analysis of language and visual elements and successfully integrated linguistics and semiotics into media sociology.

The recent state of the art of combining the approaches of media sociology and ethnomethodology is represented by the collection of papers edited by Jalbert



(1999). This work contains numerous papers of relevance, most notably Hester and Eglin's membership categorisation analysis of news reportage and this will be examined in more detail later. However in this instance two further papers are significant. Stetson's work on the categories used in the emplotment of news stories is strongly influenced by the work of Sacks. (1992A: 1992b) His concern is with the categories of 'victim', 'offender' and 'witness'. He attempts to apply Sacks' rules of description to an analysis of news reportage concentrating on the notions of 'hear it that way' and 'see it that way' and the inferential significance of membership categories. In this sense Stetson aims to unpack the processes of the ascription these key categories in regard to the concept of news worthiness. By the end of the paper his focus appears to have changed however. Having unpacked the emplotment of a news story and demonstrated their intelligibility as a routine accomplishment, he argues the significance of such methods of practical reasoning beyond the phenomenon of the news story:

*"This analysis of media methods can and must illuminate broader, commonsense, practical reasoning which transcends the particularity of a newspaper (or television) account."*

(Stetson in Jalbert 1999:95)

The second paper by Bjelić is an ethnomethodological explanation of the New French Theory of Media. Focussing heavily on the work of Baudrillard and Virillio the author examines the constraints placed on the 'real'. Using the visual grammar of image representations he observes that media presentations can invent their own rules of what is viewed as 'real'. Bjelić analyses two excerpts of news reportage from the 'War on Bosnia' and compared the frame of interpretation suggested by the order of the visual representations in each. His work is similar in argument, and indeed he

makes this point himself, to Baudrillard's essay *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. In the two excerpts he studies the visual images are edited to convey two different messages. The argument rests that if the visual representations of the war, the reality presented by the media is fake, how can the war itself be real? The notion of a media simulated reality is not new. However Bjelić's work adopts a new approach and is a revealing insight into the fragility of the 'real world' as presented by the news media.



## **Conclusion**

Considerations of time and space have precluded the more detailed discussion of studying the language of the news media that such approaches as mentioned above deserve. However, the brevity of such coverage serves at least to indicate the plethora of multi-disciplinary constructs available to the media researcher. Recent approaches demonstrate the growing importance of the language of the media, and the news media in particular, within research on contemporary processes of social, cultural and international change. They highlight the distinctive linguistic, discursive, narrative and potentially ideological properties of media language and as investigations into the changing properties of representations, identities and social relations their significance can not be overemphasised. As Bell (1991) observes, the media generate much of the language heard in our society and the diversity of approaches to studying the language of the news media can only be to the benefit of our understanding.

It is possible to argue that the immense body of research in this area is becoming increasingly more refined and effective in its treatment of the subject matter, frequently combining multiple approaches to deal with the complexities of the language of the news media. However it is my belief that as part of this ongoing process it is necessary to undertake an ethnomethodological study of the language of the news media on a scale that has not yet been considered. I believe this approach remains as close to the data as is possible and consistent with McKeganey and Smith's assertion that my own version of reading is sufficient and adequate to allow me to theorise upon the natural intelligibility of the news text. Similarly it upholds for Stetson's assertion that such methods as members might use to routinely attend to

such reportage is practically applicable to a wider sphere of understanding of how members operate in the way that they do.

**Chapter Two:**  
**The Ethnomethodological Project**

## Introduction

Ethnomethodology, an approach first conceived of by the American Sociologist Harold Garfinkel (1967, 1970, 1984, 1986; see also Heritage 1984) but having its roots in the work of (amongst others) Schutz (1962, 1964, 1966) and Parsons (1963) refers quite simply to the study of members' methods of practical action and practical reasoning. As a rational breach from the traditions of mainstream sociology and in the years of research following Garfinkel's founding work 'Studies in Ethnomethodology' (1967), the theoretical, ontological and methodological importance of ethnomethodology cannot be overemphasised.<sup>4</sup> The growth of the Ethnomethodological movement through the work of such writers as Schegloff (1968, 1972, 1977, 1991) Cicourel (1973, 1981) and Kitsuse (1963), Sacks (1974a, 1979, 1984, 1992a, 1992b) and Zimmerman (1971, 1974, 1991) to name but a few continued the rediscovering of an immense, omnipresent and previously ignored sphere of analytically significant phenomena. In the very first chapter of *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967) Garfinkel describes the Ethnomethodological project thus:

*"...to treat practical activities, practical circumstances, and practical sociological reasoning as topics of empirical study, and by paying to the most commonplace activities of daily life the attention usually accorded extraordinary events, seek to learn about them as phenomena in their own right."*

(Garfinkel 1967:1)

The most significant aspects of the ethnomethodological approach are perhaps best summarised by Coulon (1995) whose work provides an excellent synopsis. An excellent discussion of the ethnomethodological programme is also provided by Coulter (1974) and Sharrock and Anderson (1982). A brief overview of these

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<sup>4</sup> Work which it is argued grew out of the classical roots of sociology, see Hilbert (1992)



concepts will precede a more detailed discussion of Membership Categorisation Analysis.

### **Practice and Accomplishment**

This relates to an interest in the 'practical action and practical reasoning' undertaken by the social actor in all situations. Garfinkel (1967) did not attempt to distinguish between the activities of the lay or professional inquirer and located his primary interest in the methods by which members' 'got things done', that is the procedures by which accomplishment of mundane, routine and descriptably recognisable actions were made possible. Ethnomethodology had a unique connection with its subject matter insofar as it recognised sociological or professional inquiry as describable in the same terms as the accomplishments of the lay member.

### **Indexicality**

Using a linguistic term, Garfinkel applied the concept of indexicality to explain how all social life is an observable construct of language and the configurations in which it occurs. Indexical expressions were described by as having "*properties that are exhibited by accounts (by reason of their being features of the socially organised occasions of their use).*" (Garfinkel 1967:4) The indexical expression then is the foundation upon which language or the competent use of language is built. Expressions that derive meaning from the contextual occasions of their occurrence, that are 'indexed' in a conversational structure are of obvious importance to the routine activities of the social actor. Ethnomethodology adapted this premise beyond the studies of linguists to include the entire body of language. This illustrates the abiding interest of Ethnomethodology in the 'occasioned corpus'

and the significance of contextual particulars to the local order work of the lay member. Ethnomethodology changed the way in which indexical expressions were treated by the social sciences by viewing them not as problematic and requiring resolution before the 'real' analysis could begin but as the primary characteristic of everyday language and a valid topic for inquiry.<sup>5</sup>

## **Reflexivity**

The notion of reflexivity is paramount to the ethnomethodological approach. The problem was raised that in all accounts of a social activity, or procedure, or interactional situation one could distinguish in the first instance the activity itself and in the second instance the contextual particulars its occurrence (see Chomsky 1968, 1988). The meaning or sense of an exchange was constituted by the use of its features in that context. However, it was observably so that the context was itself a reflexive construct of the interactional specificities that occurred within it. Garfinkel stressed that such reflexivity was 'essentially uninteresting', meaning that members' did not consciously consider this process. Rather it was taken for granted that at the outset members' knew the settings in which they would be making practical actions recognisably accountable for what they were. This equivalence between describing and producing an accountable action (Coulon 1995:23) was utilised but yet not a point of 'interest' for the social actor:

*Members' know, require, count on, and make use of this reflexivity to produce, accomplish, recognise, or demonstrate rational-adequacy-for-all-practical-purposes of their procedures and findings."*

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<sup>5</sup> See also Abercrombie (1974)

(Garfinkel 1967:8)

### **Accountability**

The characterising of members' methods as 'accountable' conceptualised the idea that such actions are recognisable and recognisably describable. In turn this dictates that for the status 'recognisable' to be conferred upon an activity it must be achieved by members' methods. Garfinkel described accountability as meaning 'observable and reportable'. In essence situated practices can be referred to for the coherence afforded them by their production and reproduction.

### **Sociological Reasoning – Lay and Professional**

By its very nature ethnomethodology's agenda removes the distinction between the sociological inquiries of the professional and the lay member. By definition both endeavour to make sense of the world using the same resources and operating within the same contexts and domains of understanding.

*"I have been arguing that a concern for the nature, production, and recognition of reasonable, realistic, and analysable actions is not the monopoly of philosophers and professional sociologists...The study of common sense knowledge and common sense activities consists of treating as problematic phenomena the actual methods whereby members' of a society, doing sociology, lay or professional, make the social structures of everyday activities observable."*

(Garfinkel 1967:75)

Garfinkel argued that if the social actor was to successfully negotiate the instances of interaction that filled each and every day then he or she must continuously be engaged in reflexive and interpretive sociological inquiry. What Garfinkel (1967:36) called the rediscovery of common sense came about by treating



as problematic that which sociology had previously considered only a resource for investigation. The notion of the socially competent member, or 'the social actor is not a judgemental dope' served to 'reintroduce' the individual to the agency of his or her acts a separation of which had grown from the concern of traditional sociology's with viewing society from the outside. The new status afforded members' use of practical knowledge and activity in the production of a recognisable social order revealed to the ethnomethodologist the forgotten domain of inquiry as a programmatic topic.

### **The Documentary Method of Interpretation**

As a concept described by Garfinkel and whose subsequent bearing on ethnomethodology has been critical, the documentary method of interpretation is concerned with members' common sense knowledge of social structures being treated as analytically significant. More specifically it describes how members' utilise a body of knowledge pertaining to social structures as common sense situations are negotiated. It arose from Garfinkel's observation that members' cannot 'know' the full details of what they are doing prior to or during any given activity. Nonetheless numerous decisions are made in these instances of 'meaning, facts, method and causal texture'. Essentially the documentary method of interpretation allows members' to see instances of social action as 'documents of' that instance, as an expression of a pattern. Accumulations of such patterns formulate a body of common sense knowledge and facilitate the understanding of social actions as observable, readable, describable and manageable in the way that they are. Reflexively informed by context and subject to re-evaluation and re-assessment such methods compensate for the indexicality of language. The documentary method of interpretation is a crucial

conceptualisation for researchers intending to formulate a description of a cultural event in such a way that it could be seen as accountable.

*“The method consists of treating an actual appearance as ‘the document of,’ as ‘pointing to,’ as ‘standing on behalf of’ a pre-supposed underlying pattern.”*

(Garfinkel 1967:78)

### **Description vs. Explanation**

Description versus explanation, this summation of the difference between ethnomethodology and traditional sociology offered by Sharrock and Coleman (1999:29) effectively encapsulates the two approaches. What Garfinkel and Sacks describe as “ethnomethodological indifference” (Garfinkel and Sacks 1970:345-346) describes the interest in describing formal structures in their specificities without judging their adequacy or consequences which of course establishes a diametric opposition to traditional sociology which examines social structures, generically conceived and their import for the social actor as a typification. This approach also aims to remedy the previous gulf that traditional sociology had established between its research and the subjects it proposes to study. Ethnomethodology operates from the proposal that its research cannot be considered separate from that which it analyses. Social reality is not an objective or external phenomenon imposing itself on the social automatons of society but an ongoing, reflexive production of the members’ who shape their daily lives in the way that they do.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For further discussions of the ethnomethodological programme see Benson and Hughes 1983; Button 1991; Livingston 1987; Lynch and Peyrot 1992.

## Conclusion

Again it is difficult to fully do justice to the complexities and intricacies of Ethnomethodology. Nonetheless even from a brief discussion it is possible to understand the radical impact this approach had on mainstream sociology, as a research perspective it demanded the boundaries be reassessed and brought a new theoretical and epistemological significance to the study of society. Ethnomethodology represented a policy for inquiry and shared a unique relationship with its own subject matter remedying the ontological gulf that had grown between traditional sociology and its subject matter. As a field of study it rediscovered and established its policy to investigate a previously ignored domain of phenomena:

*“Ethnomethodology’s concern, in general, is the elucidation of how accounts or descriptions of an event, a relationship, or a thing are produced in interaction in such a way that they achieve some situated methodological status, e.g., as factual or fanciful, objective or subjective, etc.”*

(Zimmerman 1976 in Coulon 1995: 68)

The contrast between this approach and those discussed in the previous chapter is clearly evident. Free from the concerns of theory driven research ethnomethodology provides an untainted analysis of members’ methods and the production of social activities, whatever these might be. The following chapter discusses the methodology of how such studies of media stories may be carried out.



**Chapter Three:**  
**Membership Categorisation Analysis**

## **Introduction**

Running parallel to his interests in conversation analysis, Sacks' work on membership categories remained consistent with his desire to describe members' methods for 'doing' social life and producing what Garfinkel (1967) termed 'accountable' actions. Similarly the categorial analysis of members' local order work could be seen as a remedy to the inescapable indexicality of language and for this reason Sacks focussed strongly on the inference rich nature of such categories and the significance of the contextual particulars of their use. His largest body of work, the collection of lectures compiled by Jefferson (1992a; 1992b) showed a predominant interest in the use of categories in language and what he describes as category bound activities although as Schegloff notes there is a 'culturalist tenor' (Schegloff in Sacks 1992a: xlv) to certain lectures in which category analysis is removed from its sequential (and therefore discursive) considerations. There follows a brief examination of the apparatus of membership categorisation<sup>7</sup> to familiarise the reader with the methodology employed in the data analysis.

## **Membership Categories**

Sacks (1992a) described membership categories as social types or classifications that may be used to describe persons. Perhaps most remembered for the famous analysis concerning the story 'The baby cried, the mommy picked it up', Sacks noticed that understanding of social situations and accounts was rooted in our prior orientation to categories and subsequently what such incumbencies might infer. Categorial order, accountable actions, the natural intelligibility of the most trivial of

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<sup>7</sup> See also Silverman (1998) for an excellent analysis of Sacks' corpus of work and Hester and Eglin (1992:117, 1997:26) for a discussion of MCA in relation to news texts

social encounters or activities all rely on members' hearing, seeing or understanding situations, descriptions, accounts, instructions and so on as 'right', correct, adequate, appropriate, valid or invalid. Sacks aimed to construct an apparatus for describing how this was so (Sacks 1992a:236). In later lectures categories were described as 'inference rich'. This is not, as Schegloff observes, to be interpreted as seeing social types as storehouses of information. Rather, in keeping with the ethnomethodological project outlined by Garfinkel and as part of the contextualised corpus of data that is ethnomethodology's rubric, such classifications are to be considered spatiotemporally locatable, inferring a wealth of contextually dependent culturally situated information.

### **Membership Categorisation Devices**

These are simply categories linked in practical terms that form classes or category sets, such that any member of any category is linked to a device allowing the rules of application to be used (Sacks 1992a). Essentially Sacks argued that certain categories can be heard as common-sensically going together, the locally occasioned organisation of their occurrence allowing for their practical collection into a device. Similarly what may be a category within a device may also be a device in its own right. There is then a visible pattern of branching and overlapping between categories and their devices which allows a potentially limitless number of variations according to the contextual particulars of their use. Returning to 'The Baby cried...' Sacks observed that our understanding of the categories as being linked in a personal sense was informed by our seeing them as co-members of the device 'Family'. This conceptualisation of category collects was extremely versatile and worked in tandem with what were described as the rules of application:



*"The first term is 'membership categorisation device'. ...And those things are collections of categories for referring to persons, with some rules of application."*

(Sacks 1992a:238)

### **Rules of Application**

The rules of application reflected Sacks' concern with conceptualising recognisability; how members' 'did' social activities and did them recognisably. The first, the 'Economy Rule', refers to the adequacy of single category use for the purposes of intelligible description:

*"It may be observed that if a Member uses a single category from any membership categorisation device then they can be recognised as doing adequate reference to a person. ...It is not necessary that some multiple of categories from categorisation devices be employed for recognition, that a person is being referred to, to be made; a single category will do."*

(Sacks 1992a:246)

Therefore in the case of the children's story single categorisations were referentially adequate for a recognisable account.

The second, the 'Consistency Rule', states that if one category from a given collection is used to categorise one member or members' of a population being described, then that same category or other categories from that same collection may be used to categorise further persons. If the economy rule provided what Sacks described as a 'reference satisfactoriness rule' then this provides a rule of relevant categorial consistency (Sacks 1992a:246).

*“It holds that if you are categorising some population of persons – if a Member is categorising some population of persons – then if they’ve used one category from some collection for the first person they’re going to categorise, they may – it is legitimate, permissible – to categorise the rest of the population by the use of the same or other categories of the same collection.”*

(Sacks 1992a:239)

From the consistency rule Sacks developed the ‘consistency rule corollary’ or ‘hearer’s maxim’; in essence a rule for the hearer. Again this was designed to conceptualise how members remedy the inherent ambiguities of social activities in category terms. It permits the member to hear categories as belonging to the same collection, as with ‘baby’ and ‘mommy’:

*“If there are two categories used, which can be found to be part of the same collection, hear them as part of the same collection – which is the way you hear them.”*

(Sacks 1992a: 239)

The problem remained however of how one hears such categories as ‘baby’ and ‘mommy’ as sharing a relationship (i.e. being related) rather than being two unconnected categorisations. Comparing the device ‘family’ with the more generic device ‘team’ Sacks suggested the notion of ‘duplicative organisation’ (1992a:248) as a members’ resource for resolving problems of populations of persons categorised in terms of a device. This was formulatable into a separate collection of hearer’s maxims but allowed that incumbents of categories observably locatable within the same device (on the same ‘team’) should be heard as “co-incumbents of a case of that device’s unit” (Sacks 1992a:248).

## **Standardised Relational Pairs**

Returning to the duplicative organisation of categories within a 'unit' it is observable that two such categories as 'baby' and 'mommy' can be heard as commonsensically going together. Sacks observed that this was just one of many two-part collections of categories that were routinely and intelligibly paired. Moreover these pairings shared an inferential relationship insofar as if one were mentioned, the other could be inferred or indeed considered notable by its absence. The relationship between these categories was also inferred in terms of rights, expectations or obligations. Thus in the case of the children's story the standardised relational pair this features infers that the 'mommy' should pick up the 'baby' when it cries although as Sacks notes, 'mothers' are free to pick up their children at will.

The pairing of categories was further specified into 'collection R' and 'collection K'. As mentioned above collection 'R' referred to collections of paired categories that were concerned with a set of rights and obligations which related to the activity of giving help. From Sacks work on suicide and how members' came to feel that they had no-one to turn to, he theorised that for the individual, an observable absence or non-incumbency of a second part to the pair might lead to feelings of suicidalness; this he referred to as the 'programmatic relevance' of the collection 'R' (Sacks 1972a:38). The collection 'K' consisted of categories which again were supposed to offer help. In this instance however they were most frequently constituted by observable incumbents of 'expert' categories who might provide help be dint of their specialised knowledge of a subject. The other incumbent of the pair was naturally a 'troubled' category.



## **Category Bound Activities**

This was Sacks' conceptualisation of how certain activities are linked in practical, common-sense terms to certain categories. Again the category and the activity share a mutually elaborative and inferential relationship and Sacks used the term category bound activities (or category predicates) to describe actions that inferred a category.

*"By the term I intend to notice that many activities are taken by Members' to be done by some particular or several particular categories of Members' where the categories are categories from membership categorisation devices."*

(Sacks 1992a:249)

Subsequent writers have since expanded Sacks' work on category predicates and indeed the conceptualisation despite receiving criticism from some quarters has proved not only versatile but a crucial tool in the description of members' methods. This work, in continuation of numerous writers in this area supports the analysis that members' actions are merely one collection of predicates that might be implied from a given membership category.<sup>8</sup>

## **The Stage of Life Device – Positioned Categories**

In observing that the predicate 'cries' could be tied to the category 'baby' and in turn 'picked up' could reasonably be tied to the category 'mother', Sacks remained unsatisfied with this incomplete explanation. He observed that a further tying rule of the predicate to the category of which it was incumbent was required in such

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<sup>8</sup> See Jayyusi (1984), Payne (1976), Sharrock (1974), Watson (1978, 1983).

instances. The notion of the 'stage of life device' or 'positioned categories' allowed that the member by prior orientation to categories and their predicates (and the ages of those members' who were most routinely incumbent of such specificities) could resolve potential ambiguities in members' accounts. This is not to say that the predicate 'cried' is solely the preserve of the category 'baby' but that this category is expectedly tied to this activity by definition of the category being 'positioned' within the 'stage of life' device which runs 'Baby - - Adult' with whatever in-between.

*"We will not be claiming that the procedure is definitive as to exclusion of a candidate-member, but we will claim that it is definitive as to inclusion of a candidate-member."*

(Sacks 1992a:249)

As Sacks noted this forms a powerful apparatus not just for locating category bound activities but also for praising or denigrating a person by referring to them by categories higher or lower than that of which they are incumbent on the 'stage of life' scale.

Finally this lead to the formulation of the 'Viewers Maxim for category bound activities' which constituted another 'relevance rule' (Sacks 1992a:259). Like the 'Hearer's Maxim' this allows that if members' see an activity as being done by a member to which that activity might be bound, then see it that way. In essence Sacks was attempting to describe members' methods for accomplishing the accountable orderliness of members' activities. This led to his second viewers maxim which examined the operation of behaviours in terms of pairs of actions connected by observation of a norm (i.e. the baby cried, the mommy picked it up) where the first

could be said to provide for the second and vice versa, that the norm provides for such categories as have been observed, and that the actions are consistent with the norm.



## **Conclusion**

The focus of MCA is on the use of the above conceptualisations by lay and professional analysts alike to accomplish naturally occurring ordinary activities. Distinct from the passive and inert classifications that are the preserve of content analysts, membership categories represent locally occasioned, routinely invoked and naturally intelligible indexical expressions of social types. Their use is evidence of the locally managed, accomplished and recognisable, in short accountable production of social action. The discussions of the work above serve two purposes. Whilst they are but a very small percentage of the many studies in MCA I have selected these firstly because they demonstrate the significance of MCA to the ethnomethodological programme from which it has become somewhat estranged over the years. Secondly the studies by Jayyusi, Baker and Francis and Hart each have significant bearing on my work, either by providing the methodological and ontological foundations for research of this kind or by demonstrating the validity of the ethnomethodological approach in the study of the 'media'.

**Chapter Four:**  
**Membership Categorisation Analysis**  
**and the News Text**

## **Introduction**

In relation to this work, news texts have previously been considered significant only in so far as they reveal something hitherto unknown about the wider structural aspects of society. In short they were viewed as revealing more about authorship and readership and the dynamics between the two. The traditional conception of the news text as a passive conveyor of information led to their characterisation as a resource rather than a topic for inquiry. However it is my proposal that the device 'parties to reading the news' includes the text itself in a more 'active' role than has previously been considered. Such an activity cannot be conceptualised as passive either on the part of the reader or the news text. It is clearly demonstrable that members' methods for locating intelligibility in the texts they encounter in everyday life are examples of practical action and practical reasoning (see Watson in Silverman 1997:80).

The sociological classification of the news text as passive is now inherently misleading. The very nature of language as indexical is testament to the significant cultural awareness and local order and categorial work undertaken by the social actor. News texts are observably composed of an intricate network of rights, obligations, expectations and responsibilities inferred by categorial incumbencies and informed by contextual configurations. In and of themselves they contain a wealth of data about the society they purport to describe but it is their recognisable reproduction of this society that denounces the myth of their being little more than 'windows' to the real world. Such recognisable descriptions of incidents find their coherence not solely in the configurations of the text itself. Rather, this arrangement of context sensitive,



indexical and reflexively constructed descriptors is made intelligible and indeed story-able by members' prior orientation to category, predicate and context.

Perhaps the clearest example of the active structuring of the news text is evident in the implicative logic demonstrated throughout my data (see Jayyusi 1991). This is illustrated through the significance of the co-selection of mutually inferential categories and descriptors in establishing a specific frame of interpretation. Evidently news texts cannot be considered bland descriptions of world events, the implied but not mentioned aspects to the storied accounts may be characterised as what the text brings to the activity both operationally and inferentially. The very premise of implicative logic is reliant on the structural, contextual and categorial properties of the text inferring tacit yet observably warrantable claims in its coverage of the incident.<sup>9</sup> Organisational properties of the text that infer a specific scheme of interpretation can be found as warrantable using Sacks (1992a) hearers' maxim to apply to *categories in a context*; contextually elaborative categories, predicates and co-selected descriptors. Implicative logic may be respecified as an active property of the news text whereby the presentation of 'social facts' allows members' with appropriate cultural awareness to reach a logical conclusion. The categorial consistency between the methodological and procedural properties of the text and the reader indicate that reading the news is not the sole accomplishment of the social member.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See also Duranti and Godwin (1992) for a detailed discussion of the interactivity of language in relation to context

<sup>10</sup> An excellent discussion of approaching the study of texts as 'active' in reference to social relations is given by Smith 1982.

The operational properties of the text then serve to 'activate' or structure knowledge or information. In this way the reader can identify those aspects of the incident deemed significant. Essentially the report edits world events and lends both a categorial and chronological sense of orderliness to the account. It is my argument that reading is no more of a passive activity than the text is a passive documentary reality. 'Cultural currency' is demonstrably necessary if these reports are to be viewed as accessible to the reader.

Professional sociology might be classified as a practical activity, certainly I have no option but to analyse the world in the same manner as the lay person, we utilise the same language and cultural resources. There is a danger in establishing any significant epistemological distance between the social researcher and the lay member. One engenders the risk that we remove from the social actor the agency of the very practices we claim he or she engages in. The classification of reading as a practical activity goes against many prior studies which classify the social actor as a passive recipient of information. Many studies have turned on the 'hidden meanings' of the text and issues such as stereotyping, bias, value judgements, and ideological transmissions. Returning to Garfinkel's (1967) assertion that the social actor is not a judgmental dope, it is essential that the culturally competent reader is not dismissed as an unthinking receptacle for news events. Rather the potential of the text for conveying information, making judgments, connecting events, implying guilt or innocence, routinising the unexpected and informing our routine practical accomplishments in numerous other fields is activated by the reader in his or her analysis of categories in a context.



This is not to indicate either that readers are free to interpret texts in any conceivable way or that the text itself wholly dictates the frame of relevances. Whilst I am reluctant to characterise the contents of a news report as containing instructions for interpretation, it is nonetheless apparent that specific configurations of descriptors and consistent co-selection of activities, objects and persons does constitute a distinct storied composition, a story which may indicate pre-disposition towards a particular set of relevances. As Hester and Eglin (1999:265) describe:

*"...the killer is not called a terrorist, nor is he compared to other terrorists. A list is provided of previous 'mass murders', but this is quite a different frame of reference. ... Rather there is a preference exhibited in the categories of description employed for viewing him as an instance of social psychological pathology rather than as the 'rational erudite' he sought to be."*

As noted, news texts exhibit preferred frameworks of interpretation, in turn readers bring to the activity a set of known relevances informed by the context and prior knowledge of the document of reporting an airliner crash. This is not to say that readers must agree or in any sense adopt such implied projections of social reality. Nonetheless it is clear that reading the news constitutes a reciprocal 'exchange' of interpretive elements.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold, firstly to consider the work of those whose research provides the foundation upon which my analysis is built, the seminal studies of Garfinkel and naturally the lectures of Sacks and the more recent developments in the field with particular discussion of Hester and Eglin's case study due to its relevance to my work; secondly, this chapter briefly considers two issues often raised whenever ethnomethodology is discussed, namely accusations of



engaging in analysis of 'common sense' observations and the problem of the notion of 'culture'.

## **Garfinkel and the News Text**

The significance of the work of Harold Garfinkel to this project and of course to all that followed his seminal work 'Studies in Ethnomethodology' (1967) cannot be overstated. As the founding father of ethnomethodology he established its primary agenda and the policies for its analysis of the situated grounds of everyday accomplishments. Although the most significant work relating to membership categorisation analysis was initiated by Harvey Sacks, nonetheless it is my firm belief that the procedural and ontological agenda exhibited by this work should be rooted in and consistent with Garfinkel's commitment to the study of the routine grounds of everyday activities and concurrent with his interest in the reflexive character of accountable, situated practices and to treat as problematic the means, methods, practices and processes by which the ordered specificities of the social world are made observable.

Garfinkel's formative work "Studies in Ethnomethodology" (1967) remains the foundation for much of the observable project of ethnomethodological enquiry. In accounting for what Garfinkel describes as 'familiar scenes', this work retains a steadfast devotion to the practical activities, practical circumstances and practical sociological reasoning he advocated as ethnomethodology's topics for empirical study. A significant motivation behind this work was to continue the task of making visible what have previously been conceived of as common place scenes. Essentially the observable intelligibility of the newspaper report can be conceptualised as a response to the context in which it occurs, as a situated accomplishment of members' practical action and practical reasoning, its coherence represents an expression of the

contextual occasions of its use. That news reports constitute recognisable accounts and that they are recognisable reproductions of a 'social incident' is a testament to members' sense making activities and local order work. Reflexively the context that can be seen to inform the interpretation of the report, is itself constituted through this process. The news report as an unproblematic members' phenomenon serves to 'make visible' the common place scenes that constitute the 'world known in common but taken for granted' (Schutz 1932 in Garfinkel 1967:37). This theme will be developed throughout the work according to the principle that the procedural specificities of textual analysis on the part of the lay reader are not restricted to this activity insofar as they are inexorably connected to, in part or in whole, members' sense making processes for a potentially infinite collection of practical activities.

Returning to the above quote from Schutz, the forthcoming analysis of news reports is consistent with an interest to make visible those aspects, methods, techniques and apparatus employed by members, lay and professional, in the production, recognition and reproduction of the naturally organised, reflexively accountable, ongoing specificities of the observable social world. In the first instance the practical activity of reading the news as an accountable action is a situated accomplishment not only as unproblematic to the reader but in finding the text to be applicable, adequate and appropriate to the contextual particulars of its occurrence. The programmatic relevance of the text as a members' phenomenon is constituted through the techniques by which it acquires such methodological status as factual or accurate, or observably, descriptably and recognisably about, relating to, descriptive of or connected to in some temporal, chronological or objectively accountable sense the world we have in common.



In the second instance it is apparent that both what is reported by the news and the members' methods used to interpret such information cannot be confined to this activity. Accounts of social incidents are reflexively constitutive of the structures, categories, activities, relationships of rights, obligations and procedure they describe. News reports as social phenomena can be analysed as part of the wider process of making the common place scenes encountered everyday, without respite and perhaps lacking any direct connection to what may be reported by the journalist, visible, accountable and unproblematic. This work is concurrent with Garfinkel's preference to 'start with familiar scenes and ask what can be done to make trouble' (Garfinkel 1967:37).

Throughout this work reference will be made to indexical expressions and their significance to members' local order work. Situated accomplishments were dependent on members' proper orientation to the structures of observable orderliness in which they operated. It is naturally difficult to understand a conversation between parties without some prior knowledge of the biography of the interactants or the context in which the talk occurs and so on. This concept is equally applicable to news reports although with some caveats. When engaging in conversation members do not explain or quantify each statement, shared knowledge is assumed. This too is the case with news reports although by necessity this may operate on a far more general level due to the lack of recipient design, at least in any category specific sense. It is the 'seen but unnoticed' features of news reports that constitutes their status as analytically significant in their own right. Like conversations they may be characterised as occurring in a context. This work intends to engage in the

application of Garfinkel's agenda for the study of members' practical activities in a context which has thus far been largely neglected. Primarily the topics of indexicality and reflexivity have been addressed through the context of discourse analysis and activities whereby two or more social actors are present. The activity of reading the news, although lacking a co-interactant in the traditional sense, is no less significant due to its apparent lack of sequential considerations. It is such small scale processes of practical action and reasoning that lends coherence to the wider structures of social life,

It will be a recurrent argument throughout this work that the members' methods used in making sense of the news are applicably transferable to wider practices of social interaction, engagement, judgements and decisions. In short, the mechanisms of the methods and apparatus utilised by members to render such phenomenon as news reports unproblematic, intelligible and even adequate or factual are comparable not only to the processes used in their production but to any and every instance of members' work. Members' methods for 'reading the news' cannot be nor should it be conceptualised as confined to this instance although by necessity they are spatiotemporally located. These activities, all activities, are intrinsically connected to and reflexively constitutive of the practical reasoning and practical actions of all routine social accomplishments. News reports, both their observable literal content and the methods used to understand them, must be respecified as reflexive conceptualisations of the 'structures' of wider society that the social actor routinely attends to. This is a methodological, even an ontological necessity for both the professional researcher and the lay member. Consider for example the vast amount of media reportage concerning crime; consider then the import of this reportage on



'structural' elements such as the criminal justice system, such as perceptions of crime, such as criminal statistics, such as moral judgements on persons or actions. Certainly there is significant relationship between the methods used to interpret the accountable reproduction of such phenomena in the news and their existence as 'social facts' in the structural sense.

I return finally to Garfinkel's definition of the Ethnomethodological agenda, which encapsulates the abiding analytical commitment of this work:

*"For Ethnomethodology the objective reality of social facts, in that, and just how, it is every society's locally, endogenously produced, naturally organised, reflexively accountable, ongoing, practical achievement, being everywhere, always, only, exactly and entirely, members' work, with no time out, and with no possibility of evasion, hiding out, passing, postponement, or buy-outs, is thereby sociology's fundamental phenomenon."*

(Garfinkel in Button 1991:11)

I return now to some initial considerations as to the wider significance of the individual text and an application of Garfinkel's (1967) 'documentary method of interpretation'. My point is that documents are not understood in and of themselves. Although as I have demonstrated the constitutive elements of the news text are categorially ordered and reflexively constituted their observable consistency and coherence is a testament to members' local order work, to the practical reasoning of the social actor in making sense of an indexical construction. Whilst the very specificities of the text are of undoubted importance, I stressed the significance of members' knowledge of the 'grammar of airliner crash reporting' or the 'document'



of this type of incident. In short, members utilise prior orientation to the documents of social activities as part of their interpretive procedures. The documentary method as Garfinkel observed is crucial to professional and lay sociology although both may employ it to differing ends. Garfinkel referred to it as treating the actual appearance of something as the document of it, as standing on behalf of it; my argument rests that prior knowledge of such documents or patterns for everyday instances of members' practical action and practical reasoning lend coherence to the specificities of these experiences. This, as Garfinkel states, allows people to make sense of everyday activities, compensating for the indexicality of language.

News texts such as those included in my data can be understood on two levels. In the first instance the intelligibility of the report derived from the particulars of the report itself. In the second instance intelligibility conceived of before the report was read, the notion of the awareness of contextually bound categorial relevances. Actors may use past resources to interpret current events, to project a scheme of interpretation onto a practical activity. Naturally this scheme is informed by the specific particulars of the text itself, the 'actual' reflexively constitutes, and is constituted by the 'document' of any given phenomena. It is for this reason that news texts cannot be analysed as stand-alone pieces. In and of themselves a reality is not constructed as a real world objective account. Whilst news texts could loosely be said to be for the consumption of anyone clearly this is not the case, cultural awareness 'buys' you access to the meanings, identities and descriptors contained on the page. Intelligibility, narrative coherence, 'sense' as an observable accomplishment, can be located as both a feature and an outcome of the news text. Such documents, all documents perhaps, refer to a set of relational configurations, separate realities,

domains of understanding and significantly other documents. It is my proposal that such texts make sense not simply because of the resources contained within them, but because of their relationships to other observably similar texts and perhaps more importantly observably similar structures of categorial orderliness. The news text as an account of a 'real world' incident such as an airliner crashing can be said to be organised around 'social facts'. These facts are constructed and utilised through socially organised methods of factual production. This is not to say that they represent firm or incontrovertible evidence about the incident they purport to describe.

The nature of news texts as recognisable reproductions of a 'real world' incident is reliant on two crucial factors additional to the implicit resources contained in the structure of the text itself. The first is that they may be observed as reflecting structural and categorial properties of wider society. This is not to say the media is little more than a mirror for the particulars of our society. Rather, the metaphor of a prism was referred to earlier in this work whereby the accounts in a news text are implicitly connected to the 'real world' but that this is a 'qualified' account. The second factor is that such texts reflect and refer to, through processes of implicative logic, practical determination and reflexive inference other similar documents of inter-subjective realities. News reports necessarily exercise a certain degree of economisation in their reporting, not everything is documented for various reasons such as word limits or simply maintaining the interest of the reader. For the reader this is a fundamental resource, using implicative logic to find intelligibility. In many cases references to seemingly unconnected or neutral factors can be seen as contextually relevant and practically applicable because *they wouldn't be there if they*

*weren't important.* By reporting what is seen as important, they constitute what is important for the social actor. They can be interpreted as existing both within a wider domain of connected documents and of being inter-subjective accounts of other, equivalent and observably consistent documentary evidence. My data therefore exists under the rubric of 'airliner crash reporting,' a scheme of interpretation that lends coherence to the account. Similarly its construction is observably dependent on the accounts of others, the eyewitness, the professional commentator, and the police. These accounts stand as the document of actual events unless otherwise challenged.



## Harvey Sacks – Beyond the foundations of MCA

I will be looking in particular at several aspects of Sacks' work which I hope to use as starting points for analysis. In many respects I shall employ the conceptual frameworks Sacks' outlines for a basic analysis and in others I will attempt to expand upon his lectures and adapt his ideas. I will be looking at the lectures relating to *The baby cried, the Mommy picked it up* (1992a:135; 236; 243; 252; 259) which can be taken as the foundation for Sacks' ideas on membership categories and category bound activities. His concern with categorial predicates and the relationship of inferential and reflexive elaboration that exists between an activity and the categorial incumbent of its use is discussed in the lectures *Characters appear on cue; Good Grounds for an action* (1992a:182) and *An explanation is the explanation.* (1992a:410) His lecture entitled *The MIR Membership Categorisation Device* (1992A:40) discusses the significance of categories to the routine grounds of everyday activities. In *The Integrative Function of Public Tragedy* (1992b:188) Sacks considers how emotions are made publicly available and publicly explainable. The lecture *Storyteller as Witness* (1992b:242) discusses the warrantability of claims, the ownership of a story if you witness an event. Essentially news reports can be conceived of as a set of claims, by the journalist, by the eyewitness, by the professional commentator. The lecture on disaster talk is observably applicable to this work, particularly the methods employed by members to find what he describes as 'something for us', finding the stories of tragedy and horror in a news report. Finally, although not exhaustively as his corpus of work is relevant almost in its entirety, *Laughing Together; expressions of Sorrow and Joy* (1992b:570) considers

the positioned relevance of aspects of discourse and relates in this instance to locational formulations of the structure of the airliner crash report.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of my thesis, the foundation of the work, will be a consideration of the characters whose activities, futures, fates, quotes, speculations, arguments and theories constitute the report. In essence each report is constructed around the presence or absence of particular membership categories. Although I will be analysing the presence of particular characters from a number of perspectives, one of the most important aspects of the study will be an examination of what Sacks described as category bound activities. This was first explored in the lecture 'The baby cried, the mommy picked it up', an extract from a book of children's stories. Sacks used this data to demonstrate the importance of the rules of application and category bound activities in producing recognisable accounts, and indeed recognisably accountable actions. Significantly the inferences members might employ in the course of their practical reasoning are examined in the lecture 'Character appears on cue'. Sacks first relates this to a conversation between some men, one of whom discusses drag racing and the appearance of a cop who will arrest one of the racers dependent on how they are dressed. Sacks aimed to demonstrate one key point from the statement:

"Ninety nine percent of the time a guy could pull up to me in the same car, same color, same year the whole bit, roll up his pipes and he's in a grubby T-shirt, and the guy'll pick the guy up in the grubby T-shirt before I – he'll pick me up"

(Sacks 1992a 182)

As Sacks notes this is an extraordinarily complex statement containing a number of techniques and methods used by the speaker to keep his turn, prevent interruption and make the statement intelligible despite its obvious grammatical problems. Of most interest is the fact that the speaker does not explicitly state that the 'guy' he mentions who does the picking up is not the first guy already mentioned but in fact a police officer. There is no statement to this fact or formulation as to why the category of 'policeman' appears. The presence of such a membership category is not problematic to the reader; implicative logic dictates that members are able to find coherence in this utterance by dint of prior orientation to categories and their tied activities.

Sacks argued that the natural and observable orderliness of this statement is achieved according to the 'character appears on cue' rule and the fact that some things are observable as 'good grounds for an action'. So in this statement, in the context of two drivers drag racing which is obviously an illegal activity, a cop appears and expectedly so. There is a cue, an illegal activity, and the cop appears, we expect him to, since enforcing the law is an activity bound to that category, and in fact we may even be surprised if he did not. As Sacks states he has proper grounds for being a present membership category and proper grounds for picking the guy up. There is no need to formulate an explicit explanation for the presence, they have a cue, grounds for an action and this is followed.

The concept of characters appearing on cue is based upon what we, as members are oriented to in term of category bound activities and predicates. We are aware of the characteristics of classes of social actors; therefore to 'pick a guy up' is



predicated of the category 'cop'. Similarly to pick a baby up is predicated of the category 'mommy' and Sacks was working toward building an apparatus for this process of practical reasoning by formulating 'tying rules'. Similarly the category of 'criminal' (drag racer) forms a standardised relational pair with the category 'cop', one infers the other. We are conscious of the fact that certain actors are deputed to do a certain job, in certain contexts and that not to do so would be noticeably deficient.

The introduction of such characters as feature in this work is explainable in that these categories are 'on call' should such an incident as an airliner crash occur. It would thus be a noticeable absence if they did not appear. Although the example of *The baby cried...* is relatively simplistic it has applications on a wider scale as will be explored by this work. On an institutional level it is provided for that certain characters will act on a single cue in a given context. It allows the media commentaries to continue with the story without formulating their reason for being here; this has been filled in by the reader. That the same procedures and methodologies are used in the production as in the recognition of such accounts facilitates both 'doing reporting the news' and 'doing reading the news'. Sacks describes this as the operation of what might be conceived of as 'culture'. Sacks took this argument slightly further in the lecture *Character appears on cue; Good grounds for an action; An explanation is the explanation* (Sacks 1992a:410). He describes a variant of the 'character appears on cue' rule and relates this to 'The baby cried, the mommy picked it up'. In this case there is a considerable argument that although one need not formulate where the mother was or why she does what she does, there are plenty of other circumstances under which she might pick up the child. In essence the 'Mommy' needs no cue, this is contrasted to the reports on airliner crashes. Certain

characters throughout news reports are not free to turn up at any incident nor are they free to not turn up at a given incident. Therefore Sacks argued that some categories are institutionally bound to appear on cue and most importantly that they appear only on cue. Their activities have no place without a cue unlike the 'Mommy'. This is extremely important as it dictates that the members' description of the category needs to be adequate, or perhaps our knowledge of categories must be adequate, to report the appearance of the character and his or her activity without needing to account for it. This is certainly true to varying extents. Essentially what we are dealing with are multiple variations of the readers' maxim which I will cover in more detail in my work. Sack's ideas on 'character appears on cue' can be adapted and expanded in more ways than time and space permits here. I intend to apply Sacks' work to the characters in the reports and importantly how the themes are constructed around certain characters appearing on cue. I believe it is possible to adapt this idea to include actions and activities that appear on cue, contravention of which forms the foundation for the reporting of airliner crashes.

The second aspect of Sacks' work is the MIR Categorisation Device or Membership Inference-Rich Representative. (Sacks 1992: 40) Sacks originally intended this concept to be applied to conversation analysis as he argued that certain classes of category sets are 'inference rich'. At the start of many 'first' conversations people would ask those they had just met "What do you do?" Sacks argues that through this question they were asking 'which set of categories do you belong to?' Each category infers culturally located information about that person; such terms are therefore 'inference rich'. Members operate in terms of their knowledge of the categories of everyone else, thus the task to locate a person as being part of a



particular set of category classes is vital for interaction. This provides for the occurrence of the 'Which set?' question at the start of conversations. Once this has been determined, that the person is for example a politician, this then infers membership to a number of other categories thus locating this person in terms of the groups or organisations they might reasonably be a part of, rightly or wrongly. As mentioned they occur in the beginning stages of conversation, however it is conceivable that this concept be applied to newspaper reports. It relates to the use of all descriptors which serve to substitute for a name or personal identity. The use of nationality descriptors in particular may be used to construct what Jayyusi (1991) described as the story within a story. Like the 'economy rule' such inference rich descriptors provide a way for members to locate the characters in the reports in terms of their categorial significance to the context. As Sacks notes it is the core machinery for members' categorisation work, such an large amount of information is organised via this mechanism it seems that it can be applied to this situation.

The MIR device operates by substituting a name for a category. An interesting point Sacks raised is that it works to set up a class of social control devices. It operates according to the notion that social actors are constantly involved in monitoring events, what they are accountable for, what has happened and what other categories might be doing. In reading newspaper reports this is essentially what we are doing, monitoring other events and locating their relevance according to the categories involved. I believe this may be a crucial avenue for investigation. Essentially the embedded commentaries of 'tragedy' and 'horror' that accompany such incidents as airliner crashes are intrinsically dependent on the wealth of 'common sense' knowledge inferred by members' prior orientation to categories and



their bounded activities. Sacks related this idea to the assassination of John F Kennedy as he described people after the event seeing the news, reading the papers, listening to the radio and monitoring the categories mentioned (e.g. communist, president, gunman, white male,). His argument states that members of society were thinking according to membership categories and the information they implied. The use of the MIR device is further indicative of such reports being reclassified as members' phenomenon, as situated accomplishments of practical action and practical reasoning.

Thus I am constantly engaged in monitoring events in order to formulate their relevance to myself, the MIR device provides the mechanism to do this. Sacks argues that this monitoring allows people to 'do trouble'. Sacks used the example of Jewish names being used to infer the accusation of 'economic criminal' upon persons by dint of the inference rich character of all categories.

The third lecture I will briefly look at is 'Storyteller as Witness; Entitlement to experience'. Sacks discusses the careful regulation of story telling entitlements and what experiences or emotions one might draw from being an incumbent of the category 'witness'. The categories of eyewitness and professional commentator as prominent categories in my data are perceived to have specialised access to the particulars of the incident, just as importantly their claims are seen as adequate, appropriate and warrantable. How is this so, what apparatus is available to members to deconstruct the warrantability of a claim? The notion of a categorially imbued 'entitlement to experience' may emerge as a crucial resource for members to find that third person accounts as might feature throughout a news article, can achieve some

methodological status as accurate, factual or demonstrably so using such apparatus as the course of action characterisation described by Sacks.

The lecture on 'Disaster Talk' deals primarily with conversation analysis nonetheless there are two key principles with which I am concerned. Firstly Sacks examines members' formulations of disaster talk as adhering to the notion of recipient design, he describes the recipients of disaster talk as seeking to find 'something for us', a configuration of personal relevances that may allow us to talk about a disaster even if we were not directly involved. Secondly the notion of recipient design is often seen as redundant in news reporting as they are designed for mass consumption. Nonetheless such descriptors as refer to national identity allow the reader to find personal relevance through categorial loss. This concept of locating recipient design in the categorial specificities of the news text is significant in its application to 'finding' the storied qualities of an article. Sacks also noted that discussions of disasters occurred most frequently at the beginning of a conversation. This concern with trying to 'distributionalise' (Sacks 1992b:570) aspects of ordinary conversation is further evidenced in the final lecture *Laughing together; expressions of sorrow and joy*. Examples of situated orderliness are observable as much in conversations as they are in the news text. Observable narrative coherence is as much as an analysable feature of the structure of the text as are the categorial and contextual particulars.

## **Problems of Common Sense Analysis**

The subject of membership categorisation analysis has provoked spirited debate with regard to both its status within Sacks' (1992a; 1992b) corpus of work and within Ethnomethodology and Sociology as whole. Schegloff's (In Sacks 1992a) Introduction to 'Lectures on Conversation' highlights the concerns of many when he describes category bound activities as potentially promiscuous in their use, where examples such as 'the baby cried, the mommy picked it up' constitute not a finding but the description of commonsense knowledge, the warrantability for which rests solely with the assertion of the investigator. Moreover he states that the 'incipient' use of the premise of category bound activities may result in such unwarranted claims becoming the focus for the account rather than leading to a more significant 'analytic payoff' above and beyond that which motivated the introduction of the category account claim in the first instance. The main criticism levelled by Schegloff appears to be that when removed from sequential considerations MCA becomes little more than the unwarranted explication of commonsense observations. He goes so far as to state that Sacks went on to distance himself from this area of work as a result of these perceived problems.

Whilst I have no wish to chart the direction of Sacks' work in regards to membership categorisation analysis and category bound activities, I clearly have a vested interest in addressing Schegloff's concerns. This I hope to do by defending the validity of the analysis of media texts using a primarily MCA based conceptual and procedural framework; the validity of membership categorisation analysis when removed from a sequential and especially discursive context. The tradition has been to



examine categories' according to the production of sequential items in discourse, how such incumbencies might be established through observably positioned utterances. Studies have focussed on conversation analysis with an awareness of categorial orientations; this is not to say that such considerations were not fully explicated however MCA was largely viewed as complementing such work. The work of Heritage and Drew (1992) Watson (1983), Atkinson (1980), Baker (in Hester and Eglin 1997) and numerous others have all found the conceptual framework of Sacks' category observations to be analytically significant in this respect. However it appears to be Schegloff's assertion that without these sequential considerations, this 'analytic payoff', it is too easy to revert to common sense observations regarding the categorial incumbencies of the social world as we see it. In some respects I find this judgement wholly justified. It is simple to read for example a headline, to attribute our understanding of it to category bound activities and go no further. Significantly one has nothing greater than the authority of the researcher upon which to base such a conclusion, and what does this tell us? That headlines rely on commonsense knowledge of what people do and how they do them? If this is all that the researcher can draw from the data then Schegloff's fears are confirmed, this contains no 'analytic payoff', no insightful explication of members' methods, nothing that the lay member could not have told you.

However my arguments rest upon the assertion that the absence of interactional qualities does not render social phenomena analytically redundant. Explications of category bound activities alone are not sufficient, but deconstructing the fabric of a text, the contextual, categorial and methodological considerations that

constitute the organised character of such common sense accomplishments, provides a distinct, rewarding and revealing 'payoff to analysis.'

One might reasonably argue thus that social order, the accomplished orderliness of the social environment, is achieved of and through our interactive experiences with those around us. Certainly this is not being denied, however this does not mean that our experiences without a co-interactant are any less significant. Sociologists have been arguing the importance of the 'mass media' for decades so why now, when we examine members' methods for making life understandable, and descriptably understandable, do we discount it as being little more than an unwarrantable explication of common sense 'facts'? Schegloff's concerns are undoubtedly a risk but not a foregone conclusion. It would be naïve of the social examiner to state which meanings members will find from any given aspect of media reportage but this inherent problem is applicable to all areas of media studies from MCA to qualitative content analysis to ethnographic studies of audience response. We can only uncover those meanings which might intelligibly be derived and are accomplishable through the categorial particulars and contextual structures of the data. The content of membership categories is clearly of considerable importance, however since one cannot say with any authority what this may be for the member, the procedures by which they are invoked and the methods by which they are interpreted require examination.

At the hub of this argument is the debate regarding whether media texts can be considered analytically significant phenomena in their own right and subsequently why the machinery of membership categories, predicates and devices might offer

appropriate apparatus for their study. What must first be established is the nature of ethnomethodology's interest in the media text, to this end I believe it is towards the resolution of and consistent with Schegloff's description of Sacks' problem; "to build 'an apparatus' that would provide for such hearings or understandings, and would serve both as a constraint on them and as a research project to which they could lead." (Schegloff in Sacks 1992a: xxi). The intention is neither to reveal the hidden codes of ideological or political polemic nor to pass judgement on what may or may not be perceived as media bias. It is neither to break down the barriers of journalistic licence nor to examine the decision processes of newspaper editors in their selection of stories. My intention is not to pass judgement on what is right or wrong or to establish a critical standpoint against the media as a socially distinct infrastructure. Again though this raises numerous procedural questions, namely is the 'ethnomethodological indifference' (Garfinkel and Sacks 1970: 345) either practically accomplishable or methodologically desirable?

It may be the case that the structures and meanings behind a social phenomenon such as the news media may best be elucidated by adopting a critical approach. If so, however, this is not staying true to ethnomethodology's policy of studying members' methods of practical action and reasoning without judgement as to their validity or adequacy. I would argue that true and accurate explication of members' methods need not rely on one adopting a specific standpoint; these boundaries of assessment put the investigator at risk of finding what he or she is looking for. Ideally the reproduction of members' methods should involve just that, if from such data the recipient of the research can derive a particular standpoint which they feel is inherent to the reportage studied then so be it. Though it is undoubtedly



the case that media texts and indeed media output of all kinds may contain bias political, social economic or historical preferences, these will be reflected in the specificities of the data itself. Their explication may be an interpretation, a logical one even, but nonetheless the ethnomethodological analysis remains not a judgement passed but an interpretation deconstructed.

A conceptualisation which I will be advocating throughout this work is that of the media text as 'active'. Prior criticism of MCA has turned on the absence of interactional characteristics when 'reading the news'. By definition this is a solitary action conceived of by some as the passive consumption of data from a passive source. However recent writers have disputed this approach and argued that the media text is no more passive than the reader, viewer or listener. This argument relies on two key points. Firstly that the media text is a gestalt phenomenon and that it relies on 'cultural currency' if the reader is to find relevance in the specifications of identity and meaning. Secondly that the member is not simply a 'viewer' but a 'properly orientated audience member', by definition the media text recognises this and is organised accordingly (Francis and Hart in Hester and Eglin 1997: 149).

The media text as an active 'participant' in the conveyance of news is primarily dependent on the assumption that although news is not specifically recipient designed nonetheless the availability of the news report to the reader and indeed to the journalist who must reproduce the 'news' in a recognisable format, depends on a certain degree of cultural awareness. Regarding what Hester and Eglin (1997) describe as 'culture-in-action' the media text demonstrates the significance of categories in a context. The work of Jayyusi (1991), Hester and Eglin (1997), Cuff

(1994) and Francis and Hart (1997) illustrate the implicative significance of category contextualisations. The various configurations of category, predicate and context serve to respecify the media text as greater than the sum of its parts; unpacked and laid bare the specifics reveal little. However, when viewed as a whole the accomplished orderliness is demonstrative of an active co-interactant in the activity of reading the news. Classifying the news article itself within the device 'parties to reading the news' is not unjustified.

I refer now to ethnomethodology's interest what Zimmerman and Pollner term the 'occasioned corpus':

*"By use of the term occasioned corpus, we wish to emphasise that the features of socially organised activities are particular contingent accomplishments of the production and recognition work of parties to the activity."*

(Zimmerman and Pollner 1971:94 in Hester and Eglin 1997:27)

Continuing from my previous assertion of the media text as a co-interactant the features of a socially organised activity (i.e. reading the news) are the accomplishments of the parties to the setting. Whilst one might argue that the production aspect of the activity is in part temporally removed from the occasion (the news being produced by the journalist prior to the actual reading) nonetheless the intelligibility of the 'news' is describable and recognisably describable as an accomplishment not simply of the reader but of the text also.

One must not neglect to mention, obvious thought it may seem but overlooked by many, the active nature of the news recipient. Just as the media is not simply a

purveyor of factual information the viewer, listener or reader is not a passive 'news dope'. As members we are all culturally aware to varying degrees, just as the news is not reported in a social vacuum neither can we read it in one. The same categorisations and relevant specifications of identity and meaning invoked by the journalist are employed when we examine the reproduced events of the previous day in our newspaper. The concept of the orientated audience members' in situ category work finding the accomplished orderliness of an airliner crash report suggests that sequential considerations are not required for investigative validity in social analysis. It becomes not simply a case of identifying the categories, predicates and devices enmeshed within the news story, but of respecifying the natural intelligibility of the report as more than its categorial particulars; as a recognisably reproduced collection of preconfigured boundaries of relevance which are not just perfectly adequate but observably appropriate and exhibiting a narrative coherence that belies its literal composition.

A term often used by sociologists and ethnomethodologists' in particular is 'common sense'. Schegloff himself states that the "observation that 'crying is bound to baby' is (like the initial observations in the lecture) not a finding; it is merely the claimed explication of a bit of common sense knowledge." (Schegloff In Sacks 1992a: xlii). The problem seems to be that common sense can be translated as analytically invalid not on behalf of Schegloff but on behalf of many sociologists who chose to argue that ethnomethodology is concerned with the obvious. However this ignores the point that what seems to be 'common-sense' or 'obvious' is itself a product of members' cultural, socialised competence:



*“Thus, general exhortation to view what seemed to be obvious, mundane and commonplace as ‘anthropologically strange’ was to be a constant reminder to analysts that obviousness was itself an orderly and methodic product of members’ interpretive competences.”*

(Atkinson and Drew 1979:22)

Ethnomethodology, by its very nature studies the routine methods of everyday activities, thus by necessity the observations it offers must be grounded in the same conceptual specificities used by the members themselves. This concept is illustrated by Hester and Eglin’s (in Jalbert 1999) work on the Montreal Massacre. They describe in their conclusion the observation that the media reportage following the event is conceived of the same categorial collections used by Marc Lepine as his motivation for the action he took. To take a step back, the same categorial specificities are used not only by Lepine, reproduced by the media but employed by the researcher to respecify the functions of crime and deviance and to explicate the natural intelligibility of such reports. The very adequacy of categorial terms in the reproduction of the event by the media lends coherence to the work of the analyst. Specifically then the action can be collected as a members’ phenomenon. It is observably so that professional researchers and lay members’ accomplish meaning in their social worlds using the same resources and methods; it is the previously ignored and overlooked explication of such methods which lends validity to this approach and credence to the claim that media texts are analytically significant phenomenon. Common sense need not mean obvious, or invalid; in fact what is termed common sense is often mistakenly applied to that which has been adjudged to have no wider value, as if the agency of person’s acts are of no significance to the structures in which they occur. As Garfinkel comments:

*"I have been arguing that a concern for the nature, production and recognition of reasonable, realistic, and analysable actions is not the monopoly of philosophers and professional sociologists. Members of the society are concerned as a matter of course and necessarily with these matters both as features and for the socially managed production of their everyday affairs. The study of common sense knowledge and common sense activities consists of treating as problematic phenomena the actual methods whereby members of a society, doing sociology, lay or professional, make the structures of everyday activities observable."*

(Garfinkel, 1967: 75)

This extract raises two significant points of considerable relevance to my work. Firstly the validity of examining seemingly self-explicating activities as reading the news as 'problematic phenomena'; studying society from within dictates that methods of interpretation are valid not only as part of members' local order work but as the apparatus by which this accomplished order is deconstructed and made accountable. Secondly Garfinkel notes that the structures of everyday activities are part of a socially managed production; from this point I would argue that not only is finding natural intelligibility in a news report a socially managed production, but that such structures as are deemed problematic are reproduced in their categorial and contextual particulars in all social texts. The social world, its structures and meanings are naturally drawn upon by the media, whether they represent them correctly or adequately is not for the researcher to say. Nonetheless that such institutions as the 'Criminal Justice System' are recognisably represented and available to members is extremely important. Similarly the activity of 'receiving' the news becomes part of what Schutz described as the "world known in common but taken for granted" (Schutz 1932 in Garfinkel 1967: 37), such an immense body of knowledge and understanding cannot simply be disregarded as too obvious to study. It is the

reflection and reproduction of wider social structures in the texts we encounter in everyday life that warrants examination.

Returning to Schegloff's initial concerns I can appreciate that under the auspices of Ethnomethodological inquiry the 'promiscuous' use of category bound activities is a potential risk. However I would not damn these modes of investigation to this fate with such certainty. Such procedural and methodological frameworks and considerations as offered by Ethnomethodology and MCA can be applied with equal vigour and to similarly rewarding and revealing ends to the area of media studies as it can to the positioned utterances of categories in talk.

Two issues raised by Schegloff's comments are of particular interest to this researcher and their concern resides in providing a usable procedure for undertaking empirical research which can adequately address the constraint against 'using members' methods as an unexplicated resource analysis. (Atkinson and Drew 1979: 27) Firstly, the problem that the researcher must inevitably use to describe members' methods those very same methods he aims to explicate (See also Garfinkel 1967). Secondly upon what grounds does the analyst claim that his methods for producing and recognising accountable actions are consistent with those used by other members?

The first problem is perhaps best addressed by Turner (1971 in Atkinson and Drew 1979:27) and although he is writing in reference to conversation analysis its application in this instance is equally valid. His proposed solution rests on the inevitability of the social researcher employing his or her members' knowledge in order to recognise and produce accounts of examples of social activity. As Sacks



(1992a) noted examples of culture may be characterised by the same methods of production as in recognition thus it is not only unavoidable but ontologically undesirable that the researcher would attempt to theorise, categorise, describe, account for or pass judgement upon any instances of social action using procedures separate from, uninfluenced by and operating in independence of the very knowledge that affords the researcher his or her status as a socially and culturally competent member. The second point relies on the significance of the researchers' socialised knowledge as an 'indispensable aid' to the processes of analysis. However to avoid the pitfalls of traditional sociology Turner stresses the importance of utilising this socialised competence whilst ensuring that such processes are treated as problematic and topics for investigation. In essence a commitment to explicating members' methods, using those very same methods, is not to be considered as detrimental to the work of ethnomethodology. Rather, so long as such methods are posed as problematic and it is recognised that there will be no perfect agreement on the recognisability of accountable actions then ethnomethodology can proceed unhindered by the criticisms it claims plague traditional sociology.

The second point again refers to Schegloff's prior criticism that explications of common sense knowledge are frequently asserted on behalf of the investigator with no demonstrable test as to whether this interpretation can be considered generic. Certainly a common criticism of Ethnomethodology and certainly MCA when removed from discursive considerations, is why we should consider the interpretations and descriptions of methods explicated by the researcher to be correct? The defence from accusations of this kind is best summarised by Jalbert:

*"I am not trying to uncover which 'meanings' particular members actually discern, but to elucidate such meanings as could intelligibly be achieved. These meanings can logically be argued to inhere in actual texts in virtue of their organisation etc.; the issue is what is available to be grasped from them."*

(Jalbert 1999:32):

This raises two points. Firstly that the task of the ethnomethodologist is not to explicate the 'right' interpretation and this is in keeping with the policy of abstaining from judgements as to the adequacy of members' methods. Secondly that explicating such methods of interpretation as might be possible is only half the task. As Jalbert states and Schegloff warns against failing to do, one must go further and make something of the findings. To ascertain what might be 'available to be grasped from them' is consistent with what Sacks described as the 'structural properties' of common knowledge (1992a :23). By this he referred to the locational formulations of examples of common knowledge and also to the organisation of this knowledge as a members' resource. Thus the task of the professional investigator becomes one of explication and of ordering. Not of stating without flexibility the interpretations members arrive at but of locating rules, resources, procedures and classes of actions which might be oriented to in the activity of producing a recognisable orderliness in any given setting. Traditional sociology suffers from attempting to provide a definitive reading of a given situation inevitably characterising itself as a decontextualised account. In contrast the ethnomethodological project dictates that the investigator must pursue the orderliness of social settings and the rules by which members' prior orientation to might render said instances orderly and recognisable; in short, accountable.

## **Ethnomethodology and 'Culture'**

Much is made within sociology of the notion of 'culture', what form it may take and what significance expressions of culture might have and for social investigators it has become an elusive concept (see Clifford 1988). Hester and Eglin (1997) describe members' understanding of many of the categorially organised aspects of social life as 'culture-in-action'. To adapt this idea briefly in relation to the wider import of the analysis of news texts, given that reading is said to demonstrate the cultural competence of a social member, is it not reasonable then to classify examples of texts such as news reports not as cultural documents, but as documents of culture? By this I refer not to 'document' in the traditional sense whereby human culture is 'documented' or recorded in the written word. Rather that news texts, in their demonstrably indexical construction, are documents of the wider significance of the recognisable reproducibility of events dependent on members' prior knowledge of the broader structures of social existence (in the mundane sense, see Pollner 1989) Sacks (1992a) described the understanding of "The baby cried..." as the operation of culture, and the analysis of membership categories and their devices as "an analysis of some culture" and in this respect the same can be said of understanding news reports.

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Members find news texts as recognisably 'correct' (where correct is intelligible not necessarily factually accurate) descriptions of an incident. Sacks distinguished between 'potentially correct descriptions' and 'actually correct descriptions' (Sacks 1992a: 254) and news articles have the unusual distinction of

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<sup>11</sup> Linguistic and Conversation Analytic contributions to 'culture' are also quite prominent. See Lee (1991); Moerman (1988)



occupying both classifications. Although as members we might be aware that the news sometimes gets things wrong (intentionally or otherwise) nonetheless one might argue that the usability of the text as a recognisable description serves to warrant its correctness, again at least in categorial if not factual terms. So a correct description is a recognisable one, this in turn is evidenced by the possible explication of observable methods for making this so. Sacks mentioned the problems of how one might formulate an accurate account of a social activity to which, as an analyst, you were party. The problem lies not in the reproducibility of that event in factual terms, but in recognisable terms. Therefore that news texts are documents of culture is evidenced in members' methods for recognising descriptions, and recognising them as adequate, even appropriate. That members can see them as about something or about a collection of events and people is highly significant. However not only are the same procedures used for producing as for detecting recognisable actions as Sacks (1992a:226) states, but these formulations of accounts are in turn constitutive of the context in which they occur.

Discussion of 'culture' must not be misconstrued as methodological or procedural judgements as to the composition of news reports. Whilst I have offered consideration as to the activity of producing a recognisable description as per Sacks discussions, naturally I am not in a position to speculate as to the methods of practical reasoning employed by the journalist in his or her authorship of the news; this is a topic for another study. Rather my interest in the describability of the social world and its constituent phenomena lies with the theorem that the activities of producing a recognisable description are procedurally identical to those used for recognising such descriptions. This is significant on three levels; firstly that by identifying the methods

used to reproduce accounts, explication of methods used to interpret such accounts is made simpler. Secondly, reflexive identification of such methods as are in evidence throughout this work may serve to elucidate the practical and routine methods employed in their engagement through such phenomena as the news text. Finally to step beyond the initial parties to reading a news report, such methods have fundamental significance for the social actor as he or she engages in the mundane instances of social interaction constrained by contextual and structural awareness of his mundane perceptions of macro phenomenon (See Pollner 1989).

*"The central recommendation is that activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organised everyday affairs are identical with members' procedures for making those settings 'accountable'. ...When I speak of accountable my interests are directed to such matters as the following. I mean observable, and reportable i.e. available to members as situated practices of looking-and-telling."*

(Garfinkel 1967:1)

The production and subsequent recognition of news reports for what they accountably are, is a further example of members' practical action and reasoning thus firmly within the rubric of Ethnomethodological inquiry. Furthermore this questions the validity of accusations that membership categorisation analysis, and in particular category bound activities, are redundant when examples of their occurrence are removed from sequential considerations. The accountability of settings is accomplished as much in the sequential ordering of discourse as it is in the correct interpretation of the descriptions contained in the texts that pervade all aspects of our lives. Returning to the idea of culture, this lends credence and indeed validity to the

argument for the respecification of news texts as predominantly members' phenomenon, as documents of the evidenced machinery of 'culture':

*"A culture is an apparatus for generating recognisable actions; if the same procedures are used for generating as for detecting, that is perhaps as simple solution to the problem of recognisability as is formulatable."*

(Sacks 1992a: 226)

This is further evidenced by Hester and Eglin's (1997) discussion of the reflexive constitution of category, predicate and context as demonstrative of the significance of the notion of 'culture' as a locally accomplished and temporally dependent. It also emphasises the importance of the contextual specificities of the occasions of members' categorial order work. As Sacks notes above, a culture is an apparatus for generating recognisable actions and this might reasonably be conceptualised through the notion of context and the particulars of identity, time or meaning it infers in any given situation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The contextualised or local specificities of culture are discussed by Alexander (1984).



## **Recent Approaches to MCA**

The following brief discussions represent some of the more recent developments in the field of MCA. They also serve to demonstrate that the approach whilst firmly established as analytically and methodologically valid is yet to be utilised to its full potential.

### **MCA and Conversation Analysis**

One of the most foremost writers on MCA has been Rod Watson (1976; 1978; 1983; 1997) and his contributions to the analysis of the significance of categories and sequential considerations pertaining to conversation should not be overlooked. Watson identifies the uncertain position of MCA in relation to the ethnomethodological programme and notes that conversation analysis has traditionally focused on the sequential positioning of utterances, which whilst undoubtedly of great importance, has been to the detriment of MCA. The problem thus lies in finding a balance between the two approaches. Although many examples of the sequential analysis of conversation rely, if only tacitly, on knowledge of categories and category bound activities, most notably in studies of institutional talk where categories are located as part of the formal organisation of the talk. Therefore, as Watson observes, the tradition has been to acknowledge categorisations yet rarely to explicate them further. Watson argues the need to remove the preference for one approach over the other, the failure to explicate categorical considerations results in the tendency for members to assume in part the sense of an utterance. Watson's aim to respecify the analysis of talk and remove the dualism that blights the research is ambitious but ultimately essential.

## **MCA and Moral judgements**

Baker (In Hester and Eglin 1997) examined features of talk that occurred in school staff meetings concerned with a 'welfare system' of punishment and praise. Her work dealt with how the use of pre-existing categories and category bound activities in talk constructed a moral order within the school. Essentially the talk was concerned with categorisations of people as moral Actors. Like news reporting the teachers employed categories and predicates to describe (and reflexively to construct) a moral order. The categories used were employed to distribute feeling such as sympathy e.g. "a good kid". As mentioned these categories were seen to pre-exist the discussion of their treatment. Baker argued that members' analysis and understanding of moral actions and actors was evidence of culture in action. They found social order through their talk as practically socially organised via the production and recognition of actions, motives and statistical patterns all of which were rooted in categories and courses of moral action. Baker's work has special significance for my research as news reporting where blame is to be attached for an incident relies heavily on members' processes of recognising a moral order, of motives and moral actors.

## **MCA and the Media**

An earlier study yet still highly significant, Jayyusi's (1991) paper "*The equivocal text and the objective world: an ethnomethodological analysis of a news report*" is perhaps most applicable to this work. Its age and status as one of the few Ethnomethodological analysis of news texts indicates the need for further research into this area. Indeed Jayyusi states that her intention is twofold: firstly, to explicate members' methods for understanding a specific text; and secondly to establish a framework for the study of media texts and texts in general.

The interest in the news text is predominantly focussed on the notion that the text stands as an objective account of a real world event. Thus the task is to uncover how reality is constructed within the text rather than being seen as merely a subjective version of one reality. She goes on to discuss how the available knowledge is made intelligible and readable in the way that it is and finally how the reader resolves the inevitable equivocality of the news text. Jayyusi concludes that it is the hearable equivocality of the text that constitutes its objective character. The provision of equivocal readings is formally located in the properties of categories by which members organise their social world. Thus ethnomethodological inquiries into texts should be a combination of explicating knowledge in use and practices in use.

An equally significant contribution to the ethnomethodological study of media phenomenon is Francis and Hart's (1997) analysis of membership categories in a television commercial. Their intention is to respecify such phenomenon as 'situated accomplishments of commonsense knowledge' (1997:123). The significance of this work, as I hope will be the significance of my own, is not in the details of the specific commercial itself but in the methodological framework established by Francis and Hart for the study of what they refer to as 'texts' (phenomena lacking the interactional characteristics of conversation analysis for example). Their work demonstrates that ethnomethodological analyses can be equally applicable to such instances of practical reasoning and practical understanding. Their work provides much of the inspiration for my research.



## **Hester and Eglin: A Case Study**

Hester and Eglin's analysis of the Montreal Massacre explicates the categorically ordered commentary of newspaper reports and respecifies deviance as a production of members' local order work. It examines news reporting as a members' phenomenon and as one of the few ethnomethodologically grounded analyses of news reporting is clearly relevant to this work. Whilst not wishing in any way to merely replicate the work, similarities and parallels can be drawn with my data from which a new direction can be taken.

Hester and Eglin begin with an analysis of the categorial specificities of what they describe as 'embedded commentaries' or what might be conceptualised as the 'storied elements' of news reporting. Essentially these constitute aspects of the report distinguishable yet ontologically inseparable from the primary context or master device 'parties to a mass shooting'. The argument rests that the reportage contains commentaries not explicitly formulated yet categorially and contextually recognisable. Categories, predicates and such mechanisms described by Sacks as the standardised relational pair, character appears on cue and the stage of life device allow Hester and Eglin to explicate and respecify members' methods for finding and making news stories.

Often the most prominent story-able elements of such reports are those of 'horror' and 'tragedy'. As Hester and Eglin observe, this frequently turns on the disjuncture between what is institutionally provided for by the setting of a 'University' and what actually happens. Applying Sacks work on 'character appears on cue' it is demonstrable that such an occurrence is observably horrific because a

gunman on a university campus is *not* on cue and similarly this might be applied to the subsequent 'victim' categories or indeed the device 'parties to a shooting':

*"The reporting, that is, expresses revulsion at this breach of the bodily and social integrity of everyday life incarnate in the categorial organisation made available in the institutionalised setting of a mundane place."*

(Hester and Eglin 1999:205)

This notion of the storied elements of the news coverage residing in the organisation of membership categories in a context is further elaborated on as they examine the story of tragedy. Again this perceived aspect can be formally located in the rupturing of Sacks' stage of life device (1992a:243) whereby conventionally anticipated features of students (intelligent, young) and conventionally anticipated futures of these victims (a good job, bright future) are juxtaposed with the accountable reality. Both of these embedded commentaries are applicable to reports of airliner crashes.

Hester and Eglin observed that a number of elements to the reporting, temporally distinct but intrinsically connected were similarly dependent on categories and their predicates. Stories subsequent to the shooting included the issue of gun control, the search for a motive and the story of the killer and perhaps most significantly, at least most dependent on the readily available incumbents of the 'offender' and 'victim' categories (men and women) was the story of violence against women. Similar to the following data analysis the articles studied engaged in activities that attempted to make sense of the murder. As Hester and Eglin observe this task was the responsibility of the 'Professional Commentator'. In this instance

and common to reports of this kind the professional commentary is provided by those incumbent of categories that have specific contextual relevance, in the case of the Montreal massacre such categories as 'criminologist' or 'expert on mass murders'. The category relevance of such characters is readily locatable and again conforms to the character appears on cue discussion. The role of the professional commentator was threefold; to collect the action, to account for the murders, to formulate the consequences of the massacre. Essentially it could be classified as an exercise in containing the unexpected within pre-configured boundaries of mundane relevances.

The murders in this instance are generalised in terms of the categorial incumbency of the offender and victim (where all the victims can be grouped together as a symbolic whole), collecting the action in generic terms allows the application of symbolic representation in terms of encapsulating such actions under the wider rubric of 'violence against women'. Accounting for the murders, finding motive and indicating a preferred scheme of interpretation is also accomplished in categorial terms. Categorising the offender with terms such as 'lunatic' or 'madman' indicate a preference for individual pathology as the explanation rather than classifying the offender and his actions as the rational and considered politically motivated actor he strove to establish himself.

Throughout the work Hester and Eglin demonstrate that any sense that might be gleaned from such reports, indeed the very act of successfully reading the news, is dependent on members' local order work and is classifiable as a further example of members' situated practical action and practical reasoning. That the event can be respecified as a members' phenomenon is demonstrable so insofar as the offender, the



journalist and the party reading the news can locate such actions and accounts of such actions as recognisably describable and recognisably reproducible. The event from its perpetration, to its recounting in the news, to its recognition as pertaining to some real world incident by the reader of the news is rooted in, dependent on and reflexively constructed according to the same categorial resources.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to demonstrate the procedural, methodological and ontological significance of ethnomethodology and specifically MCA to the study of news texts. To this end it is observable that such topics for analysis are consistent with the fundamental tenets of Ethnomethodology and cohere with the category work of Sacks in such a manner so as to avoid the concerns of Schegloff (in Sacks 1992a) and represent part of the “large corpus of empirical studies of practical actions” (Garfinkel in Coulon 1995:74) that is the concern of this discipline.

**Chapter Five:**  
**Telling the Story**



## **Introduction**

Throughout this work I shall be looking at the construction of the news reports, essentially arguing that they are reflexively constituted documentary realities. That they constitute active and self-organising phenomena can be illustrated by examining the role of membership categories in the sense making activities of members. I shall begin by examining the most basic foundation of the airliner crash story, the fundamental aspect of all the reports, which allows the process of member understanding to be established. Later I shall deconstruct the stories in greater detail. However we must begin with the characters. It is in the very particulars of the descriptions, narratives, presence or absence of categories, their predicates and devices present in the reports that our sense of understanding can begin. Thus this first chapter deals with the document of an airliner crash story in the broadest sense. Rather than start to unpack the constitutive aspects of the “airliner crash story” as mundane phenomena I will initially try to establish the roots from which these more complex components stem. From this point data extracts that appear in the work will be referenced to the full article contained in the appendix by an index number to be found after the source details. For example the following extract is referenced to article 5 in the appendix:

“New York – A Trans world Airlines 747 bound from New York City to Paris plunged into the waters off Long Island on Wednesday night with 229 people aboard, apparently after exploding in mid-air. The Coast Guard said there were no survivors. Although it was not immediately clear what caused the crash, Federal officials raised the possibility that it may have been an act of terrorism”  
(Jul 18 1996 News Observer Archive :5)

This will enable the reader to see the full context of the extract if they wish.

## Parties to an Airliner Crash

The sense making process, at its most basic level is constructed around our prior orientation to categories, devices, their predicates and what categories should, and should not, go together. A similar amount of understanding is reached through our orientation to what Sacks' termed *Character Appears on Cue* (Sacks 1992a:182) which I will consider in more detail later. Let us first consider the key characters in the reporting of an airliner crash. This might at first seem obvious however it is the fact that so many of these aspects are taken for granted that sociology has long needed to sharpen the focus of its enquiries. It is through explicating these simple observations that more thorough analysis is possible.

There are of course the most basic categories within the master device 'parties to an airliner crash' and temporal logic dictates that the immediate characters are 'victim', 'offender' and 'witness'. Parties to the aftermath of an airliner crash perhaps subsumed by, yet chronologically and categorially distinct from the aforementioned master device includes such categories as 'rescuers', 'rescue teams', 'paramedics', 'police', 'emergency services'. Also within this device although particular in its specifics to this context although by no means in the generic sense are categories such as "aviation expert" which may also be collected under the master category 'professional commentator' (Hester and Eglin 1999; 1999). These categories are the foundations upon which the story is formulated. In essence when the text of a report is considered it is the collective presence of a multitude of characters that reflexively constitutes our sense of understanding. Each is mutually elaborative and shares an inferential relationship with the other. However I intend to argue that in such social phenomena as these reports there is a clear chronological and spatiotemporal

hierarchy of categories. These are built into the story and the sense making processes of the members can be likened to a gradual analysis of the text through recognising the primary categories, the secondary characters building into a sense of awareness of a constructed reality in keeping with Garfinkel's (1967) notes on the documentary method of interpretation. This is achieved not simply through the categories but their predicates and traditional contextual settings. I will shortly unpack the significance of the most commonly occurring categories each of which can serve an individual purpose that relates to constructing and establishing the report as what it accountably is. However for now we will consider the importance of the primary membership categories.

Across the reports I have examined the presence of the observable categories appear to correlate with five crucial questions. It is significant to note that these categories do not feature as part of an objective account of a 'news' item. Rather each is inextricably interwoven with the structural narrative of the 'story'. It is our orientation to categories, predicates and devices that allow these roles to be played out in a manner that facilitates our understanding of the report as concerning an airliner crash. The context of the story and its natural intelligibility is in part constituted through the presence of these key categories and in part through the temporal order in which they are reported.

I believe the categorial construction of crash reports can be summarised very simply. Essentially the categories relate to the following questions:



Who died?

Who survived?

Who did it?

What are you going to do about it?

What does this mean for the rest of us? (Or why should we care)

The five categories I believe are crucial to crash reports are (in no particular order) the 'Remedial Categories'. These are discussed in Hester and Eglin's work "You're all a bunch of Feminists": Categorisation and the Politics of Terror in the Montreal Massacre' (Hester and Eglin 1999) although in a different context. As Hester and Eglin argue the suicide of Marc Lepine can be explained by the fact that the consequences of his actions would be met by the government; by authority figures. Lepine did not view these categories as remedial, i.e. as providing any resolution to his perceived grievance. Suicide was a logical option. In relation to airliner crashes the first category group I will consider are those which offer remedial potential to the reader. In a sense the perceived 'grievance' of the reading public is that an airliner has crashed, this is not a normal occurrence and is associated with injury or loss of life. Staying with that basic premise, the reader then needs to know that in categorial terms, or more specifically in terms of predicates we know to be associated with categories, this problem is being addressed. In this instance the very simple solution is offered by the remedial potential of a number of membership categories and the predicates such incumbencies infer. He or she does not identify a required predicate (for example performing first aid) and work back to the appropriate category. Rather the predicate and its corresponding category are viewed as appropriate as categories and predicates in a context, as part of a culturally

inseparable package. In other words the category is not 'filled in' once a predicate is deemed required to resolve a perceived problem, the solution and the provider of the solution are viewed as one. What might be termed 'remedial' categories would then include "paramedics", "rescue workers", "Police", "coastguards" etc. In effect these offer an immediate solution to the problem, that of victims and possible survivors of an airliner crash.

The second category I have termed "Empathetic" Categories. These include "eyewitness", "relative" (and all categories from the device family), "friend", "resident" etc. By themselves these categories are not constitutive from or of the context of an airliner crash. However, having read the headline and being aware of the context these categories make perfect sense. Indeed separated from their context they are relatively neutral categories, ones that we might encounter regularly however given their context they become highly significant. It is fascinating to note that certain categories become 'active' or infer a far greater amount of information in certain contexts. Relating back to Sacks' concept of categories being inference rich (Sacks 1992a:40) within a certain context, a specific temporal relevance becomes apparent. In this context, in this time, these categories become a far greater source of information than in the normal context of everyday life. I believe these situated categories are vital to the reporting of an airliner crash. News reports are not a simple and bland reporting of the facts in the vain hope that members will take interest. Rather they are very specifically recipient designed. They must be made relevant for the reader, allow him or her to identify with the report in some way. In this respect empathetic characters are vital; they add what is most commonly termed a "human interest" aspect. More specifically if we read of categories to which we also belong or



can understand it becomes easier to convey the aspects of an airliner crash report such as the tragedy and horror. They are also important in regards to Sacks' work on 'Storyteller as Witness' (Sacks 1992b:242) though I shall examine this later.

The third category is what Hester and Eglin described as the 'Professional Commentator' (Hester and Eglin 1999). Again this category is vital for members reading the report and form part of the "making sense of it all" process. Such categories often include "Aviation experts", "former pilots", and all categories that can be classified as the "emergency services". Predicates of such categories include the right to comment with a greater degree of authority on such events than other categories; essentially they constitute the warrantable claim. Specific category relevances allow for the report to claim that these persons are more equipped to answer the questions mentioned earlier; they can provide an observably 'adequate' formulation of the event warrantable in category terms to which the news reader is properly oriented. Essentially the role of the newspaper report is to make sense of an unexpected event. Planes crashing are not a routinised event and the juxtaposition between what is expected or predicated of a journey on an airliner is so far removed from what must be reported that certain categories may be employed to bridge that gulf. The unexpected can be routinised and these categories work to respecify the incident using routine 'oral modes' (see Fowler 1991).

The fourth category collection can be referred to as "Resolution Categories". This follows on from the previous categories and although temporally speaking, as they appear in the report itself, they may be referred to before or after the professional commentator, the reader is aware that they represent the final stage of the story. Once



the event has occurred, the details accounted for and explanations offered, these categories must be present to 'close' the issue. They fulfil the 'what are you going to do about it?' requirement of society. There are two key elements behind the necessary provision of this category. Firstly is the essentially selfish need for members to know that this will not happen if they choose to step on an aeroplane. It needs to be demonstrated that this will not occur again, after all it is not normal or expected. The second element is the need for justice. Again these categories illustrate that something is being done to counteract the horror and the tragedy. Using the standardised relational pair of 'crime-punishment' we assume that since one is present the other is naturally inferred. For this pair to be completed the SRP of criminal (e.g. terrorist) and Law enforcement officer (e.g. Policeman, FBI Agent etc) must be present if in fact the crash was a crime. This nicely demonstrates how predicates and their categories share a mutually elaborative and inferential relationship. Although the category of criminal is not present in the report it is one of the assumptions that a crime has been committed as planes do not normally crash. Thus in this instance the possibility of a bombing which is a known predicate of the category 'terrorist', belonging to the device 'criminal' operates in place of the category. It substitutes for its presence but infers its existence due to our orientation to categories and their predicates. Similarly as the category of, for example 'police officer' is present, being one part of the SRP 'police-criminal' we can assume the possible presence of the other half of the pair. Furthermore although no explicit reference is made to the activity of punishment of possible perpetrators, since this is a predicate of the category 'Police Officer' we can that this will be a natural consequence of their presence fulfilling our question; "What are you going to do about it?"

The fifth and final category is of course that of victim. This category is vital if all the above categories are to make sense thus in this respect it is the most important. The presence of victims or more specifically of the categorially symbolic 'victim' provides relevance for the reader; it allows for the possibility of locating a sense of 'something for us' (Sacks 1992b). Thus the category of victim is crucial; it constitutes the key elements of the story, allows for the presence of many of the important categories and creates news worthiness and a sense of contextual relevance for the reader.

These I believe are the primary membership category devices to be located in news reports on airliner crashes. It is our knowledge of their associated categories, relations pairs, predicates and contextual and temporal significances that forms the basis of members' methods for interpreting news reports as documentary realities, as self organising reflexive texts.

As had already been mentioned, members' orientation to standardised relational pairs is crucial to an understanding of airliner crash reports. They also serve to demonstrate the inferential schemata of contextual specificities so fundamental to the intelligible text. They are not read and understood simply for what they are; we interpret them for what they infer. Members' methods for reading texts are not consistent with the perception of the social actor as a cultural dope, that he or she reads the news as a passive recipient. Rather they suggest a complex process of situated analysis that cannot be removed from the contextual occasions of its use, suggesting that texts are worthy of investigation as culturally inference rich devices in themselves, as documentary and temporally located realities; the occasioned corpus.

Returning to the significance of standardised relational pairs, there are numerous notable examples in all of the reports I have studied. These pairs relates to the personal e.g. father and daughter, husband and wife and to the non-personal e.g. offender and victim. This may also be extended to include such pairings as 'crime and punishment' or 'crime and victim'. I believe it may also be necessary to go beyond the constraints of category pairs to include category chains. In many instances it would be incorrect to state that members interpret an aspect of a news report for what it accountably is using only their knowledge of common-sensically paired categories, predicates and contexts.



## Temporal Order

The temporal order in which all news is reported is highly significant. As members we may confidently assume that events are reported in the order in which they actually occurred. It is possible I believe to break down such reports on airliner crashes into several constituent aspects which are characteristic of the data I have studied and whose order is set to best facilitate understanding of what is essentially a chaotic event. The order in which an airliner crash is reported has bearings on all the categorial aspects I will be considering in this work. It also relates to the job of the professional commentator to routinise the unexpected but this will be examined later. The order of the report dictates the categorial structure that can be applied to these texts. The structure appears to be:

*The News announcement (Two parts)*

*Details of the crash*

*Explanations (why might this have happened)*

*Victim Report*

It could also be argued that the news readers are aware of this common structure which accounts for the presence of certain categories, devices, predicates and pairings in the order in which they appear. This is of course a common sense order for an airliner crash report; it would make little sense to have the announcement of the crash anywhere but at the beginning. This can be related back to Sacks work *Laughing Together: Expressions of Sorrow and Joy* (Sacks 1992b:570). In this lecture Sacks expressed a desire to distributionalise things, to examine where certain things occur in the overall structure of the organisation of a conversation. He uses the example of laughing together, a unique activity, as it is one of the few things that can

be conducted together in conversation and is not constrained by turn-taking considerations. Thus from this one should locate an aspect of the conversation and attempt to layer a characterisation of it, to provide an account of why it occurs where it does. Therefore if one can deconstruct the order of a report, account for why this is so and establish a framework of rules of application it provides a significant contribution to understanding how members make sense of news reports.

We should first consider the aspect of the story most readers encounter first, the 'News Announcement'. The first thing to be said is that it can be compared with an invitation in a telephone conversation. Invitations, especially in telephone conversations most often (though not always) occur at the start of the talk. This is for two main reasons. Firstly it is often the main reason for the call thus should be raised as soon as possible, as the legitimate business of the call it has good justification to be the opening topic. Secondly the invitation has a distinctly significant effect on the character of the call. Unlike some topics which may be raised and have no real bearing on the subsequent nature of the conversation, an invitation could reasonably shape the organisation of any number of following turns simply because they are naturally preceded by arrangements and negotiations. Thus the inviter must provide for the possibility that the invitee may need conversational space in which to conduct such interaction as may be necessary.

Returning to the news announcement this can be considered in these terms. Understandably the announcement comes first because it is the reason for the report. Members need to have some indication that this article is news worthy and that they should spend time reading it. Thus the article does not start by covering trivial news

events then cover the main story. It makes sense for the announcement to be first also because it provides for the subsequent aspects of the story none of which would make any sense without it. Secondly if the announcement were put at the end of an article this would leave no room for the necessary members' enquiries regarding the specifics such as where it happened and how many were killed. Although technically the positioned announcement of the crash renders the actual report chronologically misleading as it must then recount how the crash happened, this is an expected organisational feature of news reporting.

The announcement comes in two significant parts. Firstly, the news headline which always comes at the start. Putting aside for the moment the significance of the headline in terms of context, reflexivity and indexicality the headline is the first part of the generic (for my data) structure of the reportage. The headline is followed by a brief synopsis of the story, confirming and elaborating on the headline, I will call this 'story A' (S.A). The third and final section is 'story B' (S.B), this comprises the story in its fullest detail. Thus the story is announced (headline), reported briefly in story A then covered in detail for story B. Although drawing some distinction between stories A and B may seem disingenuous, they are of course the same incident, I believe it is necessary as it demonstrates the interesting chronological and temporal peculiarities of this reporting. As mentioned the chronology of a news report is inherently misleading, as the end (the headline) appears at the beginning. For story A the end can either be the start again preceding further details or the beginning can be returned to for the summery. Subsequently story B naturally relays the incident in a chronologically accurate manner although to all intents and purposes the body of the text merely tells the reader how to get to the headline or the end. Whilst this



deconstruction might appear convoluted it serves to demonstrate that past attempts to draw parallels between news reportage and story telling must be approached with some caveats. One cannot begin to characterise journalists as the story tellers of modern society (Bell 1991:148) unless we choose to understand stories in the way Sacks (1992a; 1992b) characterised them.

If we take the notion of the story preface, the function of which is to inform co-conversationists' that a story is going to be told and thus to provide for additional conversational space in which to tell it, this may help with the analysis of the news report. In conversational terms the story preface alerts others to the story in much the same way as a headline, it is an announcement. For the sake of distributionalising elements of the news report the two are comparable. However it is here that comparing news reports (as a structural whole) to stories becomes misleading. In conversation members do not announce the end of the story as a preface as in news reportage. Essentially the true story preface for news reporting lies in the contextual particulars of this phenomenon. The presence of the story or text in the news serves as a preface, or an announcement that something interesting, shocking, unbelievable or so on is to be found within. Thus the headline serves as a specification of the news worthiness inferred by its very presence in a news paper. If we take the context (a news paper) as story preface A (SPA) and the headline as story preface B (SPB) we can begin to understand the recurrent structural orderliness of the news report. Therefore the sequence reads SPA – SPB – SA – SB and this encapsulates the distinctive ordering of a news report where SPA is the prior knowledge of the member that newspapers don't just report any happening and the three subsequent sections, although distinct, don't just happen to contain similar characters or events but are

linked in practical terms. The two story prefaces also serve the purpose of letting the reader know when the story is finished. Although logically speaking one need not have this clue since the article ends and it isn't the case that you wait for your turn when the story is done. Nonetheless it sets the context so in dual terms the reader is looking for something news worthy (SPA) and for things that relate to the specific subject (SPB). Thus we have the situation where the regular and even expected structural properties of the reportage is one of the most fundamental resources the reader has at his or her disposal for not just getting around the apparent chronological jumps back and forth in this sequence of events but for understanding the article as a whole.

Referring again to Garfinkel (1967) and the documentary method of interpretation this set of common organisational facets constitute a generalised although essentially situated document of airliner crash reporting. This recognisable account, the fact that it is describable and recognisably describable is strongly connect in part to the inter-textuality of its structural features. The structural characteristics of an airliner crash report, as a whole, not as constitutive parts, serve as one of the key resources in members' understanding of them. In a way it correlates with our own sense making processes which lead from hearing about the report, to requiring confirmation as it is unexpected, to requiring more details, to understanding why it happened and then to knowing who was affected. In a sense our understanding is constructed by the ordering of the reports. Like a jigsaw but following a defined series of steps the data is gradually added to until we reach the complete picture, that is, knowing what happened, why and to whom.

## Character Appears on Cue

*"Now we'll say that for some pairs of activities, pairs of actions that are related by norms, that there's at least a rule of adequate description which says 'character appears on cue,' i.e., if the first takes place and it's an adequate grounds for the second taking place, then it's okay to describe the thing without having provided for how it is that that second person happened to come on the scene to do whatever it is they properly do, if one says the first occurs and the second occurs as well."*

*(Sacks 1992a:254)*

The foundation of this chapter lies in the lectures of Harvey Sacks (1992a; 1992b) however I would like to move beyond Sacks' conceptual boundaries established in his work especially relating to the work "The Baby cried, the Mommy picked it up", "Character Appears on Cue", "An explanation is the Explanation" and "Good Grounds for an Action" (1992a).

Much of an analysis of this topic is dependent on the member's awareness of context, category and predicate. At the very root of all members' work in understanding texts is our prior orientation to our cultures' categories, predicates and devices. It is therefore worth noting that the methods I will unpack over the course of this chapter cannot be separated from the cultural environment that informs them, they are inexorably connected to the contextual occasions of their use. That is to say they will not serve to provide a framework for the analysis of airliner crash reports or even disaster reports in general, rather they will demonstrate members' use of culture in its purest form and that the social actor *is not* a cultural dope.



The previous chapter considered the most common characters that occurred throughout the corpus of data. It is of course instantly noticeable that each of these characters could be seen as appropriate to the reports. Each in their place, in their relative contexts, were observably or at least categorially and contextually warrantably present. Were I to present this list of characters to any social member they would register little surprise at their presence and indeed most would be able to deduce with some accuracy the context to which they were appropriate. No-one reads of the Swissair crash and registers surprise that the first quote is from the Canadian Rescue Service, what is interesting is that the key aspect I will be examining is that the presence of all characters in airliner crash reports are not provided for. Now this is an immensely interesting thing and although one might reasonably question the wider consequence of this observation, it has far greater ramifications than one might initially consider. There are three key aspects here; the fact that the appearance of the characters is not explained, how this is not an issue and what purpose it may serve. To put it another way if this can be deconstructed as an example of 'culture in action' how can this be applied to social interaction in a far wider sense than just the reading of newspaper reports?

One of the key elements Sacks (1992b) noted when people tell stories are that they may often have to work extremely hard to get this activity done. It is no simple effort in many instances to obtain and retain the floor, ride interruptions and get your story across whilst maintaining the interest of your audience. Thus speakers will be grateful for any instances where the storytelling can be simplified to get help get the talk 'done'. Having worked for the right to occupy more than one turn in speech one

does not wish to have to provide for the presence of all characters if that is not necessary. We would like to think that in many cases we could rely on the cultural and categorial awareness of our co-conversationists to fill in certain gaps. We can easily then return to Sacks' example regarding the cop who may vary his arrest pattern dependent on what the driver may be wearing (Sacks 1992a:182). In this example the speaker uses many techniques to tell his story and ensure that he can tell it to the end without interruption. One such method is that fact that he does not provide for the appearance of the cop; to do so would lengthen the utterance considerably and unnecessarily. He needs a shortcut and his knowledge that his co-conversationists are culturally aware of categories, predicates and their contexts allows him the luxury of telling the story just as he does.

One can state that in effect a newsreader is a willing audience, that we start reading because we want to and this cannot be compared to story telling in conversation. However this would be incorrect, although we have picked up the newspaper and have started reading presumably because we want to discover more about this airliner that might have crashed, we don't have to read the whole article. Like any recipient of a story we do not wish to get bogged down in categorial explanations that may prevent or delay the main facts of the story being told. All texts and indeed all members rely on what is considered to be the mutually shared cultural knowledge of communicator and recipient. Thus we must ask, are all texts by definition, recipient designed and can the utterly mundane nature of certain categories appearing on cue be used to demonstrate this?

Firstly however it is necessary to examine the techniques and aspects of the stories by virtue of which it is not necessary to formulate an explanation of why characters appear. The two most significant areas of the story (at least in terms of membership categories) therefore become the cue and what members generally conceive of as good grounds for an action. A great deal of our sense making processes rely on the mutually elaborative and inferential relationships that exist between categories, the predicates of which they are incumbents and the devices to which they belong as well as the contextual specificities of their operation. The instance of an airliner crash report is particularly interesting and considerably more complex than the example Sacks gave about the “guy picking the other guy up” (Sacks 1992a:183). In this case speeding is the cue, breaking the law, which as an action naturally provides for the possible presence of a cop; after all preventing law breaking is what they do. Similarly the formulation of the first guy as a cop is achieved through the predicate of “picking up” of which cops are an expected incumbent.

In this case the character appears on cue, and we can see that this is not a problem for the story recipients or indeed ourselves. We can also see that in breaking the law, there were good grounds for this action, for “picking the other guy up”. That is not to say that characters have to appear on cue, clearly this guy may have gotten away with speeding on this occasion regardless of what he was wearing, and we might well have considered that the second part of the ‘crime-punishment’ or ‘criminal-police officer’ adjacency pair was missing allowing us to formulate that he did indeed ‘get away with it’. But nonetheless whether the cop appears or not is not



problematic due to our knowledge that not everyone who speeds gets caught, perhaps due to the fact that we speed, maybe on a regular basis and haven't yet been caught.

The point I am trying to convey is that in some instances characters do not have to appear on cue and sometimes they appear without a cue. The 'Mommy' need not pick her baby up as it cries and similarly may pick it up without a cue; "Mommies are free to pick up their babies, perhaps at will". (Sacks 1992a) However, and airliner crash reports are a good example of this, there are some instances when characters only appear on cue and culturally available story-telling shortcuts, such cues, provide for the adequacy of a story told in the way that it is.

In the first article the report covers the crash of TWA Flight 800 that crashed into the ocean shortly after taking off from New York killing all 229 people aboard. The headline reads *Jetliner crash kills 229* (Jul 18 1996 News Observer Archives) and the first membership category that is mentioned is "Coast Guard". In fact the second paragraph of this article is an extremely complex statement giving several examples of the significance of the character appears on cue variant and indeed categories and their predicates.

"New York – A Trans world Airlines 747 bound from New York City to Paris plunged into the waters off Long Island on Wednesday night with 229 people aboard, apparently after exploding in mid-air.

The Coast Guard said there were no survivors. Although it was not immediately clear what caused the crash, Federal officials raised the possibility that it may have been an act of terrorism"

(Jul 18 1996 News Observer Archive :5)

The first notable aspect of this segment is the two membership categories; "Coast Guard" and "Federal Officials". It is worth noting also that neither is explicably accounted for, at least not in an obvious manner. I would argue that members could use three key resources for seeing "Coast Guard" as an unproblematic character. In this instance there is a clear cue, available to all, that of the jet crashing, which sets the context. Using our common sense awareness of the device 'parties to an airliner crash' we can see the presence of the coast guard as utterly unproblematic. Unlike Sacks' example where the presence or absence of the cop after the guy has committed a traffic offence would be equally unproblematic, the absence of a 'coast guard' in this situation would not be so. Although in the case of the 'mommy' she could appear with or without a cue or indeed not appear at all, certain characters such as the 'coastguard' must follow their cue. To read that an airliner had crashed into the waters and then not to read of the presence of characters such as the 'coast guard' would present the reader with a problem. Namely where was the specific character who, given the circumstances, would expectedly be present.

Sacks (1992a) stated that there was a set of characters who appear only on cue and do their activities also only on cue. But to take this further, there seems to be sets that appear only on cue, only perform their activities on cue but that must appear. That is to say although the 'cop' should appear in Sacks' example; we could all cope with it if he did not. But if a 'Coastguard' or a 'Paramedic' or a 'Federal Official' did not appear this causes a problem. That is not to say that the 'coastguard' only appears when an airliner crashes but that there is a collection of cues at which they properly appear and would be noticeable by their absence from. In a sense there are clear rules tying characters to certain contexts and this is an extremely complex statement. It

cannot be broken down into simple equations whereby an airliner crashes and a character appears, each membership category is tied to any number of situations and activities.

Perhaps the best way to conceptualise this obligation to appear on cue versus the basic normative appearance on cue which differentiates my data from Sacks' is using his notion of the 'viewer's maxim' (Sacks 1992a:259). The first maxim states that if you can see a category bound activity being done by a member of a category to which it is bound, then see it that way. The second maxim examined the operation or more specifically the recognisability of behaviours in terms of pairs of actions connected by observation of a norm (i.e. the baby cried, the mommy picked it up) where the first could be said to provide for the second and vice versa, that the norm provides for such categories as have been observed, and that the actions are consistent with the norm and this therefore provides for the relevance of both categories and actions, reflexively speaking.

As Sacks observes, viewers use such norms to provide some sense of orderliness to the actions and categories they observe. It may be the case that such recognisably 'correct' (where correct is recognisable, adequate or allowable) norms might provide for the obligations of some categories to appear on cue. The operation of the norm that provides orderliness to the mother picking up *her* crying baby is not the same as that norm which provides orderliness to the action of the coastguard, or indeed the police, emergency services and so on appearing on cue at the airliner crash. This norm indicates a sense of contextually bound expectation that transcends a merely unproblematic or naturally intelligible cue-category-action sequence where



the category and action need not explicitly be provided for. Sacks uses the word 'duty' to describe the behaviour of the mother in picking up her crying child, this seems a disingenuous although perhaps offhand characterisation of an action that is unproblematic but not required. If a baby cries one could not categorise the mother as being 'duty bound' to pick it up. For this data however 'duty bound' activities seem a good conceptualisation of the norm that serves to connect such categories and their predicates to the cue via their observability as 'intelligibly expected' not merely 'intelligibly allowable'. Naturally this sense of obligation is tied to the categorial incumbencies of these unknown individuals and there inexorable connection to the generalised cue to which their 'duty bound' predicates tie them.

Without our prior knowledge of what contexts may occur, what predicates may be required, an awareness of this tangled web of tying rules, sense making would be rendered almost impossible. Given the potential for overlap and crossover our correct understanding of any text is no simple accomplishment. 'Coast Guards' may reasonably appear at boating accidents, drowning swimmers, suicide attempts, airliner crashes or any number of other instances. However having read the headline we locate a membership category, search through our knowledge of categories who might attend an airliner crash and see their presence as normal and expected. Conversely whilst reading the article we are constantly aware of a set of characters who should respond to the cue. If these are not located this becomes problematic, if characters that do not fit are located this too is noticeable. In every reading of a news report we are continually trying to locate the characters that are tied to the cue; we try to find who should be there, who should be but isn't, and who is there but shouldn't be.

Thus far we have used our knowledge of which characters are tied to which cues, all of which allows for the telling of the story as adequate. Secondly if an airliner has crashed in the water we know that some sort of rescue service must be conducted at sea. Our orientation to categories and their predicates allows us to see that only the category 'Coast Guard' or possibly members of the Navy are equipped to perform this task. Thus the required predicate, of rescuing people at sea infers the category of which it is an incumbent. For the social actor reading this report, the inferential relationship between a predicate and its relative category is extremely powerful. This differs slightly in airliner crash reports because members frequently locate what predicate is "needed" not what is being performed, at least not until later in the report. Again this is highly complex. As readers of this text we must employ some apparatus of analysis which allows us to see what predicates, given the context, may be required and then use this to account for the presence of, for example, the 'coastguard'. In this sense predicates as well as categories can be considered inference rich. (Sacks 1992a: 40) Again we return to the significance of our own awareness of contexts and categories. In this first paragraph alone the reader must reference his own knowledge of emergency situations, locate a relevant course of action and then cross-reference this with the appropriate category. It is not simply a case however of seeing that the 'Coast Guard' is an expected category, but a case of reading the story with a set of characters in mind as expectedly appearing over the course of the article.

As Sacks remarked in his lectures "The Dirty Joke as a Technical Object" you listen to such jokes with 'dirty ears' i.e. being attuned to the fact that it will feature obscene probably sexual references. (Sacks 1992b:470) Similarly we read airliner crash reports having been tipped off by the cue featured in the headline, for want of a

better phrase we read with 'airliner crash ears'. Now this is a clumsy conceptualisation but it encapsulates how we understand that characters appear on cue. The cue itself is far more than just an occurrence that starts a sequence, although that in itself is significant enough as a starting point. This demonstrates how members might use the cue to provide for the appearance of membership categories.

To properly assess the structure of this member's resource one can formulate some tying rules that might be applied to 'character appears on cue' as a conceptual framework to be layered onto news reports. In most instances the rule follows a three-part sequence. A great many things in ethnomethodology and especially in the work of Sacks follow a perceivable three-part sequence and this is not coincidence. Telephone openings (successful ones) often contain three parts, as do story prefaces and the 'Initiation-Reply-Evaluation' sequence applicable to education (Mehan 1979).

Cue (which determines the necessary character) = Q = Cue

Character Appears = C = Character

Character performs the appropriate predicate = P = Predicate

However in reality it is not as simple as this. The cue in itself is constitutive of the appropriate predicate and to read the conceptualisation in this sequence (QCP) is not to follow the process that we as readers can follow. Nonetheless this sequence is an accurate reflection of the structuring of airliner crash reports. What is interesting is that the reader notes the cue, deduces the necessary predicate that might expectedly be performed and locates the relevant character as an unproblematic addition to the report. In a sense members operate from steps 1-3-2, QPC, as was demonstrated



earlier in finding 'coastguard' as a relevant category. In this case the coupling of the cue with the predicate is crucial. It seems obvious but members primarily view characters as unproblematic in airliner crash reports if they serve some purpose relating to the three key factors I listed in the earlier chapter, that is:

Who died?

Why did it happen or who did it?

What are you going to do about it? (Now and later)

If the characters can be related to the cue in one of these capacities then their occurrence is deemed relevant. Returning to the characters I identified as occupying a common appearance throughout my selected articles members view parties to an airliner crash in terms of immediate gratification and deferred gratification although gratification could hardly be considered an ideal term in this instance. By this I mean that some categories are remedial, i.e. they aim to deal with the immediate problems at hand associated with an airliner crash such as the possibility of survivors:

“Even if the plane was still intact as it fell, aviation experts said, the high speed impact with the water would have shattered it, and the chance that anyone survived was small. The water was a chilly 59 degrees, and 250 to 270 feet deep, a cod and tuna ground that would have been dotted with fishing boats and lobstermen in early October but was all but deserted early Sunday.

Coast Guard rescue ships swarmed to the scene, followed by helicopters and reconnaissance planes. As dawn broke, a body and a flotsam of wreckage - none with burn marks that might have suggested an explosion - were found adrift in the choppy sea. Throughout the day, officials insisted that they were still seeking survivors, but the grim search seemed all but hopeless.”

“I want to re-emphasise our focus, and that is a continued effort to find victims who may still be alive,” Rear Adm. Richard M. Larrabee of the Coastguard said at a news conference in Boston late in the afternoon. “This is still a search-and-rescue case, and we are very mindful of the families, the trauma they are going through, and making every effort to keep them informed.”

(New York Times 01/11/99 :2a)

Notice in this extract that the focus of the article is the immediate problems that follow after the crash of an airliner. The important membership categories present provide resolution to the situation at hand, dealing with the consequences of the crash rather than the causes, categories that address the “what are you going to do about it *now*” aspect of all airliner crash reports. Thus in this instance members follow the QPC sequence of the rule in order to find categorial relevance, demonstrating the fact that such reports are locally situated accomplishments of members’ categorial work.

In reading these reports it seems clear for certain categories that appear readers have to do more work to provide for them being present in terms of considering what they might be doing there. It is conceivable that for an airliner crash report there exists a character appears on cue hierarchy each relying on the cue to provide for their presence but to varying degrees. Characters where their role is instantly obvious and others where the link between the cue and their appearance might not be so clear. In both examples it is important to deconstruct members’ methods for seeing them as characters that have rightly responded to the cue of an airliner crash.

Problems may occur for readers when a character does not seem appropriate to the perceived ‘cue’ of an airliner crash. The airliner crash report is a situated

accomplishment of commonsense knowledge and to this end the 'cue' in itself provides far more than simply a starting point for this. As a reflexive construction and a situated accomplishment of members' local order work it is logically dependent on and constituted by the relational and contextual configurations of the membership categories it contains. The 'cue' or what is observably and warrantably 'good ground for an action' becomes a constant reference point throughout the reading of the text and may be returned to in varying degrees depending on how easily we can see the characters that appear as correctly and justifiably belonging to the device 'parties to an airliner crash'.

The device 'parties to an airliner crash' is constituted by a large number of categories and may subsume the smaller devices of 'parties to an accidental airliner crash' and 'parties to an intentional airliner crash' although clearly there is considerable overlap. What is apparent is that some categories are more firmly tied to airliner crash reports than others. If we return to the example of the 'coast guard' in the extract given above there are two varying degrees of appropriate character appears on cue. The very nature of the cue, an aircraft crashing into the sea instantly provides for the presence of the coast guard. However 'Federal Officials' are not so easily connected. To put it another way, to find relevance for some characters, the cue in itself is sufficient. To find relevance in others it is not but may be used in conjunction with other co-selected (we assume) predicates, categories or devices.

To consider the below passage:



“Its abrupt and rapid fall raised immediate questions about sabotage. The FBI and other intelligence agencies began investigations but President Clinton and other Federal Officials said there was no immediate evidence of foul play.”

(Los Angeles Times 01/11/99 :1)

To find relevance in the categories of “FBI” or “Federal Official” the cue is used in conjunction with a number of resources that all members have at their disposal. For example members’ prior orientation to the inferential standardised relational pairs such as ‘law enforcer’ – ‘criminal’ and subsequently the available predicates of such categories (although chronologically reversed for purposes of reporting) ‘criminal activity’ – ‘investigation’. From this the implicative logic to find that a terrorist act is one known reason why airliners crash and that this explanation is categorially, contextually and recognisably inferred, allowable and available in this given instance.

### **Finding that an Airliner Crash was not accidental:**

This section constitutes a discussion of methods for constructing understanding for membership categories that do not immediately seem obvious members of the device “parties to an airliner crash”. In other words what resources do members employ when the cue is not enough to explain why a character appears? This is an especially prevalent point for news reports. By their very definition many news reports will feature characters that ‘do not belong’ as necessarily it is this that constitutes the items as news worthy. However there is a clear distinction between characters that do not belong ‘constituting the news’ and characters that seem not to belong appearing on cue. For example if one reads of a person being in a house of which he is not the owner, this character does not belong, he is most likely a ‘burglar’

and in this case this violation constitutes a story albeit a rather mundane one. However were a 'policeman' to appear, this character too does not belong but given the cue of a 'burglar' it is simple to find relevance for his appearance. The case of airliner crashes is similar to this example. Put simply airliners don't often crash which is why the event is newsworthy. All members thus know that if an airliner crashes it is usually for one of three reasons, technical problems, weather or deliberate intent. Along similar lines terrorist attacks on airliners are also rare so it is not unreasonable to assume that, to paraphrase Sacks (1992a), the most likely explanation is *the* explanation. And in many reports the characters appearing on cue follow the aforementioned QPC sequence. However to find that the crash was not an accident is a complex procedure by members. This I believe is achieved by their knowledge of category chains.

I will discuss the significance of category pairs (standardised relational pairs) later. However in this instance I believe the resource is constituted by a 'chain' consisting of categories and predicates each of which infers the other and vice versa. As with most categorical relevances' these 'chains' have two notable characteristics. Firstly they are indexical expressions, relevant and understandable in that context, in that time. One might argue that isolating temporally relevant devices for understanding has little value if they cannot be mapped onto interactional situations as a whole. However, this is to miss the point. It is the indexicality of these chains that makes them such a significant members' method. The method one must explicate therefore becomes not the chain itself but the process of making such temporally located connections.

The second point pertains to the contexts in which these chains occur. These can be considered 'chains-in-context', that is to say that although the chains are constituted by and of the context in which they occur, that is not to imply that the two can be considered separate phenomena. For this instance one cannot simply classify context as operating independently of the categories that it informs. Neither however can it be accurately stated that the context determines the meanings members might attach to the categories they witness or read about. In essence then the relationship between the context (said to be set by the cue) and the categories that subsequently appear is one of mutual elaboration. I will discuss the importance of context in the proceeding chapter. For now, it is important to unpack category 'chains'. There are I would argue two category sets which lead to finding that the airliner crash was not an accident, members of crime solving agencies such as the "FBI" and members of possible offender groups. Category chains therefore have as considerable bearing in both these instances:

"Reports claim Arab group warned of attack on US target before 230 killed. The sudden catastrophe which overtook TWA Flight 800 off Long Island, New York, on Wednesday night killing all 230 people on board has cast a long, fearful shadow over today's formal opening of the Olympic Games in Atlanta.

As investigators, backed by local fishermen, scoured the crash site about 10 miles south of Moriches Bay for bodies and wreckage of the Boeing 747 jumbo jet, speculation that it had been destroyed deliberately intensified late last night amid reports that before the blast an Arabic newspaper had been warned of an attack by the same group that claimed responsibility for an earlier bombing in Saudi Arabia."

(The Guardian 19/07/96 :4)



In this extract the first category to appear on cue, unusually, is “Arab group”. Now there are several fascinating points to be made concerning this initial statement. Firstly the report does not state that the ‘Arab group’ claimed responsibility for the attack on the US target. Indeed the term ‘warned’ has equivocal readings. It could mean warned in the sense that one warns of danger in order to avoid it, or warned in the sense of a threat, a warning that action will be taken. However logically we do not interpret this sentence as being that the ‘Arab group’ somehow knew about the attack and warned the authorities with the intent of averting disaster. Secondly, given most members’ knowledge of relations between the Middle East and the U.S we can see the appearance of the category ‘Arab’ as suggesting that the airliner crash was not an accident even before the word “attack”. In this sense small scale situated examples of common sense implicative logic are dependent on macro scale perceptions of social structures and relations. Thus there here are two instances where members are provided with resources for finding that the parties to an airliner crash indicate that it was not an accidental attack. The significance here is not that these parties themselves the readers ability to find this interpretation rather these categories to be viewed within the package of context and predicate allow this. These can be broken down into constitutive category/predicate chains.

**Context – Category – (Inferred) Predicate**

**Airliner Crash – Arab Group – Terrorist Activity**

Clearly this chain is highly subjective but I would argue that this is the apparatus members might use to find that the Arab group was responsible for the bombing of the airliner. There could be a reasonable argument to state that this is

nothing more than two examples of standardised relational pairs but to label them as such again implies some distinction, some separation between the two pairings that seems only to exist for the purposes of analysis. The reader, I would argue, sees this chain as a complete package, it is not a sequence of events pairing the context to the category, the category to the predicate and relating the predicate back to the context. Rather the elements of the chain can be seen as an indexical whole, which is why I would argue that in many cases the notion of standardised relational pairs, as an explicated members' method, is referentially inadequate. There is a danger in the desire to explicate members' methods that one might break down the sense making process to mere fragments rather than the complex accomplishment they accountably are. This clearly has a bearing on Watson's work on the "Activity of Implication" (Watson in Silverman 1997:86), this will be addressed later. Most significantly here the three-stage method is far more complex than it seems. It works on several levels, from the context and then the category of 'Arab' appearing seemingly on cue (which the reader must locate) and the aforementioned viewers maxim the reader can see 'Arab' as possibly belonging to the device of 'terrorist'. It is a reasonable assumption that the category of 'Arab' is mentioned because it is in itself subsumed by a larger device that carries some relevance to the context or cue. This can in turn be linked to the principle of co-selection. One can see that such categories as 'Arab' or indeed 'FBI' as logically appearing on cue simply due to the fact that from our own practical reasoning we assume that they have been co-selected for a purpose i.e. they have some bearing on the context.

"It was unclear what happened; Had an explosion erupted? Was there a mechanical failure? Was the aircraft even in one piece as it went down/ All that was known was that the jetliner, without warning,

plunged out of the sky and into the dark, rolling sea about 60 miles southeast of the Massachusetts island of Nantucket.

Federal Officials said radar sweeps at 12 second intervals showed that the aircraft fell from 33,000 feet to 19,100 feet – a drop of 13,900 – in 36 seconds, indicating that it was falling “like a rock,” as one aviation expert put it. The rate of descent was more like 23,000 feet per minute, while a normal descent is 1,500 to 2,000 feet a minute.”

(New York Times 01/11/99 :2a)

In this example we can reason that the character ‘Federal Official’ has been consistently co-selected, that is to say we hear this category as a co-selection with the categories, contexts or predicates that may precede or follow it. And indeed this may have a bearing on how the context and subsequent categories are interpreted. Therefore the context is changed from simply an accident to an intentional occurrence that provides the cue for the category ‘Federal Officials’ and the predicate of ‘investigating’ the crash.

If we take the below extract:

“According to ABC News, the Movement for Islamic Change – which claimed it was behind the killing of five Americans in Riyadh, last November – warned the al Hayat Arabic paper on Wednesday that a US Target would be hit at the exact time Flight 800 went down.

The warning used ‘chilling specifics’, ABC said, but was not passed on to authorities.

‘All will be surprised by the size of the attack, the place and the time,’ the group warned.

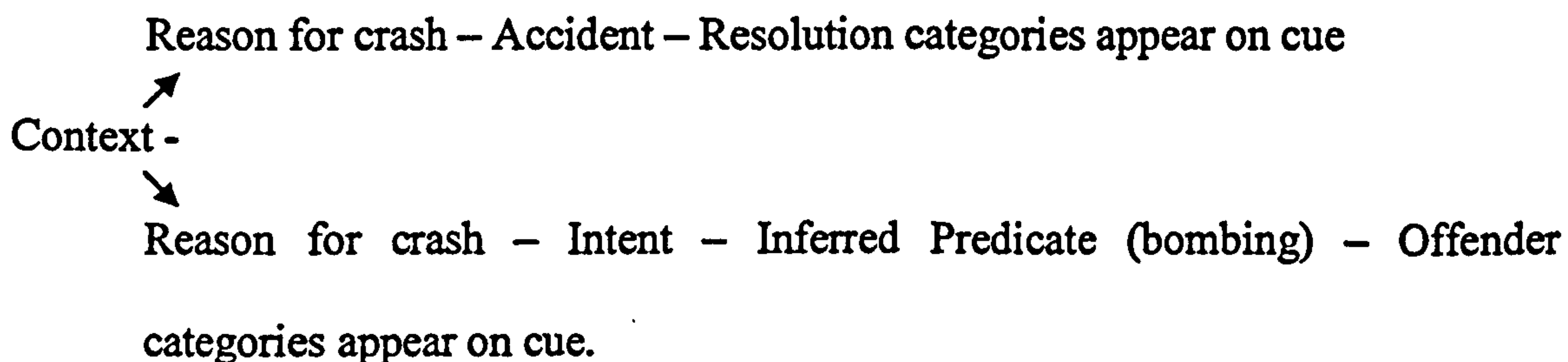
Citing sources close to the investigation, ABC said the leading theory was that the airliner was destroyed by extremists using a shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missile.”

(The Guardian 19/07/96 :4)



Again the interpretive procedures that can be applied to this extract are hugely complicated. It is possible to see that the category (or device) ‘the Movement for Islamic Change’ appears on cue because it is a method of practical reasoning that it would be co-selected with the other words (or indeed within the context) for a reason. Every airliner crash report, indeed the airliner crash in and of itself demands that certain categories do appear, categories which would be noticeable by their absence such as the emergency services regardless of the cause of the crash. However if the crash was the result of a terrorist act then this as part of the chain ‘crime-victim-offender’ then a category that could conceivably belong to the device “parties responsible for an airliner crash” can be seen to appear on cue. Thus the category ‘Movement for Islamic Change’ can be seen as incumbents of the predicate ‘terrorist act’, terrorism being provided as a predicate of the ‘Movement for Islamic Change’ byu the reporting of their previous claim to responsibility for an observable consistent act. Reflexively the airliner crash can be seen as the result of a terrorist act. Each mutually elaborates the other.

The two processes of interpretation can be deconstructed thus:



This second chain works two ways. The category of ‘Arab’ can be seen as appearing on cue if one follows the chain using the inferential relationship between

categories and their predicates however this is a reflexive relationship also, for the appearance of such a category can (I say can because it is not a certain rule) in turn constitute the context of the crash as intentional rather than accidental. So it is clear that finding certain categories as appearing on cue is considerably more complex than others.

The reader achieves all this admittedly as a sense making process but not in a step-by-step deductive process. The sense that can be derived from this sentence comes not from pairing the contexts, categories and their predicates but seeing them as a packaged sense of cultural relevancies that may, as seen above, constitute a lengthy set of interconnected elements.

The second example I mentioned for finding that the airliner crash was not an accident is the appearance on cue of categories that can be seen as resolution categories appropriate if the resolution requires a criminal investigation. That is to say there are two sets of resolution category, short term and long term. Whilst each may deal with different forms of resolution (e.g. helping victims or deducing cause) there is also room for considerable overlap as certain categories may be both (Federal officials) whose predicates may allow for resolution to be provided now and later. As mentioned previously there are those categories that resolve the situation at hand i.e. 'emergency services' and those that provide resolution in the long term. This second set comprises two key aspects. Parties to an accidental airliner crash e.g. aviation experts, members of the FAA (Federal Aviation Authority) and parties to an intentional airliner crash e.g. 'the FBI', 'CIA', 'terrorist experts' etc. Clearly there is a significant blurring of the edges between parties to an intentional and accidental

airliner crash as expectedly both might be present at either at least initially. However it is how members find relevance in the parties to an intentional airliner crash that is of significance.

I have already discussed how such immediate resolution categories are seen to appear on cue and in many ways the same is true of parties to an accidental airliner crash for long term resolution. They perform a predicate that is consistent with the context and may be termed 'pure' categories in that they do not confer upon subsequent categories or devices new meaning. By this I mean the presence of 'coastguard' in a report affects little in terms of the categories that surround it. However other such categories as 'FBI' may be used in conjunction with such categories as 'Arab Group' or 'Libyan' to imply intent to cause an airliner crash. Put simply, characters appearing on cue need not be restricted to the actual event (an airliner crash, speeding) to appear on cue as in Sacks' example. Rather certain categories may appear on cue themselves and in turn confer relevance on further characters appearing on cue. Thus in the above example the airliner crash can act as the cue for the appearance of the 'FBI' and similarly the crash could conceivably constitute a cue for the character 'Arab' or 'Libyan' if we are to find guilt. However it is possible to argue that for members to find certain categories, as reasonably being present a secondary cue is required. It is easy to see 'Arab group' as being a cue respondent category linked to the airliner crash if it can be seen to be located in the same context as the category 'FBI'. One can thus use Sacks' (1992a) maxim, if two categories can be heard as going together (perhaps as part of the standardised relational pair criminal-law officer) then hear them that way. But I would argue that these are not seen as a pair formulating part of the device parties to an airliner crash. To state this suggests that one can draw some



distinction between the context and the categories that inform it. When in reality the reader sees this pairing not in isolation, as a category pair in a context but rather as categories-in-context. So it can be seen in certain examples that the 'character appears on cue' variant is an inadequate concept.

In many cases I have demonstrated the need to go beyond the simplistic examples of a cop arresting a person for speeding and the mommy picking up the crying baby. In reality members' interpretation of airliner crash reports relies heavily on the concept being far more complex than Sacks' early lectures describe. In these examples we see a category working to activate meanings for other categories allowing the reader to see them both as appearing on cue as each mutually elaborates and constitutes the other. As Sacks broke down the rule into what could be described as 'Cue → Character Appears' I would argue that this is an over simplification if we are to fully understand how members find that a character rightly belongs to the device 'parties to an airliner crash'.

### **Routinising the Unexpected:**

This chapter deals with several key elements. Firstly how the unexpected and sudden occurrence of an airliner crash is made available to the reader in mundane terms. That is to say what resources do the reports offer the reader in order that he or she might resolve the question “Why did this happen?” Secondly it considers the role of the commentator. By this I mean the role of the eyewitness and the professional. (‘Aviation experts’ for example). It is worth addressing how these categories are used and to what purpose the reader might utilise their appearance as a resource for making sense of the account. In this sense the news report is as much an organisation of facts to resolve disputes pertaining to ‘what really happened’ (See Benson and Drew 1978).

### **Bringing the unaccountable to account:**

In essence the airliner crash report is somewhat problematic for the reader, at this stage of events any explanation for the event is mere speculation. As members we are aware that although airliners do crash, this does not happen often and recognising this, reports frequently attempt to offer the most likely explanations. The question therefore is how might members explicate the given resources to find that the unaccountable (at this stage at least) can be brought to account not by providing a definitive reason for the crash, but providing a set of real world options each of which allow the event to be routinised and reflexively constituted in mundane terms.

Although we as members do not know the reason for the crash, we can reasonably speculate as to the possibilities, terrorism, bad weather or mechanical failure. Each of the reports presents a series of mutually exclusive options that help construct a framework of mundane ‘knowables’ given the proximity of the reports to

the actual event there is no certainty regarding the cause of the crash. However each text provides the reader with a number of resources to constitute possibilities. Paradoxically it is the organisational equivocality of the text that reflexively routinises the unexpected. The options given to us within the text are, for the most part, mutually exclusive and similarly there are no determinate ways of resolving these choices. Yet as members we are aware that the organisational particulars of the texts go some way to accounting for the crash. No doubt the majority of members will be aware of the possible causes for an airliner crash such as were mentioned above. The structure of the report encapsulates both the confusion over the cause of the incident but also the mundane and logical certainty that an explanation can be formulated as a routine accomplishment.

Members' methods for accounting for an airliner crash are firmly embedded in an apparatus available in the text which might be described as the 'formal characterisation and assessment of possible scenarios', a distinct feature which can fall under the rubric of 'recognisable features of an airliner crash story'. This understanding falls into three sections. For the reader these categories are inseparable, he or she does not follow a three stage plan to understand reasons for a crash rather they view these aspects as part of a whole. However for the purposes of analysis I feel the need to draw some distinction between them and hopefully mesh them together at the end. The three aspects are; the basic facts and comments provided by the journalist, the opinions of the professional commentator and the role of the witness. All of these build towards a stock of resources and categorially informed information that might allow the reader to understand the reasons for a crash.



Separate from the views of professional commentators and eyewitness accounts the texts often provide a formal characterisation of possible scenarios usually accompanied by an assessment of their likelihoods.

“There was no immediate indication of what caused the crash, which took place in clear weather less than an hour’s flight time from London.

“There were no mayday signals,” a Pan Am vice president Jeff Kriendler, told reporters in New York. The plane had left London’s Heathrow Airport at 6:25p.m. local time (1:25 p.m. EST) and the last contact with the crew was at 7:15 p.m., when the plane was cruising at 31,000 feet, Kriendler said. He added the plane was ‘precisely on course’ when it disappeared from radar screens.”

(Washington Post 22/12/88 :17)

This is a simple example of how inferences can be accomplished using our stock of common sense knowledge. An awareness of bad weather being part of the device ‘reasons for an airliner crash’ allows us to understand the reference above as part of the process of characterising the possible scenarios. There is no need to explicitly state that although one of the reasons for a crash is bad weather, this is not applicable in this case. This is a clear resource for routinising the unexpected by addressing the known reasons and assessing the likelihood that this is the cause, this quote might be repackaged as “although there was no immediate indication of what caused the crash we can reasonably discount bad weather or overly long flight time as a factor”. Again although one cannot speculate as to whether the journalist intended this or indeed whether all members may interpret this in such a fashion, nonetheless it is a resource for members’ sense making processes. It seems that this is a formal

characteristic of airliner crash reports; the locational configurations of cause followed by assessment provide the apparatus for bringing the crash to account.

There are examples of this apparatus throughout the data:

“The airline yesterday ruled out a terrorist atrocity, and said it had no intention of withdrawing similar planes from its fleet. The model had an exemplary safety record, and this plane had recently been refitted.

George Schordet, the chief financial officer of parent company SAirGroup, said the aircraft was overhauled in August and September last year, and had been checked before take-off. ‘This airplane was in perfect working order,’ he said.”

(Guardian/Observer Archive 04/09/98 :8)

Again such statements rely strongly on the assumption of certain ‘knowables’ regarding why airliners crash. It explicitly discounts terrorism as a factor yet the statement regarding the safety record and the recent refitting allows us to find that mechanical failure was unlikely. Again it is the relational configurations of topicalised mundane knowledge and the properties of the relevant social context that constitutes the text as an intelligible account. Therefore the basic foundations for routinising the unexpected turn on a sequentially ordered process of non-personal categories subsumed by the locally available device ‘reasons for an airliner crash’. If members can locate the organised particulars of a text as belonging to this category they can find that references may constitute a likely or unlikely reason for the crash. The unexpected is formally characterised as both routine and mundane by dint of the fact that it can be explained to any given extent using the above device. The below extract gives a comprehensive analysis of the factors present in this device, it is this structural

organisation of such categories that reflexively constitute the mundane nature of the crash:

“There were no indications that the Egyptair plane had been sabotaged and no claims of responsibility by terrorists, American and Egyptian officials said, although the Federal Aviation Administration had warned airlines a month ago of a threat to bomb an unspecified flight out of Los Angeles or New York. Egyptair Flight 990 had originated in Los Angeles on Saturday.

Weather conditions did not appear to be a factor. Fog had shrouded Kennedy airport at the time of takeoff and through much of the day Sunday, but there were no storms in the vicinity of the crash, winds were light and visibility as 10 miles or more, meteorologists said.

It was equally unclear whether some mechanical failure on the 10 year old jet, which had no history of serious problems, or human error had contributed to the disaster, which ranked with a score of crashes as among the worst in aviation history.”

(New York Times 01/11/99 :2a)

In effect reports such as this offer the reader a respecification of the event. The sudden and unexpected nature of an airliner crashing is repackaged and restructured as operating within a set of boundaries and possibilities that can be constructed in terms of a mundane framework of socially available particulars.



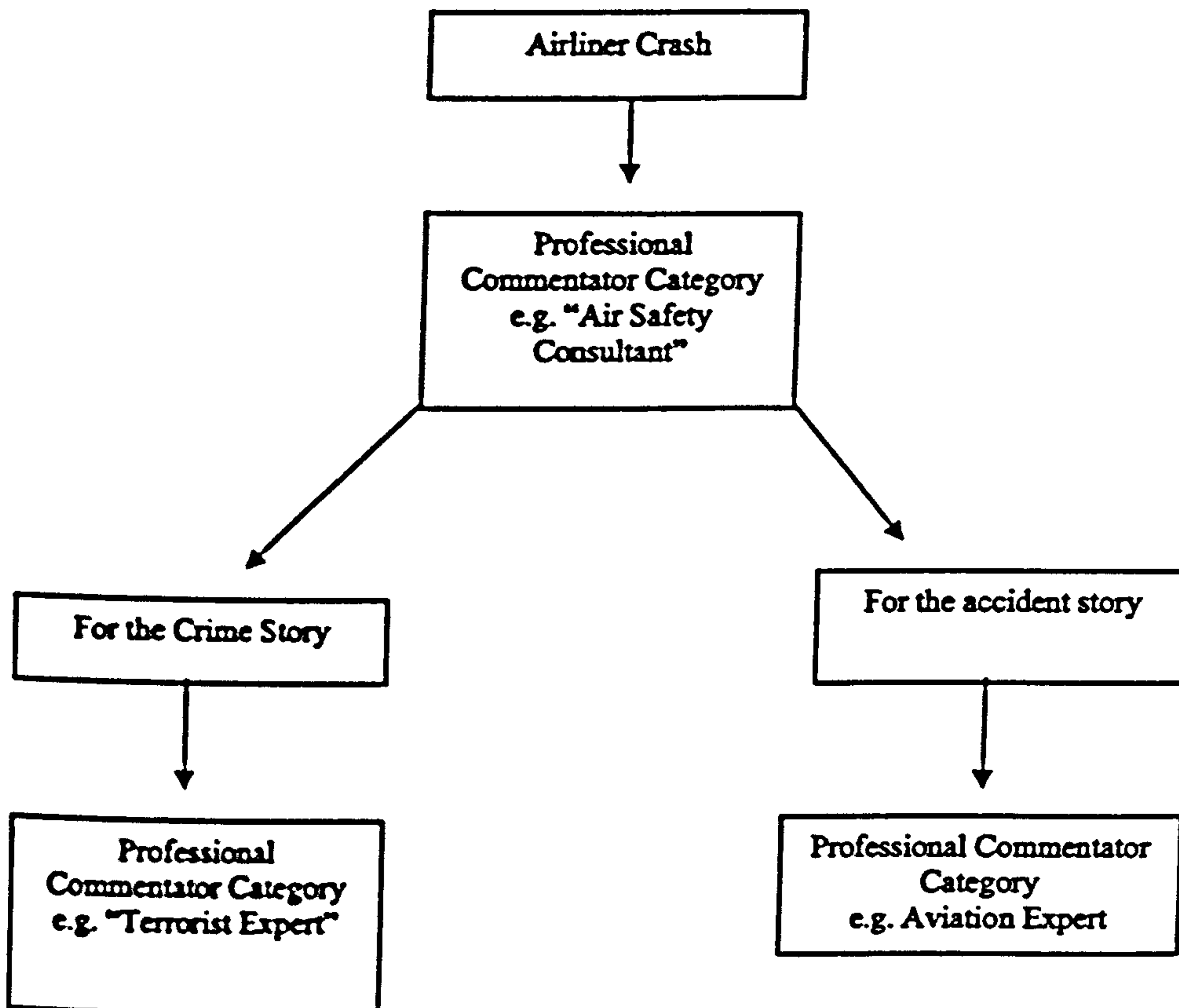
## **The 'Professional Commentator' and the 'Eyewitness':**

This addresses several significant issues under the rubric of the 'role of the professional commentator' and the 'eyewitness' in airliner crash reports. Firstly it examines the significance of categorical entitlement to speculate, and how the category of professional is used to formulate the incident. Secondly how certain categories may be used to collect the action, or rather to determine exactly what kind of story this is; is it a crime story or a story of an accident? Thirdly how members work to find that the comments, opinions and quotes of such categories are warrantable claims and what consequences this has for the perception of the incident.

The data considered features commentary in the form of direct quotes and paraphrased comments from a variety of categories from the device 'professional commentator'. Such sources include "an expert on terrorism ", "an air safety consultant", members of the "Federal Aviation Administration", "Federal Officials", "a former investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board" and others which shall be examined later. The categorial relevance for such characters is provided for by the context as are the categorially bound nature of their comments and speculation. Before considering the points mentioned above I would like to examine the formal organisation of the appearance of categories from the device 'professional commentators on an airliner crash'. This is significant for two reasons. Firstly the structural particulars of the text are highly dependent on how the story is formulated; this formulation is achieved in part through the appearance of specific categories. Secondly the incident is, to a large extent, reflexively characterised by this

organisation of the professional commentator category and thus provides an important resource for members' interpretative procedures.

I believe the organisation of these categories can be formally characterised in terms of predicate considerations pertaining to the particulars of the given context. In many respects the appearance of such categories as 'Terrorist expert' or 'Air safety consultant' operates in a similar fashion to the 'context-category-predicate' chain discussed previously in that they conform to specific relational and contextual configurations providing a resource apparatus for members. The organisation of the categories closely resembles a flow chart:



The data examined often follows this formal organisation. As such this configuration is as much a resource for the reader as the presence of the categories themselves. The context of the airliner crash makes relevant the appearance of professional commentator categories that may be part of device 'parties to an intentional airliner crash' or 'parties to an accidental airliner crash' although frequently there is considerable overlap. Similarly the story may follow one or both of the above routes introducing categories from either device. Essentially the unexpected event is formally structured and routinised by the organisation of categorial relevances. Eyewitness accounts seem to be more loosely distributed throughout the data. They seem to have no formal structural relevancies other than that their appearance is provided for by the fact that they were present and as such have what Sacks' termed 'entitlement to experience.' (Sacks 1992b:242) That is to say the professional commentator category appears to have a specific locational configuration whereas the eyewitness category does not.



## **Categorical Entitlements and the Warrantability of Claims:**

The categories of eyewitness and professional commentator are perceived to have advanced access to the specificities of the incident being reported, just as importantly their claims are seen as warrantable. How is this so, what apparatus is available to members to deconstruct the warrantability of a claim? This is comparable to the notion of 'owning knowledge' discussed by Sharrock (1974:375). This perception is constructed as a product of the inferences one can draw from such categories. Again we return to the MIR device (Sacks 1992a), if the reader can find that a person or persons belong to the categories of 'eyewitness' or professional commentator then certain inferences can be made. On its most basic level, the eyewitness saw the crash, we did not. The professional commentator has dealt with the causes of many air crashes, we have not. Therefore one might argue that one aspect of the warrantability of claims is achieved through an analysis of the perceived differences between incumbents of certain categories and us the reader. The two categories so vital to airliner crash reports share a common entitlement; that is to comment on the crash. Although the nature of the comments differ (entitlement to experience and entitlement to speculate) and in turn are strictly regulated as to what they consist of, nonetheless the very category itself provides the first key aspect to finding that a claim is warrantable. By regulated carefully I refer to Sacks comments in his lecture "Storyteller as witness; Entitlement to Experience" by which he states that such entitlements are differentially available:

"At least the blandest kind of formulation we might make, then, is that while lots of people figure that experience is a great thing, and apparently at least some people are eager to have experiences, they are extraordinarily carefully regulated sorts of things. The occasions of entitlement to have them are

carefully regulated, and then the experience you're entitled to have on an occasion you're entitled to have one is further carefully regulated."

(Sacks 1972b:242)

In the case of airliner crashes the entitlements available to the categories of eyewitness and professional commentator are regulated and this differential availability of the two entitlements (to experience and to speculate) is constitutive of the significance of the presence of the categories themselves. It is these restrictions as part of the mundane 'knowables' of members categorial analysis which in turn acts as a resource for finding that a claim is warrantable and subsequently acts as a tool for such members to successfully participate in the activity of claiming a self awareness of such entitlement restrictions.

Such regulation is noticeable simply in the ordered structure of the reports. It is self evident that characters adhere to the entitlements their categories afford them. The eyewitness can claim such an experience and can claim a right to relay that experience to others, similarly this claim can be seen as legitimately belonging to this category. Whilst he or she could in theory speculate as to the cause of the crash, their categorial predicates do not include the kind of knowledge that could make this claim warrantable. The category of eyewitness allows the incumbent to be seen as partaking in the activity of claiming ownership of the problem or event. It is their experience, they have a right to share this experience and it is not available to any other members who are not of the category eyewitness to an airliner crash in the same way. Similarly the category of professional commentator infers and entitlement to speculate as to the cause. However he or she has no entitlement to experience.



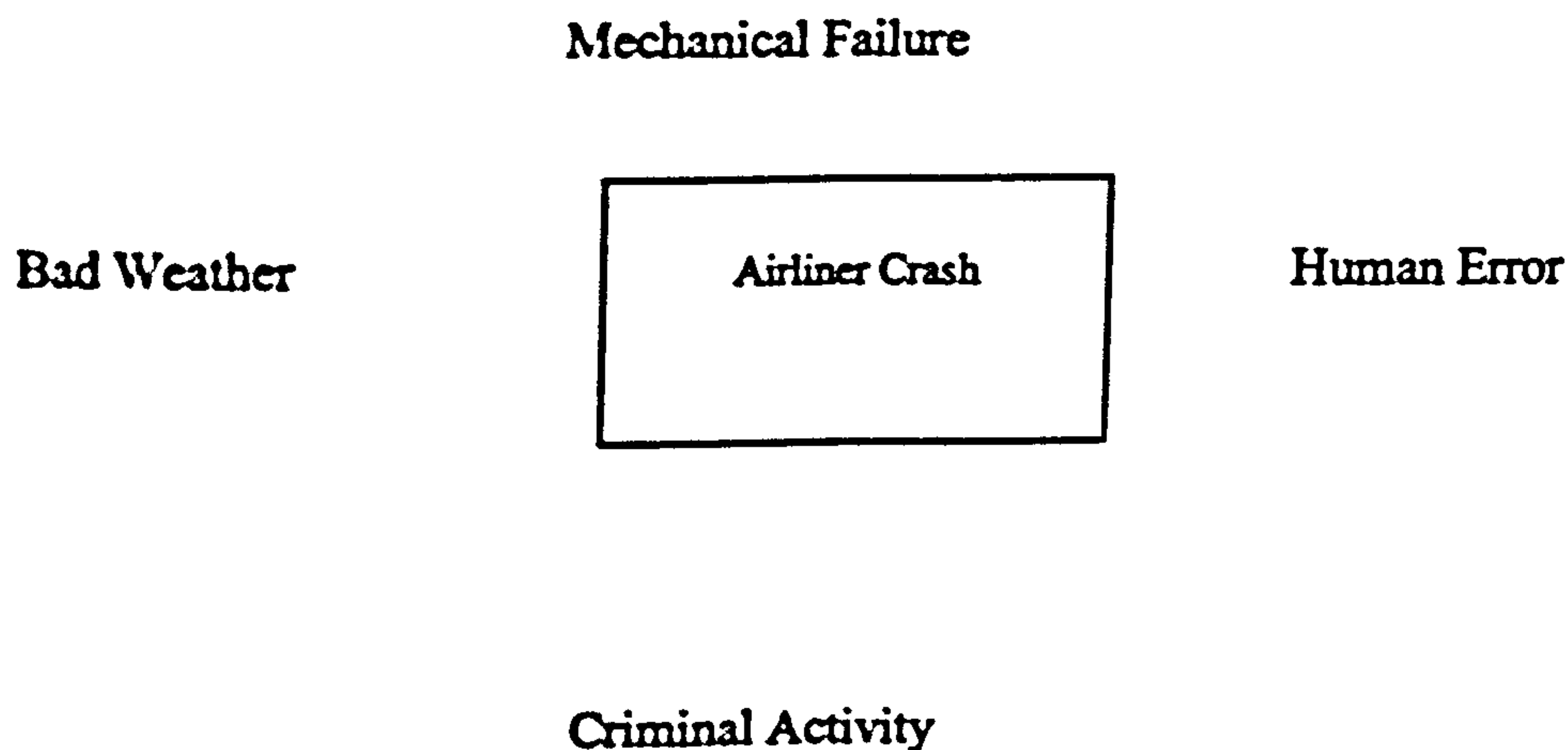
One can deconstruct this aspect of finding warrantability to a claim and categorial entitlements and its regulations by formulating a two tier apparatus. Essentially the categories of eyewitness and professional commentator are involved in routinising the unexpected. Their comments act as resources for collecting the action, thus the unexpected is routinised through constraining the event within a known set of boundaries. The crash reports I studied can be said to have a specific discursive logic and one can respecify the routinising of the event as a tri-logical debate structured around the categories of the journalist, the eyewitness and the professional commentator. Therefore members' can employ known categorial predicates and devices in order to find that eyewitnesses may claim ownership to the problem, i.e. they witnessed the crash, and professional commentators can claim ownership to the solution i.e. they may be experts in aviation. Thus the two tier apparatus is organised around the devices 'Parties not specifically present for the event on which they are commenting' (the accidental eyewitness) and 'Parties specifically present for the event on which they are commenting'. (The professional commentator) Both of course subsumed by the larger device "parties to an airliner crash" but each very different.

The membership to these devices dictates to a large extent whether the reader has the resources to find warrantability for a claim. Members of the former device are naturally restricted to entitlements to experience, the devices and categories within it infer no specific expertise regarding airliner crashes. Their course of action characterisation frequently involves a chance presence at the scene. Similarly members of the second device cannot make warrantable claims to have experienced the event as their course of action characterisation dictates that their presence is as a



result of the crash. This in turn infers that they may fulfil one of the resolution categories inferring entitlement to speculate. As mentioned there is a clear thematic cohesion to this ordering of the reports in the presentation of categorial ownership of the problem and thus logically the solution. As such each report formulates the crash using these key categories, essentially perhaps, as without them one might question the warrantability of the claims of the journalist.

Both categories can be said to be part of the wider rubric of 'doing a solution' or routinising the unexpected. Their comments and claims can be employed as resources in the construction of a solution, or as mentioned collecting the action. (Hester and Eglin 1999) This formal characterisation of the action can be respecified as more than a simple description of the facts. Rather it can be perceived as an exercise in restriction, the unexpected is ordered within known and understood pre-configured boundaries. The unexpected becomes formally characterised using the mundane:



In this instance the unexpected event, the airliner crashing, is routinised by its being restricted within the boundaries of the known causes of such an event. Readers can find that this is accomplished by the categories of the eyewitness and the professional commentator both collecting the action and providing a logical and thematically coherent narrative.

## **Finding that a claim is warrantable – The course-of-action characterisation:**

In this section I shall examine how warrantability can be found using what Sacks termed the 'course of action characterisation', a reference to be found in his lectures on storytelling. (Sacks 1992b:242) It is my argument that the course of action characterisation plays a significant role in members' sense making processes. The previous points regarding collecting the action and routinising the unexpected are founded on the untenable assumption that the claims of the two categories, eyewitness and professional commentator, can be found as warrantable. If not then the very structural characteristics and narrative coherence of the text as an understandable social phenomena are meaningless. Therefore I would argue that one must explicate some formal apparatus that may be found by social members as a means of finding that a claim is warrantable.

"The initial observation I want to make is that in using the fact that she was a witness, for the telling of the story, she employs a way of identifying herself which articulates two types of organisation involved in the story: the course of action characterisation organisation that bounds the story, and the story of a wreck. That is to say the 'witness' identity relates those two things. It's by virtue of that, that the course of action gets into the story, and that the story is tellable as something seen. Notice that 'witness' could be contrasted with 'reporter', where the reporter of a proposed news story would present it without the use of a course-of-action characterisation as to how he comes to tell it"

(Sacks 1992b:242)

For my work this is a simple observation that in all the reports characters such as the witness were not simply thrown into the fray as it were. Although one needs no course of action characterisation as to how the journalist comes to be telling the story, we need legitimation for seemingly unaffiliated characters to start making



observations on the incident. The course of action characterisation differs slightly in news reports to the examples Sacks' uses:

A: Say did you see anything in the paper last night or hear anything on the local radio, Ruth Henderson and I drove to Ventura yesterday,

B: Mm hm

A: And on the way home we saw the: : most gosh awful wreck.

(Sacks 1992b:229)

As a preface to her story or statement speaker A offers the course of action characterisation "Ruth Henderson and I drove to Ventura yesterday...", the course of action that leads them to be telling this story and legitimises their entitlement to experience and their claim to be a member of the category 'eye-witness'. In a sense the news report is an odd phenomenon as unlike conversation the organisation of the text is specifically set and known, we may reasonably assume that all characters, categories, devices and words have been deliberately co-selected and ordered to provide a coherent and temporally accurate narrative which formulates a description of an event or events. Thus we also assume that we will not be encountering claims that are not warrantable. Nonetheless this does not negate the need for course of action warrantability characterisation; their very presence reflexively formulates the structural recognisability and coherence of the report. As before the resources available to members for finding that a claim is warrantable differs between the claims of the eyewitness and that of the professional commentator.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For an alternative discussion of the 'eyewitness' see Darley and Latané 1968a; 1968b.

Reading any given report and the comments of those people whom we can see to be incumbents of categories who might have an interest or reason to comment is not problematic. However this is not to say that categorial claims in news reports are to be taken lightly. There is a very specific set of rules as to just who can say this or speculate about that. The occasions of warrantability to a claim, a view or opinion are very carefully regulated. Therefore the warrantability of claims is differentially available:

**"By the the flight had reached its cruising altitude of 31,000 feet and was "precisely on its flight plan to John F. Kennedy International Airport," Kriendler said.**

**Two minutes later – 7.17 p.m – it disappeared from the Scottish center's radar screens.**

**There were no distress calls, "no indications of any problems,... no contact from the captain or any of the crew members," Kriendler said.**

**Air Safety consultant Wayne Williams of Plantation said that when an aircraft comes apart at 31,000 feet, as this one apparently did, the speculation centres on three possibilities: structural failure, a bomb or explosion of some sort, or a midair collision.**

**Since there were no indications of a midair collision, speculation was sure to center on the first two options, said Williams, 61."**

**(Miami Herald 22/12/88 :14)**

There are several things one can notice about this extract. The reflexive nature of the presence of the professional commentator is paramount. Firstly the category of "Air Safety Consultant" is contextually bound to "an airliner crash report". Secondly the resource category in conjunction with the apparatus described by Sacks

(1992a:40) for the MIR device allows the reader to construct that not only that his or her comments are categorially and contextually bound (and indeed relevant) but this in turn contributes their claim being perceived as warranted. Members are aware of a map of entitlements or rather the social distribution of what comments or opinions are made available to incumbents of any given category. Thus for example we could find that although an eyewitness has available to him or her the entitlement to experience and indeed to relay this experience, their category does not allow them to make perceivably warrantable claims (in terms of categorially or occupationally provided for expertise) as to the cause of the crash. Similarly this categorial entitlement to make such comments is very carefully regulated. Members are acutely aware of what categories belong to the device "professional commentator" and if no categorial relevances can be found then entitlement to comment is not available. '

"Federal Law enforcement officials said Wednesday night that preliminary reports of an explosion over water had raised the possibility of terrorism, which would give the FBI jurisdiction over the investigation into the cause of the blast.

But the officials cautioned that they had no definitive evidence suggesting what caused the downing of the plane and said that it would probably be many hours before they got a clear fix on what happened. One federal official, however, said "It doesn't look good," meaning that circumstances seemed to point to a terrorist act.

Ira Furman, a former investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board, said that one must be careful about early reports of explosions. "We have found reports of explosions unreliable," he said. "I can suggest that sometimes an explosion is really connected with a flameout, like a backfire in a car."



But Larry Johnson, an expert on terrorism, told CNN: "In my experience with Pan Am 103, mid-air fireballs occur only when explosives are on board." He said the TWA explosion was probably bigger than that of Pan Am 103, which exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988."

(News Observer 18/07/96 :5)

From this extract it is possible to explicate two resources from the category used. Firstly that the characters are on cue, given the context the categories of 'Federal Official', 'Former investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board' and 'expert on terrorism' their presence need not be provided for. But secondly that the category to which the latter two belong can be located within the device "professional commentator" of which finding warrantability for a claim in this context is of paramount importance; thus category and a comment on the cause of the crash can be seen as being a logical and indeed warranted co-selection. It is members' knowledge of the differential availability of such entitlements, be they to explain an airliner crash or simply to relay an experience that allows the unaccountable to be brought to account.

As a consequence members have this resource for making sense of the crash. As mentioned, the unexpected is routinised through the formal characterisation of causes of the crash and this is subsequently achieved through the organisation of resolution categories as constitutive of the structure of the text itself. To take a step back, the apparatus for finding such organisational relevances is dependent on having the available resources to find that speculation or reliable comment is an entitlement rightly available to a given category. The structural qualities of a text allow the common sense location of any category to be found within the devices "professional commentator" or "eyewitness" as a constitutive resource for making sense of the

unexpected. Thus members use two key resources to find that the claims of certain members are warrantable, both being dependent on their categorial membership. The course of action characterisation in this sense is the contextually bound categorial membership of the person making the claim.

The claims of the characters being incumbents of the category "eyewitness" can be unpacked in a different fashion. Although any given or known social context provides for the possibility that there may be a witness to it, nonetheless the context does not explicitly provide warrantability to the claims of members who cannot be perceived as having any contextually bound categorial membership which might constitute a context course of action characterisation. Instead for the characters with no professional expertise they must be characterised in such a way that reader's can find them to be members of the category 'eyewitness':

"It looked like a flare at first, like somebody's May Day flare, and then, boom, it went up," said Tom Kennedy, who was tying up his boat not far from where the crash occurred. Interviewed on WABC-TV, Kennedy said, "It looked like a Christmas tree on fire going down into the water."

Other witnesses spoke of a light dropping swiftly from the sky and then either one or two bursts of flame and an enormous black cloud. As the plane spiralled hurriedly toward the water, they said they saw two pieces peel off.

"There were two explosions, bright red up in the air," said John Keshal, who lives right a long the shore in Center Moriches, near the inlet. "There was a lot of flames and redness in the air, and a lot of smoke, a lot of smoke."

He said he didn't actually see anything resembling an airplane, but "two separate red areas coming out of the sky."

Jackie Marlowe, who lives in East Moriches and had been fishing in Moriches Inlet, said: "There was a great fire, like a fireball. Eventually the plane just spread apart, and there was a loud thump. I felt the tremor when it hit the water."



Debbie Walsh, who was in a restaurant within view of the crash, said, 'It looked like a ball of fire falling into the water. It was a ball of fire and then the plane trailed down and seemed to break into two pieces.' She added, "It was trails of flame going down into the water."

(News Story Archive 18/06/96 :5)

"There was a terrible explosion, and the whole sky lit up, and the sky was actually raining fire,' said Mike Carnahan, a Lockerbie resident who was a few hundred yards from the scene.

"It was just like liquid. We have actually found an aluminium rivet embedded in the metal of my car," Carnahan told BBC Television.

Carnahan said he believed the plane was on fire before it crashed because "it was trailing flames when it went over the village."

"The way it exploded was just beyond description," he said. "All you could see was flames and fire... I could see several houses on the skyline whose roofs were totally off and all you could see was flaming timbers and what was left of the houses."

(Miami Herald 22/12/88 :14)

"It's something I never thought I'd see in my life; it's something I never, ever want to see again," one unidentified fisherman told reporters."

(The London Times 04/09/98 :10)

These are three examples of the course of action characterisation. The first extract gives four examples of the witness course of action characterisation, they are witnesses whose claims are warrantable by an observable locational proximity to the incident, in a similar way to Sacks' (1992b) example, providing a clear course of action as to how the person came to directly witness the event regarding which he or she is making a claim and giving them to right to 'own' that story, not the story of the airliner crash per se, but the story that they witnessed it, that they were there, an entitlement to experience. The final example is slightly different although it may still



be characterised as an extension of his concept. In this instance the course of action is formulated by the use of a specific category, in this case “fisherman” that provides a resource for the reader to find that he might have witnessed the airliner crash. It is here that members may employ prior knowledge of categories and category bound activities to understand the emplotment of the news story. As with the ‘professional commentator’ this is inexorably linked to the known context, that of an airliner crashing into the sea, and the subsequently relevant category. Thus the course of action need not simply be a rationalisation of how that person came to be classified as an eyewitness; rather it can depend on the reader finding that a given category might be contextually bound, directly or indirectly, to the incident on which he or she is commenting.

Members may use both these examples to find that a claim is warrantable. In a sense it is a matter of confirming that the person or persons do indeed have an entitlement to that experience, that their claim is warrantable because of the category they gain membership to by dint of their course of action or their pre-existing categorial memberships which in themselves may serve to infer a course of action, e.g. the pre-existing category of ‘fisherman’ infers the activity of fishing, being a predicate of the given category. Again as before this aspect of finding that a claim is warrantable is dependent on members’ awareness of such pre-configured boundaries of contextual relevances.

With the claims of both the professional commentator and the eyewitness the resources available to find warrantability includes then; the context, the course of action characterisation and the category of the claimant. However it would be

inaccurate to theorise that having found contextual relevance to a given category or indeed a reasonable course of action characterisation, that the reader would subsequently find any claim to be warrantable on the basis of these prior stipulations. Rather these elements to the process are separable only for the sake of analysis. Essentially these factors, coupled with the claim itself, form part of a package of understanding that is seen as a whole rather than as constitutive parts. The warrantability of a claim can be assessed as much by the nature of the claim as by who made it but for the social member the two are seen as part of a whole. Although Lynch and Peyrot are describing the nature of context, it is equally applicable to say that finding whether a claim is warrantable relies on our perception of;

“.... ‘a reflexively’ constituted relationship between singular actions and the relevant specifications of identity, place, time and meaning implicated by the intelligibility of those actions.”

(Lynch and Peyrot in Hester and Eglin 1997:27)

The point to be argued here is that to classify warrantability of claims as being reliant on the categorial membership of the claimant is an over simplification. Rather it is the pre-existing boundaries of categorial and contextual relevance coupled with the claim itself.

The natural progression from this assertion is a return to the regulation of categorial entitlements mentioned in the previous section pertaining to routinising the unexpected. This examined how such regulations related to experiences and speculation. However I would argue that these entitlements are regulated further still and that this secondary aspect is a fundamental resource in finding a warrantable claim. It is the specific nature of the course of action categorisation which serves as a

resource to both determine and regulate categorial entitlements. The course of action infers either ownership of an experience and thus entitlement to relay that experience or ownership of a possible solution and thus entitlement to deduce cause.

The apparatus whereby the course of action can be explicated from the text serves three purposes for the reader, it provide for the presence of the person or persons, provides warrantability for their claims, and provides for and regulates the entitlements. The course of action for the professional commentator which is constituted by the specific category being bound to this context dictates that their presence entitles them only to speculate or offer professional comment on possible causes. Thus if such a claim can be found associated with a category belonging to the device professional commentator than the claim can be found to be warrantable. Similarly the course of action for the eyewitness, as demonstrated in the above quotes, dictates that their presence was accidental inferring no specialist knowledge of the crash but determining that they witnessed the incident and are justified in relaying that experience. Therefore we can see that the course of action apparatus the claims of any given category present in the text and it is our knowledge of such constraints that contributes to our assessment of whether the claim might be warrantable.

The category of eyewitness binds incumbents to a collection of courses of action which might be loosely termed “just happened to be present” or more sensically “aren’t there specifically for the event on which they are commenting”. This assessment of categorial status is explicitly formulated in such accounts as “Debbie Walsh, who was in a restaurant within view of the crash...”. This directly infers that she was present for a meal, rather than the crash, thus restricting her claims



to 'entitlement to experience'. It is this formal characterisation of categories which provides the resource. For the professional commentator their very categorial membership and its contextual bindings formulates that they belong to the collection of courses of action which one could term "specifically there for the event on which they are commenting" which infers ownership of a possible solution or specialist knowledge but temporal logic dictates that they have no entitlement to experience.

As a consequence members have numerous resources for making sense of the crash. As mentioned, the unexpected is routinised through the formal characterisation of causes of the crash and this is subsequently achieved through the organisation of resolution categories as constitutive of the structure of the text itself. However to take a step back, the apparatus for finding such organisational relevances is dependent on having the available resources to find that speculation or reliable comment is an entitlement rightly available to a given category. The structural qualities of a text allow the common sense location of any category to be found within the devices "professional commentator" or "eyewitness" as a constitutive resource for making sense of the unexpected.

The categorial entitlements of the category 'eyewitness' differ greatly to that of the professional commentator yet are still a significant aspect of the report. As demonstrated the locational configurations of the professional commentator category can be said to have common organisational features. These are in themselves a resource for the reader. However the experiences and comments of the category 'eyewitness' do not seem to possess any specific locational properties in regards to the structural particulars of the text. Regardless the category is still bound to the

contextual relevances of such reports and as such may be explicated as a formal characteristic of a disaster report for my data.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed what might be considered the organisational properties of the airliner crash report. More specifically although with no intention to explicate structural properties in the generic sense, it has respecified such examples of news texts as gestalt phenomena. The formal aspects of such reporting in regards to characters, narrative style and the distributionalising of recurrent features demonstrates the significance of Garfinkel's (1967) 'documentary method of interpretation', the inherent indexicality of language and most significantly perhaps the demonstrably situated invocation of 'presumed common-sense knowledge of social structures (Hester and Eglin 1997:3).



## **Chapter Six:**

# **Embedded Commentaries, News as Narrative**

## **Introduction**

In each of the cases I have examined the reports are constructed around a number of common elements or story aspects. It would be reasonable to argue that airliner crash reports are built around a number of categorially themed aspects that constitute the story for what it accountably is and each of these elements are reflexively constitutive of the main story itself. As I have mentioned no news report is an objective account of the events and facts. Quite aside from the fact that such reporting would be difficult if not impossible it would not make interesting reading. Thus when I talk of the elements of a story I do not refer to the fact that an airliner has crashed, without explanation, that people were killed or that some survived as these are self-evident features. Rather I refer to descriptive elements often referred to either explicitly in the reports or by means of categorial inference such as 'Horror', 'Tragedy' or the 'search for truth'. The moral actors in news reporting are most often identified through categories and category bound activities and this in turn imbues news reportage with what might be termed the 'human interest' angle. This analysis is informed by Hester and Eglin's (1999) case study of the 'Montreal Massacre' and their description of such elements as 'embedded commentaries.' Embedded commentaries in this sense are category generated 'sub-stories', or stories within the story.

The aspects chosen for analysis in this chapter are 'horror' and 'tragedy'. Whilst these might seem two subjective labels for airliner crash reporting they have been chosen because such elements are alluded to in the data I have studied either explicitly or through the use of descriptors. Thus these conceptualisations of recurrent themes are practical collections of formal organisational features. They

would be most noticeable by their absence and can be respecified as constructed relevances through membership categorisation analysis. This also links back to the construction of relevance and the construction of a solution. It might become evident that all airliner crash reports employ these universal elements as part of a wider process of routinising the unexpected or even as constituting a 'grammar' for reporting this kind of incident.

The nature of most news reports dictates that they are not recipient designed, at least to no specific degree, they are designed merely for the culturally competent reader. Although the writer of any article or editor of any newspaper will be aware to some extent of the character of his readership, news reports are designed to be accessible to the 'general public'. Thus it seems reasonable to argue that the elements of the stories I will be considering are not simply ones that have occurred to myself and no-one else. No journalist can assume that his or her readership will contain a population of peoples with identical beliefs systems or interpretative procedures and it is taken for granted that what they write will be understood. I am endeavouring to deconstruct natural intelligibility in a news report, where such unproblematic interpretation can be considered as reflexively both a feature and an outcome of methods not only dependent on but also constitutive of and evident in the text itself. In this respect it can be conceived of as being part of the wider rubric of all cultural and communicative analyses. This chapter therefore considers the conceptualisations of 'tragedy' and 'horror' as 'story-able' qualities of reportage of this kind.



## **Locating Horror**

**“So appalling, so horrific; Bodies, debris, anguish”**

**(USA Today 22/12/88)**

Of interest in this chapter is how the accountable occurrences of an ‘objective reality’ are reflexively tied to the interpretative elements of a subjective reality. Successful explication of the methods used to accomplish mundane social order relies on a consideration of what are considered the real facts of an airliner crash (i.e. that an airliner crashed) and how the social actor encounters them. Therefore the news text can be viewed as taking the objective world as a premise to construct a subjective (thought no less ‘real’) outcome. (See Jayyusi 1991) The repackaging of news events in subjective terms can be observed as recreating the details of the incident for the readership. Thus I would argue the sense of horror, as a conceptualisation for characterising the descriptors constituent of one of the recurrent themes employed in such media reportage as I have studied turns on the adequate and unproblematic reconstruction or recreation in category terms of the incident for the reader. Just as Sacks (1992b) discussed storytelling as reliant on ‘finding something for us’, news reporting relies on making the story available, that is to say empathetically possible, for the readership.

These elements of the story and their interpretation are as much a part of the narrative coherence of the story as any other feature. It is also reasonable to argue that they are a subjective real world account, a story within a story. Thus it is with all airliner crash reports, the first story is the airliner crash and the embedded commentary is available to those with the cultural resources to find it as such. All

aspects of such reports, be it horror, tragedy, a search for truth or justice are intersubjective realities constructed in and of the text itself, thus one must ask what methods and resources are available for this to be achieved?

As we have seen most reporting relies heavily on what is considered to be a commonly held stock of knowledge, a common sense understanding of categories, pairings, devices, predicates and who should and should not appear on cue. The social distribution of this commonly held knowledge seems to link quite strongly to what is perceived as the social distribution of acceptable practices or behaviours by members. Clearly this distribution can be mapped onto different membership categories thus allowing us to construct an understanding of what could be considered the “social integrity of everyday life” (Hester and Eglin 1999:205) Thus it is clear that the horror story is to be found in the recreation of the events for the reader, part of which is reliant on the observable disjuncture between what is conceived of as normal and what actually has occurred. This can take several forms each of which I will examine: events that are not on cue, characters that are not on cue, a breach of the social distribution of appropriate actions (or context inappropriate actions), breaches of expected pairings (not just of categories) or coupling of unexpected contexts/outcomes, the disjuncture between predicated outcomes and actual outcomes and breaches in the institutionalised expectables of mundane places and settings.

“A Pan AM jumbo jet bound for New York, with 258 people -- many of them, Christmas travellers -- crashed Wednesday night in a Scottish village, exploding in a huge fireball, destroying dozens of homes and spreading burning wreckage for 10 miles.

No survivors were found from the Boeing 747, according to John Boyd, the police chief for the area. Royal Air Force rescuers said the plane *“demolished two rows of houses. There are no survivors from those houses.”*

Flight 103 crashed in the heart of Lockerbie, a village 10 miles northeast of Dumfries in southern Scotland, about an hour after departing London’s Heathrow Airport.

Boyd said parts of the plane came down in six separate locations over a ten mile radius.”

(The Miami Herald 22/12/88 :14)

As mentioned the horror story is found initially due to the apparent disjuncture between what is expected of an airliner journey and what actually occurs. This is particularly noticeable in the course of action characterisation pair evident above from the take off in London and the crash an hour later in six separate locations. Again most significant here is the recreation of this event in mundane terms easily imaginable for the readership and the juxtaposition of the routine, taking off on holiday, with the mundane ‘rows of houses’ with the outcome. One could categorise an airliner crash as an event that is not on cue or indeed as part of a whole package of characters, predicates or outcomes that are not on cue given the expected result of an airliner journey, that is to say an uneventful trip. I believe the practical methods used to find horror in this story turn on the commonly understood coupling of events and their predicated outcomes and the ability of the member to found recognisability in the mundane, and horror in its juxtaposition with such descriptors as ‘fireball’, ‘destroying dozens of homes’ (with all that the word ‘home’ infers such as family, innocent victims etc.), burning wreckage’ and so on:



**“Witness John Glasgow said the aircraft hit a road, skidded for about 1,500 yards and then exploded.”**

**“The whole road was ablaze,” Glasgow said. “The road was completely covered with masonry, garden gates and apparently parts of the plane, but not very big parts.**

**“We tried to get near the plane but it was completely on fire...It went up in a fireball.”**

**(Miami Herald 22/12/88 :14)**

In finding ‘something for us’, finding categorial or contextual relevances through the mundane, the expected, the routine or the un-news worthy, we the readership establish a point from which to imagine or unproblematically recognise and react to their breaching by something not on cue.

The second aspect of the horror story is the repackaging in subjective terms the objective fact of an airliner crash. ‘Subjective’ descriptors are particularly effective at recreating the events in unproblematic ‘lay’ terms thus conveying a sense of the ‘horrific’.

**“An EgyptAir jetliner plunged suddenly and mysteriously, like a stricken bird, into the Atlantic Ocean south of this resort island early Sunday, killing all 217 people aboard and strewing the ink black sea, 270 feet deep, with their remains.**

**The plane, a Boeing 767, was Flight 990, which originated in Los Angeles and added fuel and passengers in New York on its way to Cairo. Its abrupt and rapid fall raised immediate questions about sabotage. The FBI and other intelligence agencies began investigations, but President Clinton and other Federal officials said there was no immediate evidence of foul play.**

**Searchers hunted the Atlantic for the fourth time in three years, seeking bodies and pieces of a plane lost at sea. The first time was after TWA Flight 800 went down off Long Island in July 1996, the second after Swissair Flight 111 crashed off Nova Scotia in September 1998, and the third after John F.Kennedy Jr., his wife and her sister were killed off Martha’s Vineyard last July”**

**(Los Angeles Times 01/11/99 :1)**

**“Federal Officials said radar sweeps at 12 second intervals showed that the aircraft fell from 33,000 feet to 19,100 feet – a drop of 13,900 feet – in 36 seconds, indicating that it was falling ‘like a rock,’ as one aviation expert put it. The rate of descent was more than 23,000 feet per minute, while a normal descent is 1,500 to 2,000 feet a minute.**

**(New York Times 01/11/99 :2a)**

**“Giuliani said at midafternoon that 16 families were in the hotel, with more expected as EgyptAir pledged to transport relatives within the United States and overseas to the scene.**

**“Some are shellshocked, some are angry,” said Rabbi Moses A Birnbaum who viewed the scene in a conference room where the families were gathered.**

**“There are at least four Muslim clerics. They are sitting with the families. They are trying to involve them in conversation.”**

**Some of the clerics read Muslim prayers.**

**A woman, supported by two men, made her way through a throng of reporters and cameramen. She wailed with grief and collapsed several times before entering the hotel.**

**Robert Kelly, the Port Authority’s director of aviation, said 185 families had been notified that they had relatives aboard the plane.”**

**(Los Angeles Times 01/11/99 :1)**

**In these extracts it the use of the descriptors ‘falling like a rock’, ‘plunged suddenly and mysteriously, like a stricken bird’ and ‘the ink black sea’ serve to repackage the objective in the subjective in order that the event is unproblematically recognisable and thematically consistent with the notion of the horrific. Particularly apparent is the use of the term ‘shellshocked’ with its connections to war. Notice that this is also prominent below:**

**“The scars in this village, both physical and emotional, were clear to see Thursday in daylight, after Pan Am Flight 103 fell from the sky Wednesday night.**

Eight bodies lay on a golf course, covered in tarpaulins and guarded by police, and the town hall became a makeshift morgue as fire-fighters recovered remains strewn about town. Children played beside twisted airplane wreckage. A long, deep trench was torn, like a black scar, along a row of houses. Other homes, drenched in flaming aviation fuel were gutted.

“It is beyond one’s comprehension,” murmured Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who toured Lockerbie. “It is beyond one’s imagination... You have to come here to see it and to realize.” Residents recalled whooshing noises and tremendous flames as the stricken Boeing 747 jumbo jet roared low overhead, spewing pieces over the rolling countryside and finally crashing in fragments across their streets and house.”

(The Charlotte Observer 23/12/88 :12)

Again the horrific elements of the story work on two levels. The formulation of aspects of the reportage in highly subjective terms often being analogous such as the ‘scars in this village’ and later the ‘deep trench’ like a ‘black scar’. Secondly and more significantly I would argue the sense of horror is constructed around the detailed and descriptive recreation of events evident in the final four lines of the extract, ‘roared low overhead’, ‘spewing pieces’, ‘crashing in fragments across their streets and houses’. Particularly significant for the reader are the final words in which they can find something mundane, routine and more specifically something they can identify with, destroyed. Thus this sense of the horrific relies on empathy, on the reader finding the mundane in the extraordinary:

“Although searchers started with high hopes – there were initial, false reports of survivors in the water – they were faced instead with horrifying examples of devastation: floating bodies and body parts, shoes, wallets, eyeglasses, purses, bits of luggage. A Canadian Broadcasting Corp. reporter who rode a boat into the debris field told of spotting a love letter with the phrase, “see you soon.”

Few of those who participated in the overnight search wanted to talk about it Thursday.”

(The London Times 04/09/98 :10)



In this respect it may seem possible to expand Sacks' (1992a; 1992b) idea of the standardised relational pair to include events or contexts rather than just categories or their predicates (see also Coulter 1971). In the case of airliner crash reports therefore if the first half of a pair can be said to be 'start of airliner journey' (a pair within the device 'travelling') then the second part could accurately be stated to 'end of airliner journey'. Although one might state that an airliner crash still falls within the description 'end of airliner journey' it is not commonly understood in this way. Thus we may see acceptable variations in the first half of the pair as starting the journey from different locations and the second half as landing at perhaps different airports. However members' practical reasoning does not include 'airliner crash' within the expected variants of 'end of airliner journey'. This I would argue is a key disjuncture in finding the horror story. If the second half of the 'premise-outcome' pairing does not fall within the expected variants then the embedded commentary can be constructed. By its very nature the first half of the pairing must not be altered. Thus if both parts of the pairing were to be altered (yet still within the device 'travelling') the embedded commentary might be different. The sense of horror can be located through the disjuncture between the initial pair half being as it is the expectedly mundane occurrence of starting an airliner journey and the second half being as it is the rupturing of this mundane course of action pair.

This idea of what may be considered a commonly understood map of acceptable variations for any context, any category, any device or any predicate is closely linked to Hester and Eglin's commentary on the sense of horror in the news reporting following the Montreal massacre.

“...this breach of the bodily and social integrity of everyday life incarnate in the categorical organisation made available in the institutionalised setting of a mundane place”

(Hester and Eglin 1999:205)

Thus with airliner crash reports the sense of horror can be found in the disruption to the categorially and contextually routine frameworks of any given mundane setting, in this case an airliner journey. The very nature of such a contextual setting, being reflexively tied to all the components that make it recognisable as such allow the story of horror to be found not in its violation but in the recreation of this violation in the news reportage. The juxtaposition between what we as readers know to be typical of the device parties to an airliner journey or contextual expectables of such an setting and what is read to have happened provide any member with the practical resources to locate a sense of horror through the recreated events. The institutionalised settings of the airliner provide for the descriptor ‘airliner journey’ to be reasonably paired with the co-descriptors ‘going on holiday’ or ‘bad food’ or ‘delays’. This does however differ from the Montreal massacre. Whilst considering the descriptor ‘airliner journey’ one might reasonably pair it with ‘death’ as a potential outcome, airliners do crash after all; one does not pair ‘University’ with ‘mass murder’. As such the institutionalised settings or map of potential outcomes does not allow for this outcome in the same way that our own knowledge of an airliner journey might. However although we know the potential for airliner to crash, we are also aware of the consequences of a crash and therein lies the horror story.

“Eight bodies lay on a golf course, covered in tarpaulins and guarded by police, and the town hall became a makeshift morgue as fire-fighters recovered remains strewn about town. Children played beside twisted airplane wreckage. A long, deep trench was torn, like a black scar, along a row of houses. Other homes, drenched in flaming aviation fuel, were gutted.

‘It is beyond one’s comprehension,’ murmured Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who toured Lockerbie. It is beyond one’s imagination... you have to come here to see it and to realise.’ Residents recalled whooshing noises and tremendous flames as the stricken Boeing 747 jet roared low overhead, spewing pieces over the rolling countryside and finally crashing in fragments across their streets and houses.”

(The Charlotte Observer 23/12/88 :12)

Again this extract is a similarly clear example of how, as before, the sense of horror is dependant on the network of expected premises and outcomes that is mapped onto non-personal categories. There is a clear disjuncture between what a golf course should be used for and what in the aftermath of this event it is being used for. Like a gunman in a University bodies on a golf course are most definitely not on cue. It is the rupturing of the traditional pairing of ‘golf course-golfers’ that provides a resource for this aspect of the story.

Furthermore this element is reinforced by the fact that the Town Hall has become ‘a makeshift morgue’. One can find horror not simply because one does not expectedly find corpses in the Town Hall but through the implication that there are so many bodies the real morgue cannot deal with them all. This resource can be seen as constituting an additional documentary reality, one that is perhaps not fully explicated or accounted for in the text but which is clearly understood by the reader (see Jayyusi 1991). Again this can be considered as the fundamental premise underpinning all



mundane social practices, that members carry with them a stock of knowledge about the observable social world.

One cannot comment on what the journalist is trying to accomplish by using the language he or she has, this would be mere speculation. However it is nonetheless possible to extract the resources that may be available to the reader. The juxtaposition of the mundane with something unexpected is a key resource. Again although this report could be said to be a subjective account of an event (“A long, deep trench was torn, like a black scar, along a row of houses...”) this is as objective a reality as one can find, a reality reflexively constructed in and through the text. The children playing beside the twisted airliner wreckage are an interesting contrast using the stage of life device, the predicated or expected long lives of these social members as opposed to the recently killed. Whether the author co-selected these descriptors intentionally they can nonetheless be used as a way to ‘find’ or ‘make’ the story of horror. A further example can be found in descriptive terms that constitute a resource because of a commonly known association that differs from the context in which it is being employed:

“Rescuers sent here to the site of Thursday’s airplane crash found a hellish scene of blazing homes and streets jammed with debris.

The town hall was turned into a makeshift morgue, and Sherwood Crescent – the village center that bore the brunt of the crash – was sealed off to traffic.

Rescuers had to fly in and out by helicopter. Those not helping in the cleanup stood huddled and shell-shocked from both the crash and a gale that raged all day.

At regular intervals, a body was pulled from the rubble. Occasionally, a family was reunited with someone feared missing.

(USA Today 22/12/88 :13)

One can immediately identify the use of descriptors not commonly associated with this context but through our knowledge of the correct context can formulate a sense of horror. The term 'shell-shocked' most commonly associated with war and the horror therein of that particular context is thus made available to the reader. The 'hellish scene' of 'blazing homes' all serve to recreate the event for the reader in horrifyingly descriptive and subjective terms. Like the description Hester and Eglin's work of the students feeling like hunted animals or the blood on the photocopying machine, the context dependency of such terms or metaphors reflexively constitutes the sense of horror (Hester and Eglin 1999:204).

It is for this reason that the text can be considered a documentary reality not because the horror story is a real and objective phenomenon true for all time or for all readers of the text. The specific organisation of the report, the selection of particulars or descriptors within that given context makes this 'horrific' event, this story within a story, available in the way that it is. For the ethnomethodologist it is the reflexive relationship between the objective world and its subjective construction that allows the embedded commentary to be explicated by all members of the social world in which it occurs.

It would be easy to summarise members' methods for finding the horror story in airliner crash reports as simply identifying the juxtaposition between the premised and the actual outcome. This is accurate for numerous examples: "It was actually raining fire, liquid fire" (Chicago Tribune 22/12/88) and is summed up succinctly in one headline referring to the Pan Am 103 crash over Lockerbie:

**“ ‘So appalling, so horrific’; Bodies, debris, anguish”**

**(Chicago Tribune 22/12/88)**

**Why is it so horrific? Because there are bodies, debris and anguish where there shouldn't be. They don't belong, they shouldn't be there but they are. However as we have seen it is possible to explicate methods that operate on a more complex level. It relies to a large extent on a hugely complex and overlapping network of the commonly understood distribution of responsibilities, acceptable behaviours, expected premises and premise outcomes and common relational pairs not limited to categories but incorporating contexts, events or incidents. And in turn this interpreted documentary reality is constructed and reflexively preserved by the text. The next section discusses the categorisations and descriptors that can be collected within the conceptualisation of the story of 'tragedy'.**



## **Locating 'Tragedy'**

**"There'll be no Christmas this year as far as Lockerbie is concerned"**

**(Charlotte Observer 23/12/88 :12)**

The second element to all of the reports I have studied is the story of 'tragedy'. One might argue that all news texts covering what may be termed a 'disaster' contain this embedded commentary although it would be possible to argue that the sense of a 'disaster' is only accomplished if certain elements can be located in the text. Enmeshed with the story of horror therefore is the sense of tragedy as this headline encapsulates:

**"Devastation permeates Lockerbie. Signs of tragedy stretch from wreck site to Town Hall"**

**(The Charlotte Observer 23/12/88 :12)**

As before, the reader can explicate this embedded story from the juxtaposition between expectation-as-premise and reality-as-outcome. Again one notes the breaching of the expected outcomes, categories, predicates and contexts, which are traditionally made available through such mundane settings. It can also be strongly located in the rupturing of standardised relational pairs or indeed of certain category devices. The term 'tragedy', as with the term 'horror', is used routinely throughout the reports and can be topicalised as mundane knowledge, as one of the properties that can be considered constitutive of the text itself and the possible readings available to the social actor. The analysis that will follow could well be summarised by stating that 'tragedy' is located because this outcome was not provided for.

As Hester and Eglin note the tragedy of the news reports following the Montreal massacre often turned on the 'stage of life' device and the breaching of standardised relational pairs (Hester and Eglin 1999; 1999a) This also seems to be the case in relation to airliner crash reports. It might be that these are the primary resources for finding a sense of tragedy in any report that could be said to cover a disaster. Perhaps a sense of a 'disaster', whilst again an inter-subjective reality, is in turn constructed as a real world interpretation (that is to say an objective categorisation external to members interpretation) through a set of reflexively constituted yet mutually elaborative 'elements' which constitute a universal set of resources for the reader. Again it is crucial to highlight the fact that if one could explicate a grammar for reporting 'disasters' it would be firmly located in the culturally dependent context in which it was found.

Let us first consider the 'stage of life' device as a method for locating a sense of tragedy. Any loss of life allows the reader to employ this device as a locally available resource. It is simple to ascertain a sense of tragedy because no matter at what stage of life the victims of such a disaster might be, this was not the final stage, as it were. One can easily find that was it not for the airliner crashing they would not be at the stage they are, were they not to have boarded the airliner. Certainly they might just as well not taken the train journey and died of a heart attack, in a car crash, in a robbery, of old age or whatever. And we are all aware of this nonetheless we can find tragedy in two simple equations, that 'getting on the airliner – death' and similarly 'not getting on the airliner – staying alive'. This is merely an extension of the stage of life device through which one can identify the predicated and actual futures of a person, find the disjuncture between the two and thus the tragedy. This is

a sense of tragedy in its most basic form, it is incarnate in the loss of life simply because a life has been lost. However often the apparatus surrounding the 'stage of life' device is far more complex when taking into account incumbents of specific membership categories that in turn infer a different set of 'futures'.

One of the most notably tragic elements of many of the articles was the category to which the victims belonged, that is 'students':

"New York's Syracuse University said 38 of its students were booked on the flight"

(Miami Herald 22/12/88 :14)

"Michael played Hockey for years. He went to school in Canada when he was 15 or 16. And then, of course, he gained entry to this very prestigious college, Harvard, where he continued to play. ...He hoped to play in the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan."

(The Guardian/Observer Archive 22/06/96 :7)

The category of 'student' infers a strong sense of what the predicated future might be. Incumbents of such a category are often predicated to have a bright future, that they are intelligent, will get good jobs. Therefore the tragedy turns on the premised outcome of these lives and the actual outcome. The future provided for, or that which could be considered an 'expectable' of this category will not come to fruition. Certain devices/categories such as 'student' are a strong stage of life locator in that they predominantly involve members who are relatively young.

If we take the second passage it allows for a clearer explication of what is contained within the category of 'student'. It is possible to relate this back to Sacks'



work on the 'Membership Inference-Rich Representative' Device which he described as the core machinery behind a great deal of interaction between members best characterised by the "What do you do?" question frequently asked by people who are meeting for the first time (Sacks 1992a:40). The items contained in the response go a long way to organising knowledge about a person or persons. This is because each membership category is what Sacks termed 'inference rich', this means that they imply a number of commonly held 'expectables'. They are a crucial resource as they might imply a degree of wealth, opinions on certain subjects; whether you might get on with this person, have anything in common and so on. Therefore in the case of 'student' it infers youth, intelligence, a good future etc. It is clear that in conferring any sense at all through a news report is heavily dependent on which categories are used that in turn can be considered a resource. As part of the 'grammar' of disaster reporting there are very specific categories which may be used as resources due to the inferential relationship they share with the stock of commonly held knowledge that, as members, we are able to map onto a population of persons; rights, expectations, obligations, predicates, premised outcomes, personal relationships for example.

To say that certain categories are used over others to provide a resource for members is effectively an economy rule variant. Whereas according to the economy rule one category may be referentially adequate in order to describe a person or persons, in airliner crash reports one category is not just referentially adequate (although this is an important point in itself) but referentially necessary and again relates back to the question "why should we care?" Quite simply we should care because the victims are categorised in this way and not in that, making them relevant

to *you* or providing *you* with an inference rich resource, in order that *you* might locate a sense of tragedy, horror or injustice in the loss of this particular life or lives.

As Sacks notes, members are constantly engaged in monitoring events primarily by reference to the membership categories that may be used. He relates this to what he describes as 'internal systems of social control' or 'doing' trouble but I don't think this can be applied in the same way in this instance (Sacks 1992a:43). What can be said however is that the base or primary resource available for members, the key method to be unpacked from any news reports, is what can be inferred by certain membership categories. One cannot say that all members will locate the same inferences from any category; nonetheless they can be explicated as given resources. And certainly the embedded commentaries of such crash reports can be located in the fact that categories such as 'student' are inference rich, they infer a significant amount of information some of which may be used by members to accomplish the conclusion that this might be a tragic event.

Although previously the report mentions '38 students' and one might argue that this particular category was the key resource in locating the sense of tragedy, the same sense may not have been available to the reader if an alternative category had been employed. And in this case you could attempt to construct a rule that the tragic element of the story is a result of the economy of category use again dependent on what is 'knowable' about the social world. In both the extracts cited above the categories used are far more than simple labels for social members. The 'tragic' nature of the airliner crash may be nothing more than an inter-subjective interpretation rather than an objective reality but this is exactly how it is presented. The sense of

tragedy, of horror, of injustice, are realities constructed within the text. The extract “38 of its students were booked on the flight” has no explicit mention of why this might be considered tragic. Rather the construction of the text provides for its objective character, the story within a story. The very organisation of the particulars of the text naturally allow for an equivocal reading nonetheless this does not alter the point that members’ interpretation of such reports is dependent on the inferential relationship between categories and their predicates. In this sense the disjuncture between what was predicated of the category student and the reality; “He hoped to play in the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan.” This relates to Hester and Eglin’s (1997) work on the ‘grammar’ or the conventionally anticipated features of a given state of being, thus the reader is able to compare the grammar of being a student with what has occurred and find the disjuncture.

Returning to the ‘stage of life’ device and the tragedy incarnate in the loss of life, for such devices the degree of tragedy seems to operate on a sliding scale. The sense of loss of life is constructed as being more acute the younger the person is. This raises the question as to whether in such reports there exists what might be termed a victim hierarchy, or whether there are good grounds for ignoring as victim? This issue shall be addressed at a later stage. Whilst airliner crash reports rarely list the ages of all the victims the categorisation of some as ‘students’ allow their ages to be found and a sense of tragedy to be accomplished.

“Sunday morning, all 217 passengers and crew members on EgyptAir Flight 990 were apparently plunged into the sea off Nantucket. Though united in death, they were diverse in life.

Four of the passengers were Egyptian students, ages 12 to 19, who had been in Baltimore for a two week exchange program between Luxor, their hometown, and Baltimore, its sister city, said Abdel



Wahab Elabd, the chairman of the Baltimore-Luxor-Alexandria Sister City Committee. A fifth passenger was the father of one of the students; he was a chaperon on the trip.

“They were very bright kids, very charming, all of them,” Elabd said. “They had a great time here.”

The students attended Paul Laurence Dunbar Community High School in Baltimore, and stayed with host families who have children at the school. They went to classes, visited colleges, went to the aquarium and to Annapolis and Washington. They shopped with their host families, stocking up on souvenirs.”

(New York Times 01/11/99 :2b)

Thus far two resources for finding tragedy have been explicated; the absence of any kind of future life and the absence of a promising future life. The final point in respect to the stage of life device is concerned with at what stage of life the victim is. The reader can find that were the victim to be a child, he or she is at an early stage of their lives thus predicating that the majority of it is left to live. In essence the tragedy in an airliner crash story can be stripped down to members' perception of what has been lost. The degree of loss can be gauged by our constant monitoring of inference rich categories which allow us to locate specific information about a person or persons. Thus we have a three-tier system of tragedy pertaining to the victims and what they are perceived to have lost in terms of such quantifiable indexes such as age. We can note the significance of certain membership categories as a resource for members, without the category of student it would be difficult to find the loss of a bright future around which a sense or tragedy could be constructed. Again we return to the question “Why should we care?” We should care because using the available resources we can, with some confidence, work to explicate what exactly has been lost in reference to the predicated futures of those who were killed.

On a simpler level there is a clear juxtaposition between what is happening to the members involved in the airliner crash (not just the victims, but all categories such as relatives, those seeking to help and indeed to some extent even the journalists) and the 'social world' in general.

"A Pan Am jumbo jet bound for New York with 258 people -- many of them Christmas travellers -- crashed Wednesday night in a Scottish village, exploding in a huge fireball, destroying dozens of homes and spreading burning wreckage for 10 miles.

No survivors were found from the Boeing 747, according to John Boyd, the police chief for the area. Royal Air Force rescuers said the plane 'demolished two rows of houses. There are no survivors from those houses.'"

(The Miami Herald 22/12/88 :14)

"Authorities found 84 more bodies from the crash site of Pan Am Flight 103 yesterday as this grief stricken little village tried to keep Christmas being erased from its calendar

Chief Constable John Boyd said there would be no scaling down of the search until the bodies of all 258 persons aboard the Boeing 747 and those who died on the ground are located.

Helicopters and more than 600 people searched miles of Scottish countryside for victims of Wednesday Night's crash, which showered this quiet town with flames and shards of jagged metal."

(The Boston Globe 25/12/88 :16)

"The mourning continued throughout Christmas Eve in the village.

Christmas "is really the furthest thing from my mind right now. It's not important," said Joe Horgan, an American who had come to the village, where a relative died in Wednesday night's crash."

(The Boston Globe 25/12/88 :16)

Again there are two points here, firstly the experiences of those involved with the crash versus those not involved but more noticeably the fact that the crash has occurred near Christmas. The experiences of the crash victims, their relatives and

those dealing with the incident is juxtaposed with the predicated experiences of Christmas, that is traditionally a time when people are happy, meet with their families, exchange gifts and so forth. This is strongly opposed to the realities for these people who have been killed, are grieving the loss of family members or attempting to deal with a large-scale disaster. The very fact that at Christmas news reports should be talking of recovering bodies and the idea that Christmas may simply be “erased”. This is a widely available resource for members most of whom are aware of its cultural implications and what is contextually predicated of that time of year thus most can find the disjuncture between what should occur at Christmas and what has occurred, for example the descriptors of “Christmas Eve” and “mourning” do not commonly fit together. What we face is a co-selection of activities with no perceivable match and neither providing for the presence of the other. We are so used to contexts, predicates, devices and categories being intrinsically organised around each other, being mutually elaborative, that a sense of tragedy can be derived when this is breached. The wider context of ‘Christmas’, an inference rich resource in terms of what members know of this time of year, can be located as a further resource for juxtaposition with the events that have warranted a news report:

“Christmas ‘is really the furthest thing from my mind right now. It’s not important,’ said Joe Horgan, an American who had come to the village, where a relative died in Wednesday night’s crash.”

(The Boston Globe 25/12/88 :16)

This becomes more complex in the below extract:

“...the jet was carrying 255 adults and three children – many laden with Christmas gifts.”

(The Miami Herald 22/12/88 :14)



This sentence alone offers a significant number of resources for the reader to locate a sense of tragedy. On the first level we have the immense loss of lives, 255. Secondly using the stage of life device we can see that as three of them were children a further sense of loss is constructed. Finally there is the contrast between the tragic outcome of the journey, of which the premised outcome was so very different: “many laden with Christmas gifts”. This is perhaps enhanced because the category of “children” firstly of course as part of the device “family” implying parents and possibly siblings who have lost a loved one and secondly because members will be aware of the particular significance of the event ‘Christmas’ to the category ‘children’.

This is similarly applicable to the more common characterisation of airliner crash victims as tourists. Even if this category is not specifically applied in the reports it can be found as ‘tourist’ is a common membership category to fall within the device ‘parties to an airliner journey’. As with Christmas the predicated outcome of going on holiday is far removed from the actual outcome, it is the breaching of what is institutionally provided for by such contexts. The second important apparatus is the categories made relevant to each other by the collection ‘R’ paired relational categories (see Atkinson 1980; Sacks 1974). Here the story of tragedy can be formally located in the rupturing of these pairs, most commonly those falling within the device ‘family’. The tragedy is found in the unexpected and sudden alterations to relationships demanded by such an event and arising from a context that does not expectedly provide for such changes e.g. going on holiday.

“At the weekend, there was silence at the family home. Briestoff, an ice hockey star who was returning from studying at Harvard, died age 25 on Wednesday evening when TWA Flight 800 crashed. His parents have flown to New York, where they hope to recover his body.”

“Grieving with them was the woman who only last week had accepted his proposal of marriage. ‘He asked me to marry him, just before he got on the plane,’ said Heidi Snow, aged 24, clutching his photo. ‘He had so many dreams; he just wanted to be happy.’ ”

(Both extracts - Guardian Observer Archive 22/06/96 :7)

In both these examples the tragedy can be firmly located in the unexpected breaking of specific standardised relational pairs most notably ‘parents-child’ and ‘fiancé-fiancée’. One can find tragedy from four key resources in this first extract. Initially the rupturing of the category pair and also the disruption caused to the device ‘family’. Secondly we can use the ‘stage of life’ device to determine that he was quite young therefore allowing us to assess loss. Thirdly the fact that he was predicated of a promising future “an ice hockey star, returning from studying at Harvard” and finally that his parents, given the context that should have been established of a happy family reunion, are instead having to travel to recover the body of their son. The significance of the standardised relational pair and its breaching as a resource is further underlined by the second extract. Here the tragedy operates on several levels. Firstly of course that the two were fiancées and this pairing has been broken unexpectedly and suddenly. A similar apparatus for understanding a sense of tragedy as conveyed by the text is Sudnow’s (1967) concept of ‘unit loss’. His work examined the social organisation of dying and considered death as occurring in a social order:

*“The thoughts, concerns, activities, projects, prospects and the fate of others are more or less linked to the one who dies and the fact of his death.”*

(Sudnow 1967:62)

Because deaths occur among a vast network of overlapping social relations, it seems only necessary to conceptualise the loss felt by surviving family members in this way, the notion of ‘unit loss’ where the death of a person is realised through the loss to the social or familial unit. This apparatus indicates more effectively the methods by which members can locate tragedy than the standardised relational pair which logically includes only two categories. The sense of tragedy is formally located in the observable and recognisable loss to the family unit.

Members can use the category fiancée to find that these victims were predicated a future as a married couple which is strongly juxtaposed with the actual future (Hester and Eglin 1997:38). Again it is our ability to employ the MIR Device (Sacks 1992a) as an apparatus to assess loss, which provides the tragedy:

*“He had so many dreams; he just wanted to be happy.”*

(Guardian Observer Archive 22/06/96 :7)

This effectively encapsulates the two key resources in finding the disjuncture between predicated and actual futures, the loss for both the victim and his relatives. As before with the references to Christmas, often the fundamental framework for the embedded commentary is constructed from the occurrence of such a shocking event in what may be considered a mundane context.



“Grieving families and friends of the crash victims gathered in Los Angeles, New York and Cairo to await news from airline officials and to meet with chaplains and other counsellors. Many were sobbing in desperation over the loss of loved ones, while others were angry or in denial, unable to make sense of a tragedy that seemed to have no explanation.”

(The New York Times 01/11/99 :2a)

That is to say millions of people engage in air each year with very so few ending in fatal crashes. Like the students who went to university in Montreal and were killed or shot at, the holidaymakers, students, children who got on an airliner were also killed. The mundane setting makes the rupturing of these standardised category pairs an unexpected, sudden and essentially a tragic event:

“Beneath the fanciful tower of the Town hall, a growing pile of flowers testified to grief. One of the three dozen bunches, including Christmas Holly, that had been placed there said: ‘God Bless you Melina. We love you always. Your father and mother’.”

(The Boston Globe 25/12/88 :16)

Members can easily locate the sense of loss felt by the surviving relatives and can very clearly explicate the sudden violation of the device ‘family’ and the pairings of ‘father – daughter’ and ‘mother – daughter’ in this case. The inferential and mutually elaborative resources for the reader are extremely prominent in this example; the use of ‘Christmas Holly’, imbued as it is with the culturally available connotations of the time of year being used as a funeral wreath with all that infers is perhaps the most symbolic example of how the story of tragedy is made available.

## **Conclusion**

The embedded commentaries discussed here are dependent on the locally occasioned specificities of category use. This reiterates the assertion that news reporting is dependent on a series of interwoven narratives and reflects the situated accomplishment of members local order work to 'find' the news story. This refers again to the notion of the 'story within a story' (Jayyusi 1991) again reliant on members' prior orientation to the categorical configurations of identity and social relations.

**Chapter Seven:**  
**The Story of the Victims**



## **Introduction**

This chapter continues the analysis of the categorial relevances of the device 'parties to an airliner crash' and addresses the question "Who died?" and subsequently "why should we care?" The deaths of those mentioned in the news reports have not occurred within a social vacuum, each description has been repackaged and can formally be located according to the categories he or she may (or indeed may not) have belonged to and also with some reference to the categorial memberships of the readers. News reporting relies on making the news interesting or relevant, in many of the reports I have studied the victims are listed both as a numerical fact, but frequently further detail will be provided not just regarding details of nationality but offering some personal biographies. I was interested initially then as to how these personal biographies are dependent on membership categories, their devices and predicates.

As with the previous chapters I will be concentrating primarily on four articles. Each follows the pattern of mentioning the tally of deaths within the first paragraph and then including personal biographies for certain victims later in the report. Initially then I will be considering the categorial construction of these personal biographies which in turn will lead onto an examination of the question "why should we care?" looking at the use of nationality descriptors and whether there exists a victim hierarchy, that is to say are there good grounds for acknowledging or indeed ignoring a victim?

## Victim Status and MCA

I begin with the premise that news reports use membership categories not simply in their description of victims, but more reflexively as part of the process of victim status ascription. Each news report is involved in the categorial construction of the device 'parties to an airliner crash'; this may of course be subsumed by the larger device 'parties to an offence' or indeed 'parties to an accident'. Whichever device the reader applies to the report affects the subsequently relevant categories. For example, the device 'parties to an accident' permits the categories of 'victim' but not 'offender'. For this chapter however I will consider the device 'parties to an airliner crash' and the relevant category of victim that this traditionally demands. The term 'victim', in and of itself, may be considered referentially adequate in this given context. Using Sacks' economy rule we can see that in this situation only four categories need be used in such reports, victim, offender, witness and professional commentator (Sacks 1974; 1992a). Returning to the category victim it seems that despite this adequacy, further categories are inevitably offered following the initial ascription of victim status to the people on board the airliner.

Before the analysis I refer to the work of Stetson (1999) In this work he refers to Coulter's (1989) analysis of the rules governing the "explanation/ascription/avowal" of membership categories relating to right or wrong and applies these to a study of media texts (Stetson 1999:82). Whilst Stetson was primarily studying the emplotment of news stories especially in relation to the "proximate co-presence" of such categories as offender, victim and witness, it seems this is equally applicable in ascription of victim categorisation in airliner crash reports (see also Watson 1983).

From the reports I have studied, and with reference to the work of Stetson (1999) and Coulter (1989) the explanation of the victim status is achieved both through the headline which implies deaths, and the initial tally at the beginning of the report. Following this the ascription and avowal is accomplished through the personalised biographies which are constructed of and around perceptibly relevant membership categories. In the ascription of victim status in airliner crash reports one category is *not* referentially adequate, indeed any and all categories may be referentially appropriate. In the case of victim description and categorial references the issue is not one of adequacy but of appropriate recipient design for the purpose of the avowal and ascription of the 'victim' status, of providing relevance and a 'human interest' for the readership:

"Distraught relatives talked briefly about the co-pilot of the plane, whom they identified as Mohammed Gameel el-Bitash, a resident of Cairo. He was among 18 crew members aboard the plane.

"He was a gentleman and a good person, God bless him," said Mohsen Hamza, a neurologist married to Battuti's niece. Just five months from retirement, the 59 year old co-pilot spent time in Los Angeles on layovers. Hamza said el-Bitash had flown for EgyptAir for 20 years. "It's really sad," Hamza said. "His wife is in shock."

(Los Angeles Times 01/11/99 :1)

"Monte Wilkins, 19, of Yucaipa, who was on his way to attend college in Switzerland, was among the casualties, according to a spokesman for the family.

Wilkins, the son of David and Janet Wilkins of Yucaipa, was en route to Switzerland to take a business course at Salede College in Geneva, according to Don Roth, who said he was acting as the family spokesman.

Monte Wilkins attended Walla Walla College in Washington last year and was a graduate of Mt. Elias Bozeman Academy in Montana.

In addition to his parents, he is survived by two sisters, Sahwn, 29, and Marie, 21, and a brother, Darren, 27."



(London Times 04/09/98 :10)

“A 21 year old former Charlotte resident was among the victims of the crash of Pan Am Flight 103.

Luann Rogers, daughter of Oregon and Anne Rogers, formerly of Highbrook Drive, had been in London as part of a Syracuse University study program and was returning to the family’s home in Olney, Md.

The Rogers family had been members of Chantilly Baptist Church – now Cornerstone Baptist Church – and Luann Rogers attended Idlewild Elementary School. They left Charlotte about 1977.”

(Charlotte Observer 23/12/88 :12)

The above extracts variously identify the victims as family members, husbands, sons, brothers, sisters, daughters, students and so on. The categories present in the personal biographies detailed in the reports contribute hugely to the process of explaining that there have been victims, assigning that status to the individuals and (by disregarding the economy rule) confirming that status by responding to the question “why is this relevant to us?” (‘Us’ being the reader) In describing some of the victims as ‘fathers’, ‘sons’ or ‘students’ their victim-hood is confirmed not in the objective sense, not in the sense that other categories would not be victims, but in the eyes of the reader who may find relevance in such descriptors. These biographies provide both coherence and relevance if the reader can find them as such. I am not suggesting that if either part of the victim descriptions were absent the other would not be intelligible, but rather that together they play a significant role.

I was also interested to continue the application of much of Sacks’ work on conversation to the reading of news texts (Sacks 1992a; 1992b). It would be naïve to consider the reading of a paper to be simply the absorption of facts and figures. Rather the media, and by this I refer to all mediums, play a similarly interactional role to that of a co-conversationist. I don’t mean to imply that in reading the paper one is

engaged in a sequence of utterance turns but rather that many of the routines and noticeable facets of conversation described by Sacks are evident in the communication of knowledge in the news reports. I will briefly consider two lectures and expand the analysis later. Firstly Sacks' work on Disaster Talk (Sacks 1992b:561) is applicable to the earlier question "why is this relevant to us?" and the issue it addresses notably what function might such personal biographies constructed around membership categories perform?

Sacks noted in this lecture that there are topically structured aspects of conversation that may operate differently than pairs in that they are concerned with larger sequences. Disaster talk is the given example, it is a topically strong thing to discuss and Sacks examined how such topic potential is translated into particular types of topic sequences, that is how members 'do' talking about a disaster. One particularly notable aspect is that frequently second utterances following the initiation of the disaster topic are designed in comparative terms. Essentially this is "turning it into *something for us*, where what is done first is to turn it into *something for you*." (Sacks 1992b:568) And this is where the interaction occurs, through the process of turning the event into an incident in both the conversationists' lives thus allowing talk to happen and things to be done.

This may be considered very similar to the organisation of the news report in terms of victim descriptions. It is possible to perceive the initial tally of victims as being a distant event, *something for you*, or more precisely *something that isn't for us* (where *us* is the reader.) Logically then, the personal biographies that follow, their construction through and of the use of membership categories, turns the event into *something for us*, the event is described in comparative terms because we might be

parents, students or whatever characterisation one can draw from the text. Using what Sacks describes as 'orientation to co-participant' this falls not under the rubric of 'things that might have happened to your co-participant (as a means for introducing and taking part in disaster talk) but 'things that we might find relevance in given our categorial incumbencies'. Essentially then the reversal of the economy rule can be interpreted as a technique for connecting the reader to the disaster in much the same way that Sacks argued people did in conversation. It is important to stress however that whilst categorial references may offer resources for finding relevances that victim status appears objectively and externally ascribed to a certain extent. The central proposition of mundane reason, that crime exists as a real and objective feature of our existence, extends perhaps to victim-hood (see Pollner 1987). One might employ the mundane model of crime to conceptualise the 'victimness' of a person as pre-existing their categorial incumbencies and our ascriptions of them as such. Clearly disaster reports and indeed airliner crash reports do exist which neglect to offer detailed descriptions of the victims and clearly they are fully intelligible nonetheless this does not diminish the significance of these features as a resource for readers.

Such parallels that can be drawn between conversation analysis and membership categorisation analysis are frequently both revealing and rewarding. Following the comparisons drawn from Sacks' lecture on "Laughing Together; Expressions of Sorrow and Joy" (1992b:570) earlier in the work, it is clear that reading the news, routine accomplishment though it may seem, is intrinsically more complex than is appreciated. In many senses, though one must be careful not to take this too literally, the understanding of a news text relies as much on the categorial and organisational properties of the text in achieving a sense of topical, structural and narrative coherence as it does the pre-existing cultural awareness of the reader. In this



sense therefore the news print media can be argued to play a crucial role in the construction of information not simply its conveyance.

Before embarking on a detailed examination of the data, it seems necessary to briefly consider the role of the category 'victim' within the wider context of the report. In ethnomethodological terms the category is inferred by the context, established by the headline which reports an airliner crash. The category of victim subscribes to the 'character appears on cue' maxim (Sacks 1992a). More importantly however it is reflexively constituted by the categories around it, with which it shares an inferential and subsequently mutually elaborative relationship. For the sake of analysis I have separated the various characters from the reports but in reality they are considered by the reader to be part of the whole, as Hester and Eglin describe they are "categories-in-context" (Hester and Eglin 1997:26). The ascription and avowal of victim status, their categorially organised biographies, are only one part of their establishment as valid characters to the plot. As Stetson (1999) notes, numerous categories are essential in the emplotment of news stories, most notably victim, offender, witness and to a lesser extent professional commentator (being temporally distant from the event). The structure of my analysis therefore is not intended to imply any separation of categories from each other or of categories from the context.

I am unable to speculate as to why the news reports in question chose to select the victims they did for further detail on their backgrounds. Nonetheless it is possible to unpack the category based construction of their descriptions and to explicate resources that members might employ to find relevance. The first article covers the crash of TWA Flight 800 in July 1996. 230 people were killed, a fact which is noted in the first paragraph of the article. The article also offers more detailed descriptions

of some of the victims. Necessarily in certain cases the information provided may be determined by how much has been released by the airline. Nonetheless the personal biographies used in this article are very much stories of membership categorisation analysis.

Membership categories present in these victim biographies most frequently offer the reader the resources to find a number of relevancies. They often address whether the victim or victims were part of the collection 'R' of relational category pairs. Secondly, the nationality of the victim, this might vary according to where the report originates from but is a crucial aspect of victim reporting. Thirdly the stage of life device is often invoked through the use of certain categories which allow the reader to locate the age of the victim. Finally the occupation of the victim may be noted. I will examine later whether this is significant for any reason other than possibly as a further resource for locating age, predicated future or the purpose of the trip which may have a poignant juxtaposition with the actual outcome. The narrative coherence and categorial orderliness of such reports is dependent on resources which enable members to locate certain categories in reference to victims, as being categorially newsworthy. Thus the following analysis attempts to deconstruct the categorial organisation of these victim reports but significantly why they are presented as a story within a story and how they might be found by the reader to be tellable.

One can assume in the instances above that the descriptors of category membership have been co-selected according to relevant and known category collections. One reads such aspects of the report, as one reads any news report, looking for the tellable story. In the reading of news texts (and indeed the

participation in all forms of news media) one looks for the story, the reason why this particular incident is considered news worthy, whether it be an airliner crashing or any other occurrence that can be seen as distinct from the mundane routines of everyday life. I would argue then that in a microcosm of this attunement to the newsworthy elements of a report, that such victim biographies are constructed around membership categories from which not only a natural intelligibility can be derived but also a tellable story. Such categories as may be used provide resources for the ascription and avowal of victim status in the eyes of what Jayyusi referred to as 'the public at large' (Jayyusi 1991:1).



## **Co-selection of descriptors and Standardised Relational Pairs:**

One can read these descriptions and find the relevance through the locally available and relationally configured membership categories. A simple example is to be found in the extract below:

“One of the victims was named by the Italian foreign ministry as Christine Baily, a Briton who had emigrated to Italy. It was reported she was married to an Italian, Pietro D’Iorio, and that the pair worked as waiters in Prato, near Florence.”

(The Guardian UK 19/07/96 :4)

This might be considered a story within a story, but for the reader what resources are available to find that this is so? This victim report is constructed around two key categories; the first, ‘Briton’ and the second that she is married and by definition a ‘wife’ which is confirmed by the mention of the second half of the pair ‘husband’. For the reader then the most noticeable resource to find the story within the story, that such elaboration and disregard for the economy rule is valid, is the category of ‘Briton’. In itself this reversal of the economy rule is a resource ‘tipping’ the reader to the fact that this ‘micro’ story is tellable and that it is structured according to the pre-configured boundaries of relevance of certain membership categories. As this is a British daily newspaper the tellable story is clearly that the victim is identified as a ‘Briton’. Secondly the categorisation of the victim as a ‘wife’ implies (although it is mentioned later) the presence of a husband. The implied and confirmed second half of the standardised relational pair is only one part of what might be conceived of as the ‘tellable victim’ story. The story relies to a large extent on what is inferred by a category or categories especially those that can be seen to form an intimate relational pair. This is consistent with the ‘future as premise and

reality as outcome' juxtaposition. From the category pairing of husband-wife one can infer a predicated future from what we might find as culturally applicable knowables associated with the state of marriage (see Hester and Eglin 1997). At the most basic level (and this differs from category to category) one can locate the relevance of the victim as being directly related to those left behind. The story within a story is constructed by and of the inferred rupturing of the pair and the inferred grief of the remaining partner.

In this sense the victim may be defined by the existence of a surviving category which might be found to be collected within a personal device or one part of a personal standardised relational pair. To simplify, the ascription and avowal of the victim category for any given person may be, at least in terms of its relevance and intelligibility to the reader, formally located in the disruption to personal or intimate category collections and by definition the 'biographies' of those who are left behind. This is illustrated by the following extract:

"Grieving families and friends of the crash victims gathered in Los Angeles, New York and Cairo to await news from airline officials and to meet with chaplains and other counsellors. Many were sobbing in desperation over the loss of loved ones, while others were angry or in denial, unable to make sense of a tragedy that seemed to have no explanation."

(New York Times 01/11/99 :2a)

"Christmas 'is really the furthest thing from my mind right now. It's not important,' said Joe Horgan, an American who had come to the village, where a relative died in Wednesday night's crash.

Horgan, one of about 20 people who lost loved ones and came to the crash scene in South western Scotland, met briefly with reporters yesterday on condition that his hometown and any details about his relative on the flight not be disclosed.

Beneath the fanciful tower of the Town Hall, a growing pile of flowers testified to grief.

One of the three-dozen bunches, including Christmas holly, that had been placed there said: "God bless you Melina. We love you always. Your father and mother."

A notice board carried condolences from Prince Charles and Princess Diana and from President Reagan.

In London, Queen Elizabeth II broadcast an unprecedented second Christmas message to comfort those who suffered in the Pan Am jet crash the Dec. 7 Armenian earthquake and the Dec. 12 rail crash in south London that killed 34 persons.

She said the three tragedies "destroyed the lives of so many people who were looking forward to celebrating Christmas with their families and friends." She offered prayers and sympathy to the injured and bereaved and said she hoped "the eternal message of Christmas will bring some comfort in the hour of sadness."

(The Boston Globe 25/12/88 :16)

The victim status in these circumstances is in part ascribed and certainly avowed by the, albeit brief, snapshot of the biographies of those left behind that can be located within such personal devices as 'family'. The relevance for the reader can be found in the observable parallels between the personal relationships of their own lives and those that have been ruptured in this event. Victims are made 'real', relevant, applicable to our lives in terms of their categorial incumbencies and of those left behind. The category of victim is reinforced by the reportage concerning the remaining categories from the ruptured pairs or devices.

"Two newly-wed Italian couples returning from a honeymoon in the US were among those killed."

(The Guardian 19/07/96 :4)

This differs from the previous passage in that there are no surviving categories of any intimate device or relational pair. In this instance four victims are mentioned, two couples who are categorised as 'newly-weds'. Again these people are defined by their categorisation as such. Although their legitimate status as victims pre-exists any



further categorisation beyond the economy rule one can find the tellable story of their 'victimness' through our knowledge of the category 'newly-wed'. This can be compared to Hester and Eglin's work on categories-in-context (Hester and Eglin 1997:38). One can use the 'grammar' of marriage as a resource to identify the tellable victim story. Hester and Eglin describe that certain categories project a future state in which numerous predicates or 'conventionally anticipated features' are inferred. These can be considered part of the grammar of what we understand the concept of marriage to entail. Thus the tellable story can be accomplished through members' prior knowledge of such conceptually tied predicates and the actual reality. Becoming an incumbent of the category victim within the device parties to an airliner crash is not simply not a perceivable predicate of the grammar of marriage but is in direct opposition to it. Thus although victim status is explained by the very fact that the person has died, its avowal may come in the perception of categorial incumbencies for which a grammar directly opposed to the reality may be formally located.

## **The Grammar of Victim Reportage and the Stage of Life device:**

Resources to find the tellable story of the victim may also be found through categories which might invoke the stage of life device. Although this parallels with the previous chapter on locating the story of tragedy in the loss of people who can be considered 'young' I believe it is also relevant in this instance in building towards a conceptualisation of the grammar of victim reportage. As mentioned the rupturing of standardised relational pairs and the juxtaposition between predicated and actually futures are key resources in locating affirmation of categorially subjective victim reportage. By subjective I mean the construction of victim biographies using categories that transcend the canonically adequate category of 'victim'.

A further resource that may be explicated then is the 'story as tellable' using the stage of life device. In each instance the categories which inherently lend cohesion to such reports are not only locally and temporally contingent but can be formally characterised as indexical expressions. Each victim biography as it occurs within the text as a whole is contextually embedded and dependent. Such perceptibly relevant configurations of identity are inexorably linked to the time and place in which they occur and which in turn reflexively constitutes their intelligibility. It is therefore essential to stress that although such victim biographies are perceivable as stories within the story, this distinction must not be misinterpreted as a separation for any purpose other than for the sake of analysis. These biographies occur within the contextual and relational configurations of the entire report which informs, and is informed by, their presence.

“At his press conference, Mr. Clinton singled out 16 teenagers from Montoursville High school, Pennsylvania, who were on board Flight 800 on their way to a language course in Paris.

“The whole town is in mourning,” said John Doring, Mountoursville’s mayor. “These kids were the best of the best.”

(The Guardian 19/07/96 :4)

These victims have essentially been ‘singled out’ twice, both by “Mr. Clinton” (then President of the USA) and by the journalist. Any social member can see that this observation is observably so, he or she is aware that 230 people died as a result of this airliner crash and only a small percentage of the victims are afforded any categorisation other than that which the economy rule dictates is adequate. Thus the second way that victims can be defined is by what they can be seen to have lost. One might argue that the younger the victim, the more tellable his or her story becomes, they are the ‘best of the best’ as described by the Mayor. More practically a key resource for the reader to find that the story of a victim is tellable is firmly located in the age of the person or what age can be deduced from the categorial incumbencies (student for example).

“A group of 38 Syracuse University students bound home for the Christmas holidays, all but two of them as part of a foreign study program, were among the 243 passengers and 15 crew members aboard Flight 103, which left London’s Heathrow airport about 1.25 p.m. EST and met a connecting flight from Frankfurt, West Germany.”

(Chicago Tribune 22/12/88 :15)

This is more than simply stating that young people matter more to journalists than older people, it is an essential facet of the narrative coherence as the observable news worthiness of mentioning some victims and not others is unproblematic and



indeed the categorial and structural cohesion that resources are available to find why some victims are mentioned in detail and others are not. The very structural integrity of the news report is dependent on readers finding some degree of natural intelligibility using locally available resources which might lend rationality to the categorial organisation of the piece.

“A 21 year old former Charlotte resident was among the victims of the crash of Pan Am Flight 103. Luann Rogers, daughter of Oregon and Anne Rogers, formerly of Highbrook Drive, had been in London as part of a Syracuse University study program and was returning to the family’s home in Olney Md.”

(The Charlotte Observer 23/12/88 :12)

This extract illustrates the previous point regarding the significance of categorial lucidity in victim reporting. The organisational validity of this victim biography is locatable for two reasons. This story of membership categorisation analysis is founded on two fundamental categories; ‘former Charlotte resident’ and ‘21’ year old’. The contextual embeddedness of the reportage is also evident, it is the readers’ awareness of the report coming from a Charlotte based newspaper that makes relevant the biography. Secondly returning to the stage of life device, the relevance is compounded as the victim was only twenty one. Thus in this instance the victim is defined by what she is deemed to have lost, that is a potentially long life. The data continues to support the conclusion that victim biographies are included and accomplish their coherence through a perceived sense of news worthiness. With this knowledge in mind the resources for finding that this is so and thus confirming that a report is intelligible are a situated accomplishment of members local order work, their analysis of categories-in-context.

## **Internal Systems of Social Control – The MIR Device**

Sacks described the ‘Membership Inference-Rich Representative’ Membership Categorisation device as forming part of the central machinery of social organisation (Sacks 1992a:40). Essentially it turned on the concept that categories are inference rich, that “a great deal of the knowledge that members of a society have about a society is stored in terms of these categories” (Sacks 1992a:40). This in turn warranted their occurrence in the early parts of first conversations, because topics of conversation and much more besides can be formulated based on the knowledge gained from these inference rich categories. Finally and significantly for this data, Sacks argues that any member of any category can be considered a representative of that character. The relevance for this work is clear, that nationality descriptors are key resources in reports for finding relevance. Victims who can be found as incumbents of categories which may denote nationality can be seen as representatives of that country thus legitimising (or rather rationalising) the presence of an extended biography.

The significance of the MIR device is illustrated by Sacks’ assertion that “members of the society are constantly engaged in monitoring events; on the one hand by reference to whether something that has happened is something that they’re accountable for, and on the other hand, to find out what is getting done by members of any of the other categories.” (Sacks 1992a:42) The salient point is that members are constantly aware of categories and their inferred predicates, co-categories and devices. This apparatus forms a method of handling categories encountered in the mundane, routine activities of social life. Sacks describes this constant monitoring as a way of ‘doing’ trouble, it seems also applicable to members methods for ‘doing’ victim relevance in crash reports. In essence getting a description of a victim ‘done’



is fundamentally dependent on members' constant awareness of categories and what they may infer:

“What you get then is a whole set of teachings, all of which have the same form: ‘Remember you’re a such-and-such’ (a lady, an American, a Negro, a Catholic etc). That is any action you take is exemplary. Any action you take is something we’re going to have to come to terms with. Such teachings belong to a class of activities which are often called ‘internal systems of social control.’”

(Sacks 1992a:42)

In victim reports any given category used to describe an individual or individuals can, by way of the inferred particulars of the category, be found as possibly relevant and your reaction to such is exemplary of the category which you (the reader) can be found to be a co-incumbent of. The MIR device constitutes a key apparatus for locating the resources which allow ‘victim-hood’ to be ‘done’ by the article and for the reader as what it accountably is. It warrants the use of any number of categories because they comprise such an important resource for members. Relevance and a story within a story that is the organisational rationalisation behind the biography can be formulated as a direct consequence of these inference rich categories. The reason I referred to the ‘internal systems of social control’ are that I believe this can be applied to finding relevance in a news text. Whilst Sacks refers to the commonly heard phrase “Remember you’re a...” as a demonstration of categorial regulation, I would argue it similarly dictates our potential reading of victim biographies. The resources are present for us to locate relevance by identifying a categorial incumbency of a victim and applying the statement “Remember you’re a *Briton/Father/Student*” and finding the proximate relevance of your category to that of the victims you should react as such or find that this is pertinent to you as a reader.



## **Finding something for 'us': Locating relevance in victim biographies**

This constitutes an adaptation of Sacks' ideas on disaster talk but also a general conclusion for this section. Essentially the process of unpacking the available resources for finding victim relevance can be summarised as the task of 'finding something for us', 'us' being the reader (Sacks 1992b:564). It is for this reason that victim biographies such as I have encountered can be described as stories of membership categorisation analysis. What I hope to have demonstrated are some of the resources, methods and apparatus available to members to accomplish in-situ, local order work which operates not simply as a one way process of reading the facts, but as a reciprocal interaction dependent on members prior awareness of categories, predicates and contexts. Sacks referred to disaster talk and of '*turning it into something for us*', member's methods for 'doing' talking about a disaster (Sacks 1992b). He noted that co-conversationists' in the second turn of early conversation attempted to turn the disaster topic into an event in their lives, structuring their utterances in comparative terms, simply a tool to get interaction done. This can also be applied to reading the news. The categories that constitute the narrative coherence of reports as a whole and also the victim biographies they contain can be found to offer resources to facilitate finding that this disaster is 'something for us'. That it might be happening to a class of category sets which is relevant to us because we belong to them also. In the same sense that conversation about disasters can be done by designing utterances in comparative terms, locating the natural intelligibility of a victim description and thus the task of reading the news, can be accomplished by finding that categorial descriptions of victims can be seen as comparative with ourselves, the reader. Thus members can find the victim reports as designed in terms of what we are or what we know, that is we are 'British' or know what it is to be a 'student'. This can be demonstrated inversely in reports where details regarding the

victims are not yet known. In such reports victim analysis is structured according to a search for relevance in category terms, the simplest example being ‘were there people of my nationality that died?’

“There was no immediate word on the nationalities of the passengers on board... Airport officials said that at this time of year there were likely to be many American tourists travelling.”

(USA Today 18/07/96 :6)

“Six Britons were among the 229 people who died when a Swissair jet crashed into the Atlantic Ocean off the Canadian coast at Nova Scotia, it emerged yesterday. The disaster, the worst in Swiss aviation history, claimed the lives of 10 United Nations officials.”

(Guardian/Observer Archive 04/09/98 :8)

“Alan Lewis, chief executive of the Boston based travel agency Grand Circle Corp., said he plane was carrying a group of 54 people – all over 50 – bound for a 14-day trip to Egypt and the Nile. He said most of the travellers were from Colorado, Arizona and the Pacific Northwest.

State owned EgyptAir, confronted with the worst crash in its history, said the 199 passengers included 62 Egyptians, two Sudanese, three Syrians and one Chilean. Most of the others were believed to be Americans. There were 18 crew members EgyptAir said.”

(New York Times 01/11/99 :2a)

This is similar in many ways to the example given by Sacks relating to the Kennedy assassination: “*Was it one of us right-wing Republicans?*”, “*Was it one of us Negroes?*”, “*Was it a Jew?*” etc. That is, “*Was it me?*” in that sense.” (Sacks 1992a:42) All this therefore can be summarised as ‘Was it something for us?’

The analysis of victim reporting as a member’s accomplishment therefore is reliant on categories being recognisable characteristics of the airliner crash report. This is illustrated in the search for the tellable story; this may not necessarily

constitute what I have described as being something 'for' the reader. It is clear that the story may be considered tellable for any number of reasons. We have noted the significance of both the stage of life device and of standardised relational pairs. In these instances it is often what we understand is the grammar of a certain category or device, its inferred predicates and futures and their rupturing which can be located as tellable. Even if we are not co-incumbents of the locatable victim categories, our awareness of categories other than our own allows us to find disjuncture that may rationalise the telling of this story. Whilst I have attempted to explicate how members might find meaning or relevance in various categories, I return to a quote from Jalbert as a response to common criticism of ethnomethodology:

"I am not trying to uncover which 'meanings' particular members actually discern, but to elucidate such meanings as could intelligibly be achieved."

(Jalbert 1999:32)



## **Recipient Design and Indexicality**

It was a noticeable factor of the above analysis that the victims featured in the biographies were frequently members of a restricted class of category sets. By this I mean that there were recurrent categories throughout the reports which might suggest that part of the grammar of airliner crash reports is dependent on the natural intelligibility offered by this class of category sets. There are several points I wish to elaborate on further to the previous analysis of victims. Firstly a continuance of the use of categories in 'finding something for us' particularly in relation to Sacks' lecture on *The Integrative Function of Public Tragedy* (Sacks 1992b: 188). Secondly it must be considered why certain categories feature whilst others do not, this relates primarily to the significance of category use in the emplotment of the news report. Finally a consideration of how such generalised categories, selected for no reason other than that they happen to be so, may be part of the apparatus of recipient design, that is indexical and topically selected identifications with reference to the known audience.

The notion forwarded by Sacks of 'finding something for us' in telling a story is closely linked to his lecture on the integrative function of public tragedy (Sacks 1992b). The question is how such generalised categories such as 'father' or 'student' can be found as specifically 'for us' or as having relevance to the article and indeed to the category of victim in this context, and only in this context where in any other situation they might not be noticeable or contextually significant. We see in action an apparatus of members' analysis that can be said to enable perception of generalised categories as having some specific relevance. The question then is how the categorial construction of such victim biographies go about specifying the general, making the death of these people a public tragedy available to 'us'. This problem can

be treated not as 'how do people see categories that in most contexts having nothing more than a mundane, routine significance as being specifically relevant?' but more as 'how are these categories our business in this context?' Put simply in any number of routine social interactions, one might encounter the categories of 'father', 'daughter', 'student' or 'Briton' which are available as general but not specific categories. Returning to Sacks' lecture on public tragedy:

"We can in similar fashion get at the integrative function of disaster and tragedy. That is, it is otherwise routinely nobody's business on the one hand, and perhaps unsolvable on the other, what's on the mind of the person who's passing you....But at least one facet of the integrative status of public tragedy is that someone on the street can cry, and the set of persons who pass him, who don't know him, can know what he's crying about i.e., he's crying about that public event."

(Sacks 1992b: 195)

The important aspect to draw from this lecture is that public disasters make emotions available to the public. In such a situation you can, with reasonable accuracy, understand what is going on in the minds of the public in regards to this disaster. But how is this applicable to enabling such categories to be considered 'our business'? Put simply one can explicate a clear apparatus whereby any given category (in line with the inferences that each carries) makes available to the social member, to the news reader, the emotions or thoughts of the people within the device parties to an airliner crash if said same category can be found to be within the device 'victim'. That is to say, if we are a member of the category 'father' and we see that among the victims are members of the categories of 'son' or 'daughter', these categories are made available to us through our own incumbencies and our orientation to all that such categories imply in terms of predicates, standardised relational pairs and connections to other categories. So finding 'something for us' is dependent on



finding categories' that we understand and that make available to use a whole set of information; about the nature of the victim, the feelings of the surviving categories and what has been lost for everyone involved.

Seemingly irrelevant categories (to the actual event) are highly pertinent to the grammar of airliner crash reporting, they make available the sense of the disaster. They can be employed as a resource for finding the sense of tragedy, of injustice, of horror and of the search for truth because these elements are made publicly available; because categories are public, are general and thus are accessible to us all. Victim biographies are then a crucial aspect of the story; they lend structural coherence and contribute to categorial order. It is the very context that specifies the general.

The second area I wished to explore was the class of category sets used to categorise the victims. I do not wish to embark on a statistical content analyses of the categories used, however it is reasonable to attempt to formally characterise these collections. My argument turns on the concept that this class of categories are crucial to the emplotment of the news report and subsequently reflexively constitutes the context and the intelligibility of the report; they are a member's resource. The assignment of the categories within the device parties to an airliner crash is achieved through members' local order work and orientation to categories, their predicates and contexts. The presence of certain categories which might be classified in a particular way is crucial as a resource for members. The most notable categories in airliner crash reports are 'victims' and by inference the category of 'offender' is allowable although not necessarily invoked. Therefore the classes of category sets in this instance share a reflexive relationship, that is the 'victim' category infers the 'offender' and vice versa. Each makes the other relevant, but how is this achieved?



As noted the structural properties of the story can be delineated according to the categories used. Thus in the emplotment of the news story one might identify two classes of category sets, which I will call 'Type 1' and 'Type 2' for now. These classes can be defined as categories with non-negative inferences and categories with negative inferences. This distinction is fundamental and indeed noticeable across the data. It pertains as much to the description of offender as it does victim. I shall explore both briefly and the 'offender' category in more detail in the following chapter. The narrative coherence of the story is dependent on the constituent elements of parties to an airliner crash being easily identifiable as playing the roles they observably do (see also Lee 1984).

### **Type 1:**

Described as non-negative categories this is a self-evident feature of victim reporting in the data studied. It relates to the fact that in victim biographies the news reports use categories with non-negative inferences, examples of which might be 'father', 'student', 'daughter'. Clearly there exists a case in which these categories might be used in negative ways; however in the emplotment of the news story, in the ascription of the status 'victim', these categories may be used as a resource for this very accomplishment. They facilitate or rather do not prevent members as perceiving this category as being an incumbent of the category victim (see also Watson 1976). As Jayyusi (1991) notes media texts are open to equivocal readings, the organisational qualities of the text may allow for two or more mutually exclusive interpretive readings. I would argue that in the designation of victim status in airliner crash reports, the structure and coherence of the text is highly dependent on such equivocality being avoided. The narrative intelligibility would be lost or at least fragmented were the reader to be unsure as to who the victims were, the offenders,

witnesses or professional commentators etc. Therefore the categories employed in the description of victims are unequivocally non-negative. That is, any such category may be used, through prior orientation to category, predicate and context, to find whether the mentioned person is a victim or offender. Naturally this isn't the only resource but this and other inferences serve to build the picture of intelligibility and to construct that person or persons as observably belonging to the category 'victim'.

## **Type 2**

This refers to categories that may be considered 'negative' when indexed within the contextual particulars of the report. Again this relies on members prior awareness of category, predicate and context as a means of 'doing trouble'. This relates to Sacks lecture on the MIR Categorisation device (Sacks 1992a:40). If certain categories can be found as having negative inferences in relation to the available context then they can be seen as belonging to the category 'offender'. Such examples might be nationality descriptors such as 'Libyan' or other categorisations such as 'Islamic Fundamentalist'. Both might be considered indexical expressions, as standalone categories they infer much but their true meaning as inference rich representatives is found in the context of the airliner crash. In short media texts avoid equivocality of readings through the use of indexical expressions which readers may find as naturally ascribing categorial status as a product of their inferred particulars. The categories employed are observable resources for resolving issues of equivocality, the co-selection of the category and the context allow the reader to 'do guilt' or conversely to 'do victim-hood'.



Whilst Sacks (1974; 1992a; 1992b) explored many of his concepts in relation to conversation analysis, the primary focus turned on the identifications and topical coherence of such interactions and members' ability to find and formulate relevance using the available descriptors and indexical configurations of language. There is a second consideration when exploring how it comes to be that as members, being aware of the economy of news reporting (that they don't mention every single detail of the event) and with this not being problematic, we expect only the relevant facts to be reported and in turn all things reported to be relevant, encounter no problems when in victim reporting there is a noticeable de-economising taking place. Put simply when reading of a news report and it mentions something of the weather at the time, we can reasonably conclude that this is pertinent to the report especially in regards to airliner crashes as we know that bad weather might be a factor. We don't however find this to be a problematic and irrelevant weather report; it has its contextual application. Whilst it may have independent significance, the contextual determinations of its use locate it within schemata of intelligible inferences. However as discussed the categories of descriptive victim reporting appear to have no contextual pertinence insofar as they did not contribute to the crash, cannot be formulated as a reason for the event, yet they are instantly intelligible. Initially then I examined the significance of the public availability of such categories being a factor. I would argue as a second point that that these categories derive their intelligibility in part from the fact that they are indexical expressions.

Reading the news can be considered a practical accomplishment, necessarily then there will be certain aspects which are dependent in the indexical properties of language. This is especially relevant due to the nature of news reporting where we have already been 'tipped' as to the context by the headline. Thus we read airliner



crash reports expecting certain elements and in categorial terms the proximate co-presence of a number of categories. In the victim biographies that I have studied, it is simple to discern that the categories used are not employed in relation to the crash itself they just happen to be a class of category sets, presumably infinite, that the victims belong to. Clearly these categories have standalone intelligibility. They might not be considered truly indexical expressions along the same lines as 'you', 'I' or 'that'. However insofar as they discern their complete sense from the contextual properties of use I would argue that they are indexical. When I refer to 'their complete sense', I don't mean that without the contextual awareness of the reader they have no intelligibility, but rather that within *this* context, they have a reflexively constituted meaning beyond the information that they give on their own. They are indexical in the sense that the context informs their contextual relevance and intelligibility; they are categories-in-context *because* of that context. Therefore given the nature of their use, the fact that they can be indexed by their use, makes them naturally intelligible. They serve to formally locate the category of 'victim', to make available the predicates, emotions and categories they infer by their presence and to lend topical coherence to the sense of this being 'a disaster report'. In the victim biography the categories used are far more significant than describing them as categories 'that just happen to be so':

- They describe the category of the victim
- Serve to avow that the categorisation of 'victim' is explainable.
- Provide for the presence of the category 'offender'
- Infers the predicates of this category contributing to the stories of horror, tragedy, injustice, irony.

- Infer who might be left behind by reference to standardised relational pairs and intimate categorisation devices e.g. family.

I referred earlier to the fact that knowing the categorial memberships of a victim makes available to us the sense of 'disaster' especially if we are incumbents of the same category. The sense of the 'disaster' can be made available through either the category of the victim or the categories that it in turn infers. "Us in relation to the victim's category" is a powerful tool for finding relevance and intelligibility.

## Conclusion:

The very coherence of many of our social routines depends on us being able to locate the correct characters given the known context. By linking categories or social actors with roles, bound activities and inferred paired categories in the recreation of actual scenarios (i.e. a news report) the moral ordering of the reportage is accomplished. The intelligibility of a news report depends on readers demonstrating their routine knowledge of categories and how the report could make sense *given these categories, in this context, in this configuration*. Part of the rationale of the news report is to recreate the story using the moral actors contained within; the reader must operate dual notions of structure and agency to find the genericism of the categorisations which lends moral order to the behaviours of the individual. The context of an airliner crash allows for the proximity of such categories as victim, witness and indeed sometimes offender. Stetson (1999:203) argues that the concepts of victim and offender as warrantable descriptors are assigned and negotiated through interaction of which media reports are part. Indeed for the data he studies I would agree that this is an accurate statement. In the case of airliner crash reports I would not so confidently apply this dictum. I would argue that victim status is perceived according to the mundane model, that whoever that person was, victim status is externally and objectively ascribed to them. (see Pollner 1987). Whether the news stories engage in further tellable stories or elucidate as to the categorial incumbencies of the victims, they might still be perceived as such. Regardless of nationality, occupation or age the resources and apparatus for members to locate victim-hood are intrinsic in the contextual specifics of an airliner crash and the subsequent loss of lives. Nonetheless I would agree with Stetson that the process of victim reportage contains a story-able element which is fundamental to the ascription and avowal of this category. Victim status is not so much negotiated through members local order



work but presented in terms of any number of temporal, categorial and contextual relevancies.

It is this fact that allows news reports to be rendered intelligible whether details about each victim are known or not. To be aware of the context, that of an airliner crash, is to be aware that certain characters common-sensically appear on cue, indeed their absence would be noticeable even problematic. 'Victims' are such characters, if one did not apply the mundane model in this instance the argument would rest that people could only be viewed as victims once the categorial specifics of their lives were known. Plainly this is not true as many reports feature nothing more than a figure for the amount that died. However the seemingly objective nature of the ascription of the category 'victim' is in itself reflexively constituted by the context. The relational configurations of category, predicate and context all serve to inform the other in what might be conceptualised as a cyclical relationship of mutual elaboration and inference. These meanings, categorial or otherwise, can be arrived at in a contextual sense as demonstrated in the chapter dealing with 'Characters appear on Cue' (Sacks 1992a: 182; 410). As illustrated thus far this data has a distinct 'storied' structure which informs its natural intelligibility. News reports are not simply a narrative characterisation of an objective reality; rather there exists what Sacks termed an 'observable economy' in relating the story. However this economy is disregarded in relation to specific characters, parties to the airliner crash. In the case of the victim, the most notable difference is the collection of tellable stories within the wider story.

This 'observable economy' is significant in both its presence and absence in such reports and such flexibility is as crucial to the thematic narrative as any other factor you might care to mention. To read the story of an airliner crash without any

sense of recipient deigned economy (recipient designed insofar as the recipient is a news reader not wishing to take several hours out of his or her day to pore over every detail) would simply not be feasible, at least not for the given context of news paper. We are aware that many details are omitted from a news report but we can also assume that they were not critical to the report. We might also deduce that nothing in the report is surplus to the story being told. But oddly, with regard to the victim reportages that feature within the reports, we witness a 'de-economising' whereby greater detail makes perfect sense and indeed may even lend coherence to the reports. Indeed the absence of details about at least some of the victims may lead the reader to conclude that the press are yet to obtain this information, naturally most people have read crash reports before and may consider it to be part of the grammar of such reporting.

Therefore what we encounter with these victim biographies, are sections of text which describe a person we presumably don't know and have never met, using categories that seem to have little to do with anything other than the fact that they happened to be so. And yet these descriptions are perfectly acceptable, perhaps even expected, facets of the grammar of disaster reporting. This is a remarkable fact as within airliner crash reports no other characters are permitted categorisation other than that which is referentially adequate and pertinent to the story in hand. The professional commentator is characterised in ways that might justify his or her personal expertise. The eyewitness is characterised in ways which might provide a course of action organisation for him or her to be an 'eyewitness'. Even, if applicable, the 'offender' may only be categorised according to the descriptors applicable to the activity of implication (fascist, terrorist, religious or political fanatic). Yet it seems to be the rule that 'victim' may be categorised using any

number of descriptors that need have no relevance other than the fact that they are true. Then the purpose of this analysis was to deconstruct the methods and apparatus by which this may be rendered intelligible to the reader, by reference to standardised relational pairs, the stage of life device, the MIR device and members' constant monitoring of categorial activities particularly in relation to their own.



## **Nationality Descriptors and Victim Reportage**

This term refers to descriptions of a person in an airliner crash report which indicates their nationality. This is especially pertinent to the categories of victim and if applicable offender. They constitute crucial means of categorising victims and are frequently the focal point of the story as 'tellable'. Along with many other categorisations they relate to the question "Why should we care?" They also represent one of the strongest indications of recipient design, in respect to news articles they are one of the few specifics about their audience that journalists can be reasonably sure of. This chapter then addresses several points, firstly the significance of nationality descriptors to the construction of a disaster report and as a resource for finding relevance and topical coherence. Secondly how such categorisations operate within the story-able structure of the news report contributing to the gestalt phenomena of the media text.

## **Correct Formulations of Place**

I refer briefly to Schegloff's paper "Notes on Conversational Practice: Formulating Place" (Schegloff 1972:75). Schegloff describes the considerations in selecting a locational formulation (reprinted in Giglioli 1972, alongside a broader discussion of context). Whilst I do not wish to speculate on the methods or means by which journalists chose to employ the nationality descriptors they do, I believe it to be a productive exercise to apply the work of Schegloff to this context. Members' interpretive procedures frequently rely on what we think we know about the other party to the interaction, in this case the considerations we think might be applied to the description of a victim in such a way. (see also Atkinson 1985). The problem of locational formulation is pertinent not just to the news writer but also to the reader.

Most members are experienced news readers; we carry an awareness of how things should or should not be reported. As Schegloff notes there are many correct formulations of place but not all of these would be considered 'right'. When reading the news we anticipate not just a factually accurate locational formulation but a 'right' one also. In examining Schegloff's work therefore, I do not aim to analyse the methods by which the media formulates place, but the resources members might explicate in order to find that such a reference is 'right'.

In Schegloff's work the concept of a 'right' formulation refers to the fact that for any description of place there are a plethora of factually correct terms each of which are observably true. His given example of his notes being "right in front of me, next to the telephone, on the desk, in my office, in the room" (in Sudnow 1972:81) and so on demonstrates that for each occasion where a formulation of place is required there are a number of possibilities. Clearly this differs somewhat in my data whereby the locational formulations are not where something is but where someone is from. Again however there are any numbers of correct descriptors in victim reportage however some are perceptibly 'right' and some are 'wrong'. The problem then is not (as it was for Schegloff) to formulate a correct locational reference in conversation, but to examine the means by which members might find a nationality descriptor to be 'right', that is how do we come across such descriptors as unproblematic features of a disaster report?

Schegloff notes three types of analysis performed by the speaker when formulating a location reference, I would like to adapt these to characterise the analytic methods members can employ to make sense of nationality descriptors.

These three considerations can be regarded as the fundamental resources by which members make sense of such victim characterisations as below:

“Many on doomed jetliner likely were American tourists”

(Headline)

(USA Today 18/07/96 :6)

The natural intelligibility of this extract can be formally located in members' methods for the analysis of the particulars of its occasioned use. The first consideration is 'location analysis'. This refers to our prior awareness of our own location (as reader) and by definition what nationality descriptor might correctly be applied to us, the location of the co-interactant (the news report) and by definition what national identity it has ascribed to it, and the location of the objects whose nationality is being described. In this sense members can find references to the national identity of the victims as 'correct' formulations place, where 'correct' is appropriate to the location analysis performed by the reader.

“Six Britons were among the 229 people who died when a Swissair jet crashed into the Atlantic Ocean off the Canadian coast at Nova Scotia, it emerged yesterday. The disaster, the worst in Swiss aviation history, claimed the lives of 10 United Nations Officials.”

(Guardian Observer Archive 04/09/98 :8)

This quote, through the location analysis of the reader, can be read as a categorially appropriate and news worthy reference to nationality. Similarly the following extract is comparable to Schegloff's (1972) discussion of the emergency call transcript:

“A 21 year old former Charlotte resident was among the victims of the crash of Pan Am Flight 103.



Luann Rogers, daughter of Oregon and Anne Rogers, formerly of Highbrook Drive, had been in London as part of a Syracuse University study program and was returning to the family's home in Olney, Md.

The Rogers family had been members of Chantilly Baptist Church – now Cornerstone Baptist Church – and Luann Rogers attended Idlewood Elementary School. They left Charlotte about 1977.”

(The Charlotte Observer 23/12/88 :12)

Schegloff refers to a transcript of a call to a police department and notes that despite repeated references to place names, streets and directions never once is the name of the city mentioned. This can be attributed to the callers finding a common co-presence through their location analysis. This is true of the above extract where the news report, from the Charlotte Observer, refers to street names, a church and a local school without mentioning the name of the city as the formulation can be characterised as being for readers who are co-present with the author or at least the destination of the publication. This provides for the selection of the formulation and its intelligibility for the reader. As Schegloff (1972:85) observes it relies heavily on ‘common sense geography’, a key resource for members in seeing that formulations of place are contextually and adequately provided for.

The second consideration is ‘Membership Analysis’. In much the same way as above, this involves prior awareness of the categorial incumbencies of the co-interactants. I don’t simply mean that as news readers we know what nationality we are and what nationality the news paper is reporting to although clearly this has some significance. More specifically, and this characterises much ethnomethodological analysis, we are aware of our categorial incumbencies in regards to the context which we know ourselves to inhabit and in relation to the categories of which the newspaper is perceived to represent. That is, we know who the journalist is reporting to or on

behalf of, the American or British people for example. We know who we are, we know who they think their audience is in terms of nationality, and this allows a formal characterisation of the victims in nationality terms. The news is relevant in this instance or locatable in this instance, as intelligible as reportage because of our interest in 'things to do with the categories we belong to'. In disaster reporting it seems that the most fundamental or intelligible way of 'making this something for us' is to identify the victims of the report in a manner that guarantees the greatest level of recipient design that one can reasonably achieve in a news report. Given that, as Jayyusi notes, texts are addressed to a 'public at large' rather than a person or persons with known particulars. Clearly however the use of nationality descriptors are in part at least, unproblematic to the reader because although recipient design cannot be supposed "...it might be evidenced as an organisation by which the text can be seen to be addressed to a particular community" (Jayyusi 1991).

Thus the construction of news reports, their very topical and narrative cohesion, is dependent to a large extent on the organisational properties of the text being perceivable as recipient designed. Without these categorial and contextual fundamentals, headlines such as "*Many on doomed jetliner likely were American tourists*" (USA Today 18/07/96) would not be as intelligible. By mentioning that many of the victims were American tourists one can observe the organisational properties of a recipient designed and naturally intelligible text. Coherence is accomplished through members local order work which is evidenced in the use of nationality descriptors in this given context. Nationality descriptors as indexical expressions operate by reference to the known particulars (in category terms) of the co-interactants and those being described. When members encounter such references, the solution to their intelligibility can be located in the categorial incumbencies of

those involved. It is reasonable to argue therefore that in this instance the hearing of locational formulations as 'right' or contextually appropriate manifests itself in part through 'membership analysis'.

The third order of consideration is 'Topic or Activity Analysis'. Schegloff describes this as "an orientation to 'topic' or to the activity being accomplished in an utterance; in short, a 'topic analysis' or 'activity analysis' is also relevant to the selection and hearing of a place formulation." This relates most strongly when considering airliner crash reports. Crucially it is the awareness of topic or context that informs the intelligibility of the identity descriptor. In one sense this could relate again to what members understand as constituting the grammar of disaster reporting. Orientation to topic in the hearing of location formulations is clearly a fundamental resource insofar as victims in disaster reports are frequently characterised according to their relation to the readership and the subsequent categorial incumbencies they are perceived to inhabit. Schegloff's comments on 'Rm' terms, 'relation to members' can be applied here (Schegloff 1972:97). Members can find, being aware of the context, the category membership of the newspaper (i.e. of British origin for example) and the category membership of themselves, that victims may be characterised using descriptors which can be formulated as having a 'relation to members'. This is what makes news relevant to 'us' and was discussed previously where victims were characterised as 'fathers' or 'students' for example. The national identity 'Rm' descriptor is notably the formulation which can be said to apply to the highest majority of the readership. This is not speculation as to why the report is structured in the way that it is or why such terms were selected by the author. The 'Rm' term in disaster reporting allows readers to find relevance, to find why they should care. Understanding that nationality descriptors fall within the rubric of 'Rm' terms is



crucial for explicating members' methods for making sense of victim characterisations constructed around their country of origin. Note that the description of a victim as a 'Briton' denotes some sense of belonging to this country of origin and thus of belonging to the reader of the news as they presumably share this common sense of attachment. Sacks (1992a) described people after the Kennedy assassination going through the "Was it me?" analysis, did the perpetrator belong to us in the sense of 'was it a communist?' and 'was it a right wing republican?' Reading the news conforms to Sacks observation that members constantly monitor the activities of other members. Thus reading of a news report involves the task of locating whether any of the victims 'belong to us', national identity being one of the most strongly and easily identified aspect of this kind of 'ownership'. The natural intelligibility of such descriptor formulations can be respecified as an observable resource for monitoring member activity. The particulars of the context and setting, 'who we know we are' and 'where we know we are' allow one method for finding these descriptors to be unproblematic (Schegloff 1972:75)

News reporting is frequently an excellent demonstration of the value of Sacks' (1992a) rules of application. The referential adequacy of one membership category allows news to be reported in the way that it is and can also be applied to nationality descriptors. Any number of terms in news reporting for describing the victim may be correct and indeed referentially adequate. In terms of place location formulations again one has the problem of many descriptors being correct; house number, city or village, state or county, country, continent etc. News reports feature observably 'right' formulations of locational identity descriptors. Schegloff's work argued that locational formulations must follow a set of considerations for such formulations to be considered 'right' or 'adequate'. In respect to my data I would argue that these

considerations, whilst clearly of significance to the news journalist, are of similar importance to the reader. My task is not to deconstruct the methods by which the journalist might formulate his or her report but rather to explicate some of the resources or methods available to the reader in their sense making work. Therefore just as Schegloff argues that location formulation requires sensitivity to a number of issues, finding sense or observable categorial order in such reports also depends on awareness of similar facets of the interaction. I am arguing from the perspective that reading the news is an interactive activity. The very dependence of the news on readers' prior orientation to category, predicate, context and the indexicality of the structural particulars of any such texts denies the conceptualisation of news reading as little more than the absorption of information.

Finding that any given nationality descriptor is a 'right' formulation that is not factually correct but referentially adequate, is dependent on members' awareness of the contextual and categorial particulars of the activity.

"The selection of a 'right' term and the hearing of a term as adequate, appear to involve sensitivity to the respective locations of the participants and referent....; to the membership composition of the interaction, and the knowledge of the world seen by members to be organised by membership categories....; and to the topic or activity being done in the conversation at that point in its course..."

(Schegloff 1972:114)

The observably coherent structure of the news report in this instance is leant cohesion by the presence of nationality descriptors which are locatable as 'right' by attention to the categorial incumbencies (in national identity terms) of the co-interactants and the topic for discussion. As noted, the membership composition of the interaction is a locally available resource for the reader, thus the pre-configured

boundaries of relevance are established in that acknowledgement. Any such descriptor in this context reflexively constitutes and is constituted of the particulars of that interaction. Meaning or sense derived from such descriptor terms is constituted through their use as contextually embedded indexical referents. Reflexively they represent the observable features of this context.



## **The significance of the 'Rm' Term**

The nationality descriptor as a structural and categorial feature of disaster reporting can only be fully understood in reference to the context in which it occurs, the occasioned particulars of its use. Therefore I was interested to examine how its use may alter in instances where the facts are constant but the contextual relevances different. Given the international nature of the airliner crash as a disaster incident in terms both of its location and the victim nationalities, this seemed an opportunity to effect an insight into how the national identities of the readers and the subjects may structure the conveyance of information in regards to the victims. The aim is not to attempt some a broad generalisation on victim reporting across continents but rather to offer some preliminary thoughts as to the contextual significance of nationality descriptors as ordered indexical expressions

This chapter has considered, as a central theme, whether there might be an observable hierarchy to victim reporting. My interest in this concept stems not from a desire to examine whether some categories are considered to be more worthy of reportage than others, but to propose the idea that recognisably 'victim-worthy' categories form part of the natural intelligibility of the report. The question then would address; is the reporting of airliner crashes, recognisable in part as what is observably is, because of what victims are described and what categories are used to describe them? Is there an observable hierarchy or set of categories that may be locatable as forming the relational and categorial configurations of a disaster report? If this were to be the case nationality descriptors would surely be an integral aspect of this apparatus.

News reports are faced with the problem of having equivocal readings despite the fact they are describing what seems to be 'objective' fact. In this sense the descriptive mechanisms employed to describe the victims, or more specifically the means by which such descriptions are made intelligible, provide an insight into the relationship between the news report and the 'real' world. Similarly it raises the issue that although news reports are not specifically recipient designed, in so far as they are designed for mass rather than individual consumption, the definite sense of belonging or ownership conveyed by the nationality descriptor is one recognisable feature of such reports. Some might argue journalists might go out of their way to avoid equivocality in their work (as equivocal readings do not make for clear and coherent news reporting). However as I would state the need to respecify the analysis of all news texts as containing deliberately equivocal readings (Jayyusi 1991).

News texts are produced observably so, for a practical purpose, to report 'news'. Essentially they can be said to be reporting this news to anyone. Provided they speak the given language any member can obtain a newspaper and read about the incidents contained within its pages. It isn't the case for example that a North American could pick up the London Times and find no sense in it. Certainly aspects of any article may not be understandable, place names or people for example. Nonetheless even if one doesn't know where it crashed, or who died in the crash or even who was responsible, the fact that an airliner has crashed is easily and recognisably communicated and received. 'News' is news potentially for anyone. However it doesn't stop here, that very same article, reporting that very same incident, using those very same descriptors is also 'news for these people specifically but not exclusively'. By 'these' people I mean the people of the country, region, district or whatever geographical particulars that paper operates within. 'These people' are the

readers that can find 'something for us', that can locate a sense of ownership to places, to people, to victims. The sense that those who died aboard that airliner belonged to 'us' rather than to 'them'. On a wider scale the news article as a sociological phenomenon reports 'news-in-context'. Not *exclusively* for that context, but for that context nonetheless. This differs substantially from the 'hearable equivocality' described by Jayyusi (1991) in which she conceptualises what the report 'says-in-so-many-words' and 'what it does not say'. In this she analyses the story within the story. Whilst I agree that such equivocal readings are provided for by the organisation of the text, and that this organisation is category dependent, in this instance the notable feature is not that the text provides two or more mutually exclusive readings but that there may be two or more tiers of understanding.

This can be related again to Schegloff's (1972:75) work on the selection of location formulations. Similar to his description of 'where my notes are', the accurate formulations of where a victim is from e.g. street, town, county, country, continent exhibit a concentric organisation where each of the earlier terms is contained within a later term. It therefore seems reasonable that members can locate nationality descriptors as 'right' or appropriate for this instance because they occupy a contextually appropriate level on the hierarchic ladder of location formulation. I believe this geographical scale of hierarchical place descriptors is best conceptualised using the notion that victim reports are often constructed in such a manner that a sense of loss can be located in the descriptors employed by inferring some sense of categorial 'ownership' or common categorial incumbency such as national identity. Since it is the case that few of the news readerships will have suffered a personal loss from the crash, the organisation of the report frequently provides the resources to find a sense of *categorial loss*. In this instance I stress the significance of much of Sacks'



work in terms of its versatility. His lecture entitled "Place References: Weak and Safe Compliments" (Sacks 1992a:461) refers not to place references in the context I have discussed but indexical terms such as 'here' and 'usually', in particular the phrase "Usually there's a broad in here". It seems that the use of nationality descriptors serves to convey the impression that 'usually' the person who has died is 'here'. If they're British, and you're British, and you're reading this in a British newspaper; then 'usually they are 'here', in Britain. More specifically, usually they are here, with 'us' (us in the generic national identity respect) as one of 'us'.

From this point I can expand on the 'rm term', this notion of there being a relation to members, where 'members' are the readers, is enormously powerful in victim reportage. One can use this resource to locate a sense of personal, perhaps personal is not the right term, but of a loss connected to us in some way even if we didn't know that person. This relates to Sacks' work on the integrative function of public tragedy (Sacks 1992b:188) whereby people can find or feel a sense loss of a perfect stranger because the categorial incumbencies of that person allowed them to claim some sort of 'ownership', again ownership is a clumsy term but it encapsulates the concept. Sacks noted that with public disasters, people could express their emotions in public because these emotions were available to them even though they were unacquainted with this person who had died. He gives the example of the deaths of the Kennedy brothers or Martin Luther King. And people didn't ask why they cared; motives and emotions were made available by the public tragedy. In the case of airliner crashes it is categorial incumbencies which make emotions available to people if there is some relation to them, although plainly you don't need instances of the *rm term* to understand or even react to a victim biography.

“It’s such a catastrophe, so awful,” said a woman named Fatima, who declined to give her last name. I don’t feel sad exactly because I didn’t know the young man, but inside, I have a bad feeling.”

(Guardian Observer Archive 22/07/96 :7)

Clearly this woman doesn’t know the victim in question, nonetheless perhaps by dint of their shared national identity this emotion is available to her and its expression unproblematic for the reader.

In this respect nationality descriptors are an enormously efficient way of finding that sense of loss. They are a crucial resource for the reader in several ways; they justify the inclusion of victim description, address the question ‘why should we care?’ and construct the tragic element of the story. The story within a story is assembled by juxtaposing what has happened to these people by what their categorial incumbencies dictate that they are ‘usually’ engaged in. This can include ‘being a father’, ‘being a student’, ‘being a daughter’ or simply ‘being here’ in national identity terms.

Naturally the sense of a victim ‘being here’ is context dependent. Nationality descriptors play a fundamental role in the categorial make-up of the airliner crash report. In many ways they are almost as news worthy as the crash itself and are one of the most noticeably recipient designed feature of a text intended for mass consumption by people about whom little specific is known. My interest in this feature of the reports stemmed from a desire to consider how such descriptors function as indexical, contextually dependent terms and what consequences this might hold for the analysis of media texts.

I did not intend to attempt a comprehensive analysis of victim reportage, nor did I wish to make incursions into the territory of news values. However as has been established certain categorial incumbencies lend victims, or rather their fate as incumbents of such categories, a story-able quality. I have discussed above the significance of the nationality descriptors as an RM (relation to members) term. Clearly this category of victim is 'tellable' due to the context in which the event is reported. However it is clearly noticeable that national identity is not the only element which provides for an observable story-within-a-story for victim reportage.

Previously the stage of life has been discussed as a mechanism for locating tragedy, I am not arguing for such reasons as demonstrably why they warranted inclusion in the report, nonetheless it seems a recurrent feature, for my data at least, that victim reportage is characterised by categorial specificities which provide for more than the base fact that this person is a victim. To refer to an earlier point, the victim biographies, facts that are only in the report because they happen to be so, have a number of recurring characteristics which rely on conventionally tied features of a state of being. Undoubtedly there are other instances in which victim biographies provide an additional story-able element, profession or personal fame for example. (*Some of the world's best on board* USA Today 31/01/00 Describing the deaths of AIDS researchers and United Nations Staff on board) Nonetheless thus far national identity, the stage of life device, and grammars that infer conventionally anticipated features, the projection of a positive future state, have been the most prominent story-able elements to victim reportage.



## **Conclusion**

Whilst I feel that a trans-national comparative analysis of category use in victim description would be a rewarding avenue for investigation it has not been possible to explore to any acceptable standard within the confines of this work. Rather it represents a topic for analysis in and of itself. Reference has been made on occasion in this chapter to the possibility of a victim hierarchy, a term which has been used previously by analysts of victim reportage in the media. For this work I believe this to be a disingenuous conceptualisation as it infers knowledge of the selection processes of the journalist. Nonetheless it is observably apparent that the tellable story of the airliner crash victim is firmly entrenched in the categorial particulars of such individuals and the contextual occasions of their use. That members can locate this story is testament to and indicative of the locally ordered, reflexively produced, ongoing and without respite situated accomplishments of the social actor.

**Chapter Eight:**  
**The Story of the ‘Offender’**

## **Introduction**

As a natural progression this chapter considers the final category within the master device 'parties to an airliner crash'. It discusses the use of subjective descriptors to repackage objective fact and how members might find 'offender' categories as unproblematic and even appropriate through Sacks' (1992a) notion of inference rich representation devices and implicative logic. Relating to the work of Hester and Eglin (1999) the concept of 'terrorism' is deconstructed as a members' phenomenon and it completes the discussion of embedded commentaries begun in chapter six with an analysis of categorial relevances in the search for truth. This chapter signifies the full circle approach to the work where in temporal terms the story of the intentional airliner crash logically begins.

"Terror or Accident?"

(Headline)

"Reports claim Arab group warned of attack on US target before 230 killed.

The Sudden catastrophe which overtook TWA Flight 800 off Long Island, New York on Wednesday night killing all 230 people on board has cast a long, fearful shadow over today's formal opening of the Olympic Games in Atlanta.

As investigators, backed by local fishermen, scoured the crash site about 10 miles south of Moriches Bay for bodies and wreckage of the Boeing 747 jumbo jet, speculation that it had been destroyed deliberately intensified late last night amid reports that before the blast an Arabic newspaper had been warned of an attack by the same group that claimed responsibility for an earlier bombing in Saudi Arabia."

(The Guardian 19/07/96 :4)

As an initial observation this headline effectively encapsulates the structure of the causal analysis within the crash report as a generic phenomenon. Each text can be



reduced to an exercise in describing, connecting and consulting various categories. In essence the story of the crash has happened; the new story, the pertinent question, is why it happened. The categories characteristic of an airliner crash story, the victims, the eyewitness, the professional commentator and the offender (if applicable) all play a significant role in addressing the above headline, 'terror or accident'. Having considered the roles of the eyewitness, the commentator and the victim, in addressing the 'offender' category the data has come full circle. Naturally the issue of a human 'offender' in its commonly understood sense, the terrorist, is a prominent feature of such reports whose proximity to the event dictates that speculation (albeit educated and considered) are often all that can be offered.

The categorial particulars of the airliner crash report resemble a jigsaw insofar as the facts are readily available to the reader but they form no semblance of a complete picture. Each report adequately provides for the fact that the truth behind the crash is unknown, but unknown within a set of explicitly 'known' boundaries, of which terrorism is one.

"There was no definitive word on the cause, but there were indications that the Pan Am jet, one of the earliest versions of a 19 year old design noted for its safety record, may have begun to disintegrate before hitting the ground. Debris and bodies were found scattered over a wide area. John Boyd, the Police Chief for the area, said parts of the plane came down in six locations over a ten mile radius.

Pan Am and British authorities say there was no evidence of sabotage, but aviation experts said the possibility could not be discounted. "It could be structural failure," said Jim Ferguson, aviation editor of Flight International magazine. "It could be sabotage... That's a possibility." John Galipault, president of the Aviation Safety Institute in Ohio, said yesterday that the earliest information

concerning the accident indicated that either a bomb or a catastrophic failure inside the plane or its engines was the primary reason for the crash.”

(Chicago Tribune 22/12'88 :15)

The substance of the report becomes the array of possible causes, each with its own categorial associations which are described for the reader. The most noticeable characteristic is that each text offers the necessary categorial and contextual resources for the reader to resolve the equivocality of the incident, the story within a story is constructed around which collection of resolution categories is appropriate.

Having examined the role of the categories of professional commentator, eyewitness and offender the natural progression is to address the issue of an offender or offenders. As Stetson (1999) notes the categorial presence of 'victim' allows for the 'offender' category to be introduced. As a standardised relational pair, offender-victim, one infers the other. One element of the story I omitted from the previous chapter was the search for truth, or more specifically the organisational properties of the story which ask the question 'why did this happen?' Similarly part of routinising the unexpected was providing the structural particulars in terms of boundaries of understood relevance to find cause for the crash. What was not addressed at that point was the possibility that such an incident may have been a deliberate act.

The possibility of terrorism is often one of the many assumptions in most minds following the crash of an airliner. However given that airliners fly in poor weather every day and we assume that stringent procedures are in place to avoid mechanical failures it often seems the logical deduction in a situation which seems to offer no ready explanation. I have been considering the organisational features of



airliner crash reports which may build toward a grammar for reporting this kind of incident. It is of paramount importance then that the issue of 'terrorism' as a frequent aspect of such reporting is addressed. Of particular interest in this chapter then is the construction of the 'search for truth' element to all airliner crash stories, the activity of implication in categorial terms, and the contextual significance of the 'offender' category within such a story.

My interest in this aspect of the reporting was born from reading the news articles published in the London Times from 1963 in the days following the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy. There was a distinct parallel between the reporting of the time and the comments made by Sacks about the Nazi regime and the portrayal of Jewish people as economic criminals (Sacks, 1992a). He observes that although there was no overt accusation made, the use of observably Jewish names and the categorial inferences they carried was enough to accomplish this suggestion. The reports from 1963 carried a catalogue of various categories, inference rich given the political climate of the time, that not only implied guilt but also substituted for a motive and provided a certain routinising of this event. I do not mean to imply that the articles worked to portray the offender in mundane terms but rather in terms that were readily understandable and could be interpreted as "this makes sense because that's what members of this category do". That is, it addressed the already posed question, "Who would assassinate a president?" and offered not an answer, not a motive or a reason, but a category; "A communist / fascist / racialist / radicalist." (London Times 27/11/63) This can be conceptualised as part of the grammar of motives, the inference rich nature of category in offender ascription (see Burke 1962; Watson 1978). The second point of interest was the significance of the



offender category to the narrative coherence of the story as a whole. By the 'story' I refer not simply to the article but to the 'story of the assassination' which the report aims to describe.

Clearly this is reporting which features many observable differences to an airliner crash nonetheless the similarities are striking and offer a potentially rewarding and revealing comparison. Sacks mentioned the Kennedy assassination briefly in his lecture on the MIR Categorisation Device (Sacks, 1992a:40). He notes that categories can substitute for any number of things because firstly they are inference rich and secondly members are aware of what other members are doing and being held accountable for. Thus at the time there was a sense of apprehension among certain groups who did not wish to be categorised in future as 'people who assassinate presidents'. As perceptions of social identity are constructed reflexively around the actions of its members this could be potentially significant for other members of the offenders' social group. With the proximity of the reports to the incident the cause is frequently a matter for speculation. The possibility of terrorism and the presence of the offender category is a recurring theme across my data. Three questions are then raised, how members can find sense in the employment of news stories with respect to the possibility of the 'offender' category? Secondly how is this manifested within the broader theme of the search for the truth behind the crash? Finally what significance does the 'offender' category hold within the wider rubric of the disaster report?

Of concern also is a reverse of Sacks' (1992b) storytelling maxim that members work to find 'something for us', whereby the categorial particulars of the offender facet to the story may be characterised by establishing that this is quite

clearly 'something not for us'. By this I mean that there can be no categorial associations between the reader and the offender which operates as a reflexive resource for finding such references to be intelligible.

### **Inference Rich Offender Categories:**

**"Trotskyist? Fascist? Racialist? – Many Guesses**

**Various theories on the motives of the shooting of President Kennedy have been voiced in different countries."**

**(London Times 27/11/63 :18)**

**"Terror or Accident?"**

**(Headline)**

**"Reports claim Arab group warned of attack on US target before 230 killed"**

**(By-line)**

**(The Guardian 19/07/96 :4)**

The first headline is taken from the days following the Kennedy assassination. It parallels with selections from my data insofar as the hub of the story turns on the inference rich nature of such membership categories. The second headline and subsequent by-line follows the crash of TWA Flight 800. The two are strikingly comparative in terms of their dependence on members prior orientation to categories their predicates and the contextual particulars of their use in finding that these are reasonable categories to associate with the assassination of an American President or the downing of a passenger jet. Both these extracts are enormously complex yet surprisingly compact. As Baker (1997) argues, members rely on their knowledge of categories and category bound activities to ascribe to individuals the role of moral

actors. Social order and a moral rationale are found as practically organised via members' routine knowledge of categories and their predicates.

This data illustrates the significance of Ethnomethodology's interest in what Zimmerman and Pollner describe as the "occasioned corpus".

"By use of the conception of an occasioned corpus, we mean to transform any social setting and its features for the purposes of analysis...to examine a setting and its features as temporally situated accomplishments of parties to the setting."

(In Hester and Eglin 1997: 27)

Reading the news, making sense of the news, is a practical accomplishment of parties to that setting, natural intelligibility of such headlines is firmly situated in members' prior awareness of categories, predicates and context. The occasioned corpus, the temporally situated 'here and now' of the data, is ethnomethodology's primary interest. It is not to establish a framework of membership categorisation analysis accurate for all time and in all situations. Rather as Zimmerman and Pollner argue the irrevocable indexicality of categories, devices and predicates determines that such data as is being examined here must be viewed as an example of members' practical action and practical reasoning, in-situ. The categorially structured resources of each piece are not available for all time. This is not to say that certain categories are only inference rich in the temporally located occasion of their use but that such inferences vary enormously. Most noticeably they operate to provide resources for the story to 'make sense'. However shocking the event or incident category ascription lends narrative coherence to the report. The assassination of a President is shocking



but categorisation of the offender as a 'Trotskyist' provides motive albeit a tenuous one. The following data analysis is an attempt to unpack the offender category in order to assess its significance to the media airliner crash text.

Mentioned earlier in this chapter as well as occupying a portion of this work exclusively is the conceptualisation of routinising the unexpected. It is especially noticeable in the data and seemingly many disaster report resemble an exercise in repackaging the news in mundane terms. By 'mundane' I refer the presentation of unexpected events using routine categorial and contextual descriptors. Taking the Kennedy assassination as a good example, this event was unexpected and unforeseen and, as it is, the incident is difficult to make sense of. For the reader however the events of that day are reformulated as a mundane occurrence by dint of the categorial classifications of the offender and in turn the victim. Again, by using the term mundane I do not wish to imply that the events of the news are trivialised in their categorial organisations. Rather it is the classifications used which allow the reader to locate a formal narrative within the text, a sense of categorial consistency that exists when a Communist, Russian sympathiser assassinates the President of the United States. This is a sense that would not exist if a school teacher, for example, with no 'radical' political leanings committed the same act. Repackaging the events in this manner do not lessen their impact but construct a coherence dependent on categories and the contextual occasions of their use (see Hester 1992).

Inference rich categories depend naturally on several factors. How then does the context 'modify' such categories so that not only are they perfectly adequate in their use but that they infer greater information. I wish to apply two concepts of

'modified categories' to my data, firstly the work of Cuff (1978, 1994), "Problems of versions in everyday situations." The issue he describes confronts the problem that in the breakdown of marriages the categories of 'husband' or 'wife' do not infer the necessary predicates to explain or provide for marital problems. To circumvent this apparent problem modified or qualified categories are needed such as 'dissolute husband' which of course allow for any number of situations to be located. This was encountered in the previous chapter describing the characters that formed the device parties to an airliner crash whereby such descriptors as 'victim' are modified categories along the lines of 'victims to an airliner crash'. The narrative coherence or storyable characteristics of the airliner crash report are preserved by the inferential qualities of these modified categories. This can be likened to the previous chapters' comments on finding the 'right' location formulation in victim description. It refers to how members might engage in finding the 'right' version of events as reported by the news media and the methods of resolution regarding the problems of different interpretations. Cuff's work in this area is dependent on version disjunctures finding their resolution in modified categories.

The second concept returns to Sacks' lecture on the MIR Categorisation device he refers to MIR Modifiers which "consist of attempts to provide that what it is that may be said about any member is not to be said about the member at hand" (Sacks 1992a:44 ). What is most noticeable in my data, and indeed reports in which the activity of implication is a recurrent theme, is the fact that these modified categories consist of attempts to provide that what is said about any member *can* and should be said about the member at hand and more so may be used to ascribe offender status. It is not the case that in the absence of such tautological statements a neutral



categorial status might be assumed. Rather these modified categories are an active particular of the activity of implication; they stress the relevance of what is known about members of such categories or devices as being integral to the narrative qualities of the piece. A seemingly neutral category such as 'Arab' or 'Communist' may be modified to the extent that within the given context motive and guilt, or suspicion of guilt, are inferred. Essentially in a reverse of what Sacks describes, the perceived 'offender' category serves as a locatable resource that members can find as reminding them that what can be said to be true of members of this category is true of this person also. The text can be said to direct the search for the offender implied by the presence of a perceived crime or victim by virtue of the MIR device and category modifications.

The headline poses the question "Terror or Accident", an implied mystery at the centre of all of my data and certainly the majority of initial disaster reports. 'Terror' or 'accident' as known and understood contextual instances implies a number of categorial particulars, some may overlap, and some may not. Essentially the question posed by the newspaper is a rhetorical one as presumably the answer is not to be revealed in the body of the article, clearly this must be the case or the question would be redundant. The structural organisation of the text is noticeably organised around this question as possible scenarios are examined and discussed. I have analysed the feature termed 'routinising the unexpected' in regards to the 'accident' aspect of the airliner crash story. The question of 'terror' is in many ways more complicated. The article is unable to level any conclusive accusations, thus what resources are available to the reader to locate possible information relating to first half



of the "Terror or Accident?" question? How is the notion of the 'offender' category constructed?

**"Reports claim Arab group warned of attack on US target before 230 killed"**

**(By-line)**

According to ABC news, the Movement for Islamic Change – which claimed it was behind the killings of five Americans in Riyadh last November – warned the al-Hayat Arabic paper on Wednesday that a US target would be hit at the exact time Flight 800 went down.

The warning used "chilling specifics", ABC said, but was not passed on to authorities.

"All will be surprised by the size of the attack, the place and the time," the group warned.

**(The Guardian 19/07/96 :4)**

One might question in this instance why the natural assumption is that the Arab group warned of the attack not with the intention of preventing its occurrence but rather as a threat. The natural intelligibility of this extract can be deconstructed into several key aspects; each heavily relies on members' prior orientation to the contextual, categorial and organisational particulars of the 'terrorist attack'. Firstly one can assume that this relates to the terror mentioned in the headline, even before the word 'attack', prior knowledge that an airliner will crash is dependent on its being deliberate not accidental. A second available resource is the terrorist habit of warning before an attack this is an unmentioned factor dependent on members prior knowledge of such instances (involving the IRA for example) nonetheless it is a contributing facet to finding an implication of guilt. Thirdly, again reliant on members' orientation to categorial inferences, the Middle Eastern association with terrorism allows guilt (perhaps even motive) to be inferred from the category 'Arab' in the context of an airliner crash. Thus far the single category 'Arab' modified by its

membership to the collection 'parties to an intentional airliner crash' can be located as a possible 'offender'. Each of these resources is dependent on the MIR device. As Sacks notes, this simple apparatus is an effective method of 'doing trouble' or more specifically of 'doing implying guilt' (Sacks 1992a:42).

The separation of the perceived offender category from the perceived victim category is only practicable for the sake of analysis. In essence 'doing guilt' inexorably ties the victim and offender together; it is their close proximity that constitutes the other for what it observably is. A murder committed by a *fascist* or a *racialist* is not explained solely by the category membership of the person in hand (although clearly this could be the case, 'psychopath', 'serial killer' being two cases in point popular in the media) and resources for identifying the offender category are as much dependent on the victim. A 'Trotskyist' suspect in custody could be perceived as a likely offender if the victim is the President of the United States, in the politically sensitive climate of the time the two categories in relation to each other suggest a motive and infer guilt.

One can read the by-line as not just reporting that an 'Arab group' warned of an 'attack' (inferential grounds for locating implied guilt as already demonstrated) but of an attack on a 'US target'. Given the history of political mistrust and unease between the US and the Middle East this can be located as a crucial resource in the activity of implication. On a wider note this adequately demonstrates that the categorial particulars of my data are firmly located in the temporal, even perceived macro-scopic occasions of their use. They cannot be examined as universal texts containing information available to all in the same way and having some sense of

external facticity and intelligibility. Rather for this interpretation they rely strongly on the preconditioned understandings of the readership *at that time, in that place*.

The above by-line can be unpacked into three key elements of membership categorisation analysis. Whilst this may seem to over simplify to some extent, this is a most likely resource, the foundation, of a method of interpretation. The reader is aware of the context given the headline, from reading this he or she can identify an action and two membership categories. The action can readily be identified as a crime using the word 'attack' and the lack of contextual allowables (e.g. a war), the membership categories of victim are easily locatable (230 killed) and the report offers no explanation of the category 'Arab group'. Returning to Watson's work (1999) the offender aspect of the emplotment of this news story can in part be accomplished by using the proximate co-presence of 'crime' and 'victim' as they share an inferential and mutually elaborative relationship. Finding that a given category is to be ascribed offender status is significantly dependent on the known standardised relational pairs of crime-criminal and victim-offender.

"According to ABC news, the Movement for Islamic Change – which claimed it was behind the killing of five Americans in Riyadh last November – warned the al Hayat Arabic paper on Wednesday that a US target would be hit at the exact time Flight 800 went down."

(The Guardian 19/07/96 :4)

"There were no indications that the EgyptAir plane had been sabotaged and no claims of responsibility by terrorists, American and Egyptian officials said, although the Federal Aviation Administration had warned airlines a month ago of a threat to bomb an unspecified flight out of Los Angeles or New York. EgyptAir Flight 990 had originated in Los Angeles on Saturday."

(New York Times 01/11/99 :2a)



Extracts such as this are enormously complex in terms of categorial and contextual inferences. The significance of these extracts can be encapsulated by explicating the observable consistency between two sets of warrantable claims and two sets of standardised relational pairs. If we take the categorial pairings first, the most notable is the ascription of the 'offender' category to the 'Movement for Islamic Change' and the victim category to the 'five Americans' that were killed. This pairing can be found as inferring a similar example to the incident at hand, with the airliner crash the victim category is easily ascribed and subsequently the offender can be located in the prior coupling of the offender-victim categories. One might apply Sacks' consistency rule in finding that in both instances the offender category can be attached to the same individuals as there is a hearable similarity between the two incidents (Sacks 1992a). Likewise by implication the common identity of the victims (US citizens) is a further resource.

The second consistent factor is the warrantable claim applicable to both extracts even though the second does not explicitly mention a potential offender category. This occurs firstly through the threat of attack, characteristic of terrorist action, and its subsequent fulfilment (at least observable fulfilment, a direct link is not conclusively established). In the first extract there is the claim of the news article that the terrorist explanation is 'the' explanation or at least one which they are indicating as possible. The warrantability of the claim of the terrorism explanation can be found by dint of the same being said of the claim by the 'offender'. Validity is reflexively constructed by the other, as is the case with the consistent standardised relational pair;

they are contextually and temporally dependent on the other for their warrantable status.

So far the possible interpretive procedures have been reliant on members' knowledge of inference rich categories. However, those reporting the news cannot assume too much, essentially a news report should be accessible to all and whilst some cultural awareness is inevitably necessary there remains the problem of finding the offender category when inference rich representatives are not available or known. This can operate on what might be considered a 'last man standing' basis. As has been noted the significance of other known contextually relevant categories are equally important in the activity of implication. By their very presence they infer the co-presence of offender, some more than others (the resolution category 'terrorism expert' for example.)

**"Reports claim Arab group warned of attack on US target before 230 killed"**

**(By-line)**

**(The Guardian 19.07.96 :4)**

This example demonstrates that the category of offender is ascribed to the 'Arab group' through the demand for the narrative coherence found in news reporting. The victim category has already been ascribed thus the standardised relational pairing of offender-victim dictates the intelligibility of this piece. Similarly the predicate 'attack' within the context of an airliner crash infers terrorism, the US Target is the victim thus the last man standing as it were, the Arab group, by definition is ascribed offender status.

## **Narrative implication as embedded commentary – ‘Terrorism’**

Similar to much of my data, a report in the New York Times following the crash of EgyptAir Flight 990 (October 31<sup>st</sup> 1999) can be seen as organised in terms of a tacit suggestion of terrorism. The activity of implying presence of the modified offender category (‘terrorist’) is achieved not through accusations or inference rich categories, revealing due to the contextual occasions of their use as above but through discounting the other known possible factors:

“There were no indications that the Egyptair plane had been sabotaged and no claims of responsibility by terrorists, American and Egyptian officials said, although the Federal Aviation Administration had warned airlines a month ago of a threat to bomb an unspecified flight out of Los Angeles or New York. Egyptair Flight 990 had originated in Los Angeles on Saturday.

Weather conditions did not appear to be a factor. Fog had shrouded Kennedy airport at the time of takeoff and through much of the day Sunday, but there were no storms in the vicinity of the crash, winds were light and visibility as 10 miles or more, meteorologists said.

It was equally unclear whether some mechanical failure on the 10 year old jet, which had no history of serious problems, or human error had contributed to the disaster.”

(New York Times 01/11/99 :2a)

This extract considers the four most common causes for an airliner to crash, terrorism, weather conditions, mechanical failure and human error. It demonstrates the need to respecify news texts as more than mundane accounts of social occurrences. Far from being simply a medium of information conveyance they re-order and repackage events with readily observable embedded commentaries. In this report the possible scenarios are established in an apparent attempt to resolve the



cause of the crash. For the reader, such structuring of the known causes of airliner crashes provides ample resources to accomplish the sense that terrorism is the preferred explanation. In each instance, the known variations are discounted, for example the 'bad weather' scenario is addressed by discounting those elements of bad weather that common-sensically might cause difficulties: "*there were no storms in the vicinity of the crash, winds were light and visibility as 10 miles or more*". Similarly mechanical failure is discounted by reporting that there was "*no history of serious problems*". Each of these can be interpreted as warrantable claims to disregard such circumstances.

Significantly the first paragraph is structured according to the categories of 'terrorists', 'American and Egyptian officials' and the 'Federal Aviation Administration'. The contextual pairing of 'airliner' and 'terrorist', this being an observable co-selection hearably consistent with the device 'parties to an airliner crash' and the sub-device 'parties to an intentional airliner crash' all serve to establish this explanation as being mundanely apparent as the most plausible scenario. The temporal and logical connection between the warning of a 'bomb threat' and the reported outcome demonstrate a noticeable and usable consistency between the 'expectation as premise - reality as outcome' modifiers. Moreover the logical harmony between the intended target of the bomb and the actual target lends credence to this theory as the true explanation: "*an unspecified flight out of Los Angeles or New York. Egyptair Flight 990 had originated in Los Angeles on Saturday.*"

Thus without employing inference rich 'offender' categorisations, the organisational particulars of this report provide adequate resources for members to

accomplish this common sense reading. Not dependent on members' cultural awareness of inferred culpability its preferred reading is inexorably linked to the modified conveyance of information. Finding the offender in news texts can be accomplished using a variety of methods. The contextual and categorial inferences, prior orientation to standardised relational pairs and predicates and the natural search for the story-able quality of the statement all contribute. Again the story within a story and the natural tendency to routinise the unexpected by drawing on mundane and pre-configured boundaries of relevance are further means for accomplishing this understanding.

Thus far I have examined how certain categories within the reports can be seen as occupying offender categorisation. Not all of the reports offer categorisations which are perceptible as implications of guilt. Many however are structured so as to imply this possibility, the organisational and categorial particulars of much of the data can be interpreted as working toward, as above, leaving the explanation of terrorism and the presence (if unmentioned) of an offender as the 'last man standing'. It is then possible to explicate from the data a consistent sense of implied guilt to a party or parties unknown which is structurally maintained throughout the report. This could be conceptualised in part using a term from Francis and Hart's (1997) analysis of a television commercial. They describe observably consistent particulars of the story; "a second dimension of co-selection comprises the action descriptors which provide the motivational texture of the narrative". Essentially the commercial was organised in terms of structural and categorial descriptors consistent with this individual and his goal. My initial theory then is that one might explicate the 'motivational texture' of

airliner crash reporting and the specifics which make it observably so. I believe this is most noticeable in the construction of implication.

It is possible to view the data as not simply news reports on an airliner crash but reports structured around an unanswered question. Everything is ordered around the master category of the 'airliner crash' and subsequent categories, devices and predicates must be hearably consistent with this. The course of action characterisations are observable in their efforts to resolve the obvious mystery of why the airliner crashed however they serve to redefine the texts as a collection of embedded narratives, the most prominent of these being 'why did this airliner crash?' Further to this many of the organisational features can be explicated as tacit implications of the modified category offender within the device parties to an airliner crash. This analysis examines one report and the consistent co-selection of descriptors that construct the 'story of the terrorist act'.

Francis and Hart (1997) describe the project of the central character in their analysis of the television commercial. This project, crucial to the narrative of the commercial is made available to the reader on several levels significantly by describing his actions in such a way as to convey the point that he is taking part in a "consistent course of action":

"What the filmic construction also makes available is the link between the identity of the central character and his 'project'. Thus, his actions are described in such a way as to make it available to the reader to understand that he is engaged in a 'consistent course of action' – he is described as 'rushing', 'jumping', 'running' and so forth – and the actions of other persons are referred to in terms of this course of action – for example, he is 'obstructed' and 'restrained' by them. Furthermore these



descriptors are consistent with a purpose which, in a reflexive fashion, they make available to the reader as the project which motivates the young guy's behaviour and thereby explains this consistency."

(Francis and Hart 1997: 138)

The narrative of implication observable in the crash reports relies on the co-selection of categorial descriptors. I am not suggesting that the goal of the journalist is to imply terrorism as the explanation but that the text contains such resources so as to allow for this conclusion to be readily accomplished by the reader using the topicalised information provided by the report.

The report in question follows the crash of TWA Flight 800 in July of 1996 with 230 deaths. There are two key aspects to the reporting which seem to constitute the embedded narrative or 'motivational texture' of a terrorist attack as the most likely explanation; descriptive terminology and the accounts of characters that could be described as appearing on cue. The descriptions employed in the report seem to suggest a preference for the terrorism explanation; this is demonstrated by the reflexively constituted frame of reference to which the categories, devices and terminology adhere.

The data examined has a tendency to address the question 'why did this airliner crash' as soon as the basic facts have been dispensed. One might reasonably use the first speculation as the basis for the 'explanation' narrative as this unexpected event is re-categorised within known boundaries of relevance. The opening two paragraphs of this report are as follows:

'New York – A Trans World Airlines 747 bound from New York City to Paris plunged into the waters off Long Island on Wednesday night with 229 people aboard, apparently after exploding in mid-air.

The Coastguard said that there were no survivors. Although it was not immediately clear what caused the crash, federal officials raised the possibility that it may have been an act of terrorism”  
(News and Observer 18/07/96 :5)

The formulation of the event in these terms, the categories of 'survivor' (and lack of), 'federal official' and the predicate 'terrorism' is extremely significant for the reader. The contextual impact of these descriptors cannot be underestimated as they provide for the category modifications enabling the device 'parties to an intentional airliner crash' and ascribing the labels victim, offender and witness described by Stetson (1999) as the key players in the emplotment of news stories. Each category is reflexively bound to the other in these contextual specifics, leading from the report that the airliner 'apparently exploded in mid-air' suggests that it was wholly unexpected, a fact on which terrorists attacks must logically depend. The alternative known scenarios for an airliner crashing are frequently preceded by warnings such as poor weather. The terminology contributes to this sense of the unexpected; 'plunged suddenly', 'exploding in mid-air' and of course is hearably consistent with the known traits of a bomb. This co-selection of contextually reflexive descriptors provides for the relevance of the lack of survivors, the presence of the category 'federal official' and the predicate of 'terrorism'. I believe it would be incorrect to surmise that the media constructs the news; a more accurate statement would be that they construct a specific frame of interpretation. Consider the following extracts from the same article, as they appear without editing:



“Federal law enforcement officials said Wednesday night that preliminary reports of an explosion over water had raised the immediate possibility of terrorism, which would give the FBI jurisdiction over the investigation into the cause of the blast.”

“But officials cautioned that they had no definitive evidence suggesting what caused the downing of the plane and said that it would probably be many hours before they got a clear fix on what happened. One Federal official, however, said, “It doesn’t look good,” meaning that the circumstances seemed to point to a terrorist act.”

“Ira Furman, a former investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board, said that one must be careful about early reports of explosions. “We have found reports of explosions unreliable,” he said. “I can suggest that sometimes an explosion is really connected with a flameout, like a backfire in a car.”

“But Larry Johnson, an expert on terrorism, told CNN: “In my experience with Pan Am 103, mid-air fireballs occur only when explosives are on board.” He said the TWA explosion was probably bigger than that of Pan Am 103, which exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988.”

(The News and Observer 18/07/96 :5)

The categories employed in this report, ‘Federal law official’ and ‘expert on terrorism’ indicate a strong preference for this specific frame of interpretation. Even the comments of the investigator for the NTSB guarding against speculation are prefaced by the words of a Federal official stating ‘It doesn’t look good’ which the report tells us means a terrorist act, and followed by the professional commentator citing his experience as indicating to him that this was the result of ‘*explosives on board*’. Even the eyewitness report uses language consistent with a bomb, ‘*looked as if an explosion had caused the plane to crash*’. In this context the descriptor ‘explosion’ itself becomes a modification within the device parties to an airliner crash. Despite the words of the NTSB official the report does not pursue the



'flameout' angle of interpretation. The structure and categorial organisation of the report clearly provides the resources for the accomplishment of the crime story, of the story of terrorism.

The embedded story of the terrorist act can be seen as constructed through the co-selection of descriptors and categories each of which contributes to an observably consistent commentary pertaining to the unwritten yet contextually imposed question of why the airliner crashed. The centrality of the textual particulars regarding such cause provides the reader with ample resources to find this specific narrative. The validity of the 'terrorist explanation' as a warrantable claim can be reinforced by the categories of eye-witness and professional commentator, similarly the accomplished orderliness of both categories-in-context provides for the intelligibility of this interpretation. Media reports rely on the specifications of language, meaning, category, predicate and context as relational configurations viewed as a gestalt phenomenon; they can be deconstructed as in-situ accomplishments of members local order work.

## **Implicative Logic and Offender Categories**

Finding and making the crime story is frequently reliant on the implicative logic of the media text. This factor is especially significant in the emplotment of the news story and demonstrates the validity of the media text as a subject for Ethnomethodological analysis. Stetson (1999:78) describes the use of the concepts of victim and offender as descriptors “negotiated and assigned in interaction.” Whilst I would consider the use of the term ‘negotiated’ to be appropriate in terms of member to member interaction, I argue its application to this data would be inadvisable, it implies a more proactive role on behalf of both parties in the construction and ascription of these categorisations than is actually the case. For the reader, he or she may find the narratives of offender and victim using the “temporal relevancies” upon which such categorisations are dependent, nonetheless media texts offer a frame of perception that can be accepted or declined rather than descriptions reached through mutual agreement. My perception of the emplotment of news stories is that they are best characterised not as ‘negotiations’ but as a statement of intent by the text itself. Whether overtly or covertly the narratives contained in all texts are established throughout the corpus of the data, they are open to interpretation and may be assessed by the reader as to their validity nonetheless the embedded commentaries are accepted or rejected.

The implicative logic contained in airliner crash reports offers the reader the means to find the story-able qualities of the report, the most prevalent aspect being the cause.

**“A Pan Am jumbo jet bound for New York with 258 people – many of them Christmas travellers – crashed Wednesday night in a Scottish village, exploding in a huge fireball, destroying dozens of homes and spreading burning wreckage for 10 miles.**

**No survivors were found from the Boeing 747, according to John Boyd, the police Chief for the area. Royal Air Force rescuers said the plane “demolished two rows of houses. There are no survivors from those houses.”**

**“An air safety consultant said speculation about the cause of the crash was sure to centre on an explosion aboard the plane or some structural defect.**

**Flight 103 crashed into the heart of Lockerbie, a village 10 miles northeast of Dumfries in southern Scotland, about an hour after departing London’s Heathrow airport.**

**Boyd said parts of the plane came down in six separate locations over a 10 mile radius.**

**A Heathrow spokesman said the jet was carrying 255 adults and three children – many laden with Christmas gifts. There were 15 crew members aboard.**

**“There was a terrible explosion, and the whole sky lit up, and the sky was actually raining fire,” said Mike Carnahan, a Lockerbie resident who was a few hundred yards from the scene.”**

**“It was just like liquid. We have actually found an aluminium rivet embedded in the metal of my car,” Carnahan told BBC Television.**

**Carnahan said he believed the plane was on fire before it crashed because “it was trailing flames when it went over the village.”**

**“The way it exploded was just beyond description,” he said. “All I could see was flames and fire...I could see several houses on the skyline whose roofs were totally off and all you could see was flaming timbers and what was left of the houses.”**

**IN New York, Jeff Kriendler, Pan Am’s vice president for corporate communications, said the airline has received unconfirmed reports that the pilot of another plane in the vicinity of Flight 103 had seen a “ball of fire” in the air shortly before the plane plummeted to earth.”**

**“Air safety consultant Wayne Williams of Plantation said that when an aircraft comes apart at 31,000 feet, as this one apparently did, the speculation centers on three possibilities: structural failure, a bomb or explosion of some sort, or a mid-air collision.**



Since there were no indications of a midair collision, speculation was sure to center on the first two options, said Williams, 61.”

(The Miami Herald 22/12/88 :14)

This extract demonstrates the how the question of cause demonstrates the reportage. The commentators, professional and eyewitness all serve to contribute to the issue. The implication of the possibility of the presence of an offender is accomplishable through the proximity of the category of ‘victim’, the language use by the report itself (“exploding in a huge fireball), the description of the eyewitness and professional commentator; “There was a terrible explosion”, “It was trailing flames when it went over the village” and the routinising of the vent within two mundane knowables of structural failure and an explosion.

One of the most salient features of airliner crash reporting is that the story is incomplete. Much of the organisational features of such reporting rely on, or are structured according to, the story that is yet to be concluded. Clearly this is not a generic feature of disaster reporting as a whole but is applicable in a number of instances. Thus it becomes pertinent to address how, or reflexively in what ways members might interpret how media texts organise their reporting around a subject that cannot fully be resolved at this time. This has been examined briefly in previous chapters regarding the routinising of the event in mundane terms. However it is a noticeably recurrent aspect to my data that the story of the offenders (if one exists) can be found through a sense of implicative logic. This addresses how members might resolve the problem of a question with no definite answer, applying as much to as if the crash was caused by bad weather than by sabotage. Certain categorial and contextual specifications indicate a preference for one or another explanation for the

crash. The implied logic behind such statements answers the unanswerable. Implication of cause depends on the reader being able to make logical connection between the information given and the incident at hand. There must be new revelations which routinise the unexpected event, mundane logic which might explain how this has happened and why. In the instances of terrorism, this appears dependent on four key constructions of implicative logic; previous experiences or examples, lack of prior indication suggesting sudden attack or discounting alternative factors, information that may serve as an explanation for how anti-terrorist measures were circumvented:

“Kriendler refused to speculate on whether a bomb might have caused the crash. But he could cite only one other example of a transatlantic flight reaching cruising altitude, then crashing – the Air India flight that crashed into the Irish Sea in 1985. That crash was believed to have been caused by a bomb.”

(The Miami Herald 22/12/88 :14)

“But Larry Johnson, an expert on terrorism, told CNN: “In my experience with Pan Am 103, midair fireballs occur only when explosives are on board.” He said the TWA explosion was probably bigger than that of Pan Am 103, which exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988.”

(The News and Observer 18/07/96 :5)

In the first extract the language featured, the consistent co-selection of terminology and descriptors, indicates terrorism. The reader can easily find the consistency between the cited example and the incident at hand. The similarities construct the tacit assumption that a bomb too, caused this airliner to crash. The second paragraph is extremely significant as the terrorism story can be located as valid through the comments of the professional commentator. Using Sacks’



consistency rule one can again find that if the crash of Pam Am 103 was caused by a bomb, then this incident too may be collected under the same action (Sacks 1992a).

These reports often featured statements which suggested that prior to the incident no indication of trouble had been given:

“Authorities said there was no distress call, which indicated that the aircraft was stricken suddenly—before its crew could radio for help”

(Los Angeles Times 01/11/99 :1)

“There were no mayday signals,” a Pan Am vice president, Jeff Kriendler, told reporters in New York. The plane had left London’s Heathrow Airport at 6:25 p.m. local time (1:25 p.m. EST), and the last communication with the crew was at 7:15 p.m., when the plane was cruising at 31,000 feet, Kriendler said. He added the plane was “precisely on course” when it disappeared from radar screens.”

(Washington Post 22/12/88 :17)

Again this can be located as inference that the airliner was stricken suddenly, an occurrence characteristic of the known predicates of a terrorist attack and the action caused by a bomb. This characteristic takes two forms, the lack of indication immediately prior to the event, and the lack of indication located at an unspecified time yet with significant temporal relevance to discount mechanical or human error as a factor. This particular may be coupled with further information to indicate a terrorism frame of interpretation:

“Suspensions of sabotage were prompted by the inexplicable sudden break up of the plane at 31,000 feet, a claim of responsibility and disclosures that the US government had been warned of a plot to bomb a Pan Am flight between Frankfurt and New York in December.”

(The Boston Globe 25/12/88 :16)



“Terrorism experts also noted that the flight had taken off from Athens, which until mid-May was deemed by US authorities to have lax airport security. Pentagon officials also acknowledged that US fears of terrorist attacks have been rising since last month’s blast at an American barracks outside Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, which killed 19 military personnel.”

(The Guardian 19/07/96 :4)

A significant resource for members then is the logical connection between the “inexplicable break up” of the airliner and the bomb threat. The specificity of the threat also lends credence to its validity. Information such as in the second extract may also be means for finding the story of terrorism. Again it relies on an observable and logical connection between this and the events at hand. Dependent on members’ awareness that terrorist attacks are infrequent, the unresolved question becomes not ‘how did this happen?’ but ‘why, when this happens so rarely, did it happen this time?’ Logical consistency between the poor airport security and the perceived consequences again qualifies the terrorist story. Prior chapters have discussed the various membership categories present in such reports and how their claims are categorised as warrantable. Essentially the premise of implicative logic is reliant on the report itself constructing warrantable claims in its discussion of the incident. It would not be enough to state that one explanation is preferable over the other, in this sense resolution is offered in terms into whose very structure organisational validity is interwoven. Discussing the details of any such incident becomes an exercise in justification, in offering statements that are warrantable by contextually elaborative categories, predicates and co-selected descriptors. Implicative logic is just that, where the structuring and presentation of facts is such that any member, with adequate

cultural awareness, could find the means by which the logical interpretation is determined by the article itself.

In a previous chapter it was considered how members could come to find that locational formulations, as regards to the national identities of the victims, were 'correct'. Moreover how these categorisations of the victim as a 'Briton' or an 'American' were not just referentially adequate as per Sacks' (1992a) economy rule but referentially appropriate. In the biographies of the selected victims it was noticeable that descriptions were not always structured according to the most economical way of categorising a person. Indeed often numerous categories were used because in such biographies the various categories to which a person had membership were important, they contributed to the embedded commentaries of horror or tragedy and could be conceptualised as examples of 'orientation to co-participant', recipient design in the most general sense. From this it seemed apparent that in categorising the offenders (if such a category was relevant) required a similar degree of analysis on behalf of the reader in terms of finding that there was an observable 'fit' between the question of 'who was the offender?' and the categories offered in place of an answer. Similarly so, what significance does Sacks' economy rule play in the emplotment of such disaster stories? For the most part its conceptualisation seems almost passive, a 'shortcut' in the descriptions of a person or persons. However might it be the case that adherence to the economy rule provides readers with exactly the resources to find implication of guilt?

Given that as Jayyusi (1991) notes, news reports are not dialogic and the implicated parties do not have option for recourse, the inference of guilt is somewhat dependent on Sacks' (1992a) "seers' maxim". Certain categories will be seen as



inferring guilt and providing a specific frame of interpretation, more significantly they might be seen to be satisfying a number of constraints on how this person or persons are viewed.

“Terror or Accident?

Reports claim Arab Group warned of attack on US target before 230 killed.”

“According to ABC news, the Movement for Islamic Change – which claimed it was behind the killing of five Americans in Riyadh last November – warned the al Hayat Arabic paper on Wednesday that a US target would be hit at the exact time Flight 800 went down.”

(The Guardian 19/07/96 :4)

Such regulation can only be accomplished within a set of contextual relevancies. In the above example it is clear that the category ‘Arab Group’ can only logically be ascribed offender status. The given context of an airliner crash, the suggested offence of terrorism and the observable consistency between past events and the incident at hand offer adequate constraints on how this person or group is viewed. It is clear that such emplotment is dependent on the economy rule, further categorisation of the offender is unnecessary. It is not the case however that this descriptor is ‘referentially adequate’ in Sacks terminology. Rather the implication of guilt relies on there only being one categorisation. The issue of the perceived fit between the question ‘who is responsible?’ and the suggested answer ‘an Arab Group’ is accomplished by the fact that no other class of answer which has an obvious relation to the first is ‘routinely alternatively usable’ (Sacks 1992a:743). When the answer to a question is a class of object (where this is factual categorisations of the implied offenders) where only one is appropriate, then this is a crucial technique in how the story of the offenders is made and found.



## **Terrorism as a members' phenomenon –The story of the 'Motivated Act'**

**ter-ror-ism** *noun*

**political violence:** violence or the threat of violence, especially bombing, kidnapping, and assassination, carried out for political purposes

My final comments on the analysis of the offender category are focussed on the apparent significance of what might be termed the politics of the terrorist act, the relationships between collections of categories that members might use to make terrorism mundanely routine insofar as eligibility for victim or offender descriptors are accomplishable without being problematic; more specifically the mechanics of 'terrorism' as a usable and intelligible descriptor. It is necessary to consider how the terms 'terrorism' or indeed 'terrorist' are constructed as adequate categorisations for the reproduction of the actions of a person or person's against others. The collections of membership categories inform what may or may not be understood as terrorism and that these in turn are variable according to the observably reflexive specifications of identity and context. 'Terrorism' in these configurations can be repackaged as a member's phenomenon, what actions are collected under this rubric cannot be conceived of as relating to logical or cognitive external constraints.

The above definition specifies terrorism as an act of violence motivated by political reasons. The examples throughout my data that identify a specific person or persons as the offender rely heavily on the politicising of the act, of categorising that person as a political actor without elaborating on the specificities of their motivation. Essentially the politically motivated act of terror operates on two significant levels;

firstly it creates victims of those viewed as 'opponents' or 'enemies' and secondly it relies on the consistency rule insofar as others will see that they might be categorised in the same manner and thus may claim eligibility as a potential or future victim. The September 11 2001 attacks are indicative of this as they were frequently categorised by commentators as attacks on the American people and on the democratic world as a whole. Terrorist acts such as bombing an airliner can be collected as essentially symbolic acts; the victims are de-personalised and represent a whole. In light of the categorial incumbencies of the offender, the categories of the victim provide for their victimisation. In much the same way the category of the offender provides motive or reason for why he offends as he does, in the way that he does it, at that time, against those people.

"New York has been considered a possible target for Egyptian radicals ever since the imprisonment of Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, the blind Egyptian cleric convicted of plotting a 'Day of Terror' with simultaneous bomb attacks on the city's landmarks. A month ago the Federal Aviation Authority issued an alert after receiving a warning that a bomb would "soon be used" on a flight from Los Angeles or New York."

(London Times 01/11/99 :3b)

"Reports claim Arab Group warned of attack on US target before 230 killed."

"According to ABC news, the Movement for Islamic Change -- which claimed it was behind the killing of five Americans in Riyadh last November -- warned the al Hayat Arabic paper on Wednesday that a US target would be hit at the exact time Flight 800 went down."

(The Guardian 19/07/96 :4)

The categorial significance of the terrorist act is demonstrated in the above examples. The second speaks of attacks on US targets, a highly significant



categorisation device as this serves to politicise the enemies and indeed the offenders. A terrorist act as a manageable and reproducible account is defined by its generality, by its attack on perceived category representatives rather than individuals. It can be conceptualised as an accountable action as those within the device 'parties to a terrorist attack' (namely victim-offender) can be collected as archetypal category representatives who provide for their status as political actors, unwitting or otherwise.

It is interesting to note that when addressing the story of the offender the data indicates that individual pathology is not considered a plausible explanation. Rather the crime story can be more accurately collected under the description 'the story of the politically motivated act', of the terrorist atrocity. The politicising of such an action is not routinely available in the setting of an airliner as it would be for example in a more institutionalised context and although terrorists frequently provide prior (albeit encrypted) warnings there are no direct inferences to locate this classification of the 'motivated act', how then can the reader find that the actions can be accurately categorised as 'terrorism'? This is accomplished through classification of the acts as representative of some motivated agency, the provision of the victim (in relation the offender) category is sufficient to imply motive. It is these members classifications as political actors which makes the actions routinely available as the wider structures or conflicts of political standpoints can be perceived as embodied in the motivated agency of the offender category within the device 'parties to an airliner crash'. Since similar categorial resources can be used both by the offenders and those interpreting his actions (including the news audience) the terrorist act can be categorised as a member's phenomenon. That the categorial resources are widely available and reproducible in mundane terms can be accredited to the availability of the incarnation



of political structure in motivated agency. Terrorism as a device for getting attention relies on this very premise, that the categorially symbolic significance of yourself and your victims is easily re-tellable; that your actions are recognisable and recognisably describable. This becomes a methodological and categorial accomplishment of members local order work. Thus for all involved the crime story, the story of terrorism, the story of the motivated political act is one of membership categorisation analysis.

## **The Search for Truth**

A consistent narrative easily locatable in all the reports is the 'search for truth'. This focus belongs primarily within the previous chapter relating to elements of the story. Its prevalence throughout my corpus of data however is enmeshed with the story of the offenders and for this reason will be examined here. There is considerable overlap within this work as the embedded commentary of the search for truth is bound to the other commentaries, the issue of routinising the unexpected and of course the story of the victims. Most significantly the search for truth may be classified as the broader rubric under which all possible causes and reasons are analysed. It encompasses to a greater or lesser extent all membership categories that have been considered thus far especially the professional commentator and law enforcement officials. The reports of the eyewitness are similarly significant in the attempt to shed light on the incident and the presentation of the information by the report itself is naturally crucial. In many aspects the story of the airliner crash itself becomes temporally redundant; it is almost superseded by attempts to find cause. The very essence of the airliner crash story is the question 'why?' because of this I would argue the search for truth as embedded narrative dictates the categorial specifics of the report to a larger extent than the stories of horror or tragedy.

### **Categorial Relevances in the Search for Truth:**

Each and every category specified in my data can be said to bear some relation to the search for truth. It is for this reason that I argue this commentary dominates the airliner crash text, the actions and behaviours of those mentioned in it as well as the structural particulars of the text itself. The search for truth turns on the categories that can be locatable as either giving insight into airliner crashes as a specific field of

relevance or those whose job it is to find the truth. Thus the narrative becomes organised according to this division, the eyewitness and professional commentator whom through first person account or specialist knowledge might locate the truth or those categories whose job institutionally provides for their role in identifying cause such as members of law enforcement or accident investigation teams. This however does not resolve the problem faced by journalists and readers alike, that reports must be structured around an unresolved question. The proximity of the reports to the event dictate that no definite cause is known, the search for truth then appears to depend on known causes and scenarios being assessed by 'resolution' categories. The categories charged with finding the 'truth' can be seen as duplicatively organised (Sacks, 1992a: 240), they do not have their equivalences and in other contexts may not seem to go together. In this instance however they are contextually appropriate occupying the same device and working towards a common goal.

"Searchers hunted the Atlantic for the fourth time in three years, seeking bodies and pieces of a plane lost at sea. The first time was after TWA Flight 800 went down off Long Island in July 1996, the second after Swissair Flight 111 crashed off Nova Scotia in September 1998, and the third after John F. Kennedy Jr., his wife and her sister were killed off Martha's Vineyard last July.

By nightfall, the searchers, aboard ships and helicopters, had found one body, two partially inflated life rafts and some life jackets, seat cushions and small debris. Coastguard Rear Adm. Richard M Larrabee said none showed burn marks, which would have suggested a fire or explosion aboard the plane. The Coastguard said the sea temperature was 58 degrees, too cold for survival after 12 hours.

"The National Transportation Safety Board dispatched a team of investigators to the crash site. "I want to assure all Americans and all Egyptians, and indeed everyone around the world, that we will devote all the necessary resources to find out what caused this airliner to crash," James E. Hall, the NTSB chairman declared. "We do not know at this point what caused the crash.



The NTSB said it would work with the FBI, the Coast Guard, the Federal Aviation Administration and the State Department, as well as Egyptian officials. "Until we know exactly what happened, just about everybody will be involved in the investigation," said an FBI official in Washington. The official said that FBI agents will examine physical evidence from the crash after it is retrieved from the ocean.

Other FBI agents in New York, New Jersey and Los Angeles were called in to examine the flight manifest. "We're trying to determine who was nor was not on board" the FBI official said.

"In Los Angeles a team of FBI agents questioned ground personnel -- mechanics, cargo handlers, ticket takers, food caterers and janitors -- who had anything to do with the EgyptAir jet while it was on the ground at LAX."

(Los Angeles Times 01/11/99 :1)

The above extracts, from a single article demonstrate the significance of categories and their predicates in providing for the 'truth' as outcome. It also demonstrates the significance of the structure of the text, consistent co-selection of descriptors provides for the 'motivational texture' (Francis and Hart in Hester and Eglin 1997), to find the truth. Such categorisations and action descriptors are observably consistent with the search for cause in that they address known explanations for airliner crashes and highlight the occupational obligations that resolution categories such as these are incumbent of. As mentioned categories in this context 'carry' the narrative which is implied by their presence and known predicates. It is easy to find that professional categories and professional commentators can be seen by members to be searching for cause. However even the category of eyewitness has a role to play in the resolution of the airliner crash mystery. The search for truth is built upon factual evidence from which conclusions can be drawn and answers provided. It is through category predicates that members can find that truth is an outcome of a process of gathering evidence and that resolution categories such as

'FBI' or 'National Transportation Safety Board' are obligated to initiate and complete this process. The account of the eyewitness may offer factual information which contributes to the procedure:

"One witness, Mike Gilligan of Eastport, Long Island, told CNN in a telephone interview that it looked as if an explosion had caused the plane to crash."

"...But Barry Johnson, an expert on terrorism, told CNN: "In my experience with Pan Am 103, mid-air fireballs occur only when explosives are on board."

(The News and Observer 18/06/96 :5)

It is noticeable here that the professional commentator has employed the evidence garnered from the eyewitness account to derive a conclusion as to probable cause.

Essentially the possibility of the truth is provided for given the categories present even if it may not be locatable at this time. The unresolved nature of the airliner crash story is not problematic or rather so structurally entrenched that its prominence is significant because it becomes the third facet to the report. I have discussed the concept of the story within a story, these being the crash of the airliner and within this the cause. However it appears that the mystery behind the crash is not simply a feature of the above two but a third story. The texts that comprise my data are structurally similar to the famous Russian dolls; each is a figure within its own right yet inexorably linked to those which preceded it. With the airliner crash report, one begins with the story of the crash, which contains the story of the cause, which in turn contains the story that the cause is not known. Each is story-able and reproducible using common categories and devices, although the text indicates

through the categorial particulars what the possible answers might be and the actions of those resolution categories can be seen as intrinsically ordered around 'finding the truth' a resolution is neither reached nor expected. To name this sub-narrative as 'the search for truth' then is misleading. Unlike the previous embedded commentaries of horror and tragedy which found their realisation in and of the textual specifics, the particulars which I described as comprising the search are aspects of an external albeit subjective facticity over which the text has no control. The search for truth is not so much an embedded commentary then as a mundane external reality (similar to the mundane models of society discussed by Pollner 1975, 1989) which nonetheless informs and directs the structure of the text and the conclusions of the reader. It is made available to the member through prior knowledge of category, context and predicate thus although it cannot be classified as a members phenomenon, nonetheless as a significant aspect of the airliner crash report it is a categorially accomplishable subjective reality.



## Conclusion

As was noted in the previous chapter regarding routinising the unexpected, falling under the rubric of 'explanations' the story of the offender is significant due to the increasing temporal distance of the first instance story of the airliner crash from the here-and-now of reading the report. Although logic dictates that the first instance story is reported to account for the presence of the second instance (reasons for the crash) the here-and-now of the event is no longer formally located in the story of the airliner crash. Rather it is situated (and the misleading chronology of the reports reflect this) with the story or more specifically stories of the reasons for the crash. The categories, devices, predicates and contextual particulars that can be observably linked to the possibility of an intentional act (i.e. terrorism) provide a textual counter measure to the unavoidable equivocality of the demonstrably unresolvable yet by necessity addressed question 'Why did this happen?'

## **Chapter Nine:**

### **Conclusion**

## **Introduction**

A central theme of this work has been that practical actions are problematic in ways not considered by traditional sociology. Garfinkel (1967) coined the term ethnomethodology to refer to the study of such actions and the ways in which members' incorporated them so effortlessly in their everyday lives. The opening chapters examined the characters common to the data and the structural specificities of the reports. Recurring elements of the stories were analysed and perhaps two of the most important categories, the victim and offender, were afforded detailed treatment. Throughout this work I have endeavoured to maintain a commitment to Garfinkel's policies for the study of practical actions. He described five policies by way of examining instances of member's practical actions and practical reasoning.



## **Garfinkel and the Policies of Ethnomethodology**

The first policy confirms the agenda for ethnomethodology that analytically appropriate topics for inquiry are available from a potentially infinite domain of observable settings. Garfinkel explicitly states that all projects of members' actions or examples of 'organised artful practices' are warrantable avenues for investigation (Garfinkel 1967:11). That numerous examples of members' 'planful' activities have been overlooked by sociology is often referred to as the missing 'what'. In regards to this policy the purpose of this work has been twofold as it seems apparent that ethnomethodology has similarly been guilty of that which it accuses sociology. It is only recently that instances of members' artful and planful activities and the practices and products of situated accomplishments been considered valid topics for inquiry when removed from sequential considerations. Again I refer to the preoccupation with conversation analysis that has dominated ethnomethodology. In recent years however this has found remedy in the work of a number of authors who recognised that membership categories were not simply a feature of conversation but crucial to other practices and subsequently that the lack of a co-interactant in the traditionally understood sense need not lessen the significance of such projects. This work continues this developing trend in an effort to reintroduce the relevance of activities which should never have been overlooked either by sociology or ethnomethodology.

The concerns raised by Garfinkel's second policy refers to indexicality and his assertion that natural orderliness as evidenced by any number of practical settings cannot be separated from, made a distinct rule of, perceived as external to or considered as anything less than reflexively constituted by, the socially organised occasions of their use. In this sense it is not adequate or desirable to engage in, as

traditional sociology has, the imposition of external, generically conceived constraints on the social actor such as might be used to explain his or her behaviour, true for all time and in all places by application of a de-contextualised corpus of data. Rather, 'adequate inquiry and discourse' is characterised by an instance that members' accomplishments are spatiotemporally situated and that rules, terms, descriptions and theoretical models of sense making apparatus or mechanisms of interpretive procedures that might infer, suggest, demand or by tacit indication imbue a phenomenon with some methodological status cannot be conceived of or seen to operate outside the contextual specificities of its programmatic relevance.

In this sense there is little value to be afforded to approaches which attempt to explain the practices of the social member from practices conceived of without recourse to the very agency of the practices they purport to theorise. One of the reasons ethnomethodology is often described as a 'sociology of sociology' can be traced to Garfinkel's statement in the third policy. Traditional sociology in its interest in social structures in generic terms, building society and the actions of the individual from without, is described as being of interest only as a topic for ethnomethodological inquiry rather than as a theoretically or methodologically valid proposal.

The fourth policy concerns the accountability of practical actions, that any members' activity, any social setting is self-organising. This notion has been discussed at length throughout this work. The issue is not to examine what bearing the features of observable orderliness may have upon the member, but how such orderliness is produced, maintained and made observably and interactionally unproblematic, describable and recognisable. Throughout the chapters regarding the



categories of victim, offender and indeed the data analysis as a whole, the recognisable reproducibility of the 'news' has been of paramount importance. Part of rationale of studying news texts is firmly rooted in their observable classification as self-organising phenomena. Similarly reading the news as unproblematic is one example of the accountability of settings' organisational particulars both in the describability of the news itself and the recognition of some connection between this account and the real world on behalf of the social actor. This clearly establishes the natural orderliness of social life, how members' behave in the way that they do as incarnate in the methods employed for making each setting describable, planful, recognisable, in fact evident for what it observably is. Finally Garfinkel proposes a concern with the rational properties of common sense activities. In relation to indexical expressions 'reading the news' as a practical activity is heavily dependent on the observable rationality of the descriptors employed in reporting incidents. News articles are demonstrable examples of the rational properties of members' inquiries, significantly however such rationality is an ongoing, situated and temporally located accomplishment of the device parties to reading the news. Garfinkel finished by stating that all examples of social phenomena "retains the character for members of serious, practical tasks, subject to every exigency of organisationally situated conduct" (Garfinkel 1967:34). Members' methods for reading the news have been examined according to this treatment, that as a situated accomplishment it retains the specificities of the analytically valid topic for inquiry that remains Ethnomethodology's commitment.



## **A Grammar for Disaster Reportage**

Throughout this work reference has been made to the 'grammar' of disaster reporting or more specifically the grammar of reporting an airliner crash. This relates to a collection of recognisable categories, devices and predicates which constitutes the report for what it accountably is. My intention upon undertaking this research was not to formulate such a grammar but rather to examine a number of reports to consider the categorial and contextual particulars of their construction. Initially the desire was threefold; to expand upon the category work of Harvey Sacks (1974; 1992a; 1992b), to establish some procedural and methodological observations for the analysis of news texts and to consider the significance of ethnomethodology to the structure or agency debate and the significance of news reporting within this.

For the reader, understanding the news is almost an effortless activity, despite the fact that he or she is faced with a plethora of categories, predicates and devices, of opinions comments, speculation and accusations. That the complexities of such texts make sense as they do is a testament to members' local order work, in finding that characters appear on cue, that categories are offenders and not victims and what the likely explanation may be. The coherence of such narratives appears dependent on the inference, implication and logical determination afforded by the categorial organisation of the text.

Traditionally (although not exclusively) Sociology and its practitioners have often viewed the production of perceived social facts, the output of professional inquiry, as observably and unequivocally characteristic of a reality hidden from the lay investigator by their own procedural or theoretical shortcomings. That is to say

the professional sociologist viewed her or himself as seeing past outward appearances to explicate the underlying social fabric of our existence with degrees of perceptive or practical reasoning and investigation that were not methodologically accomplishable by the untrained social actor. In essence the epistemological gulf between what constituted (social) scientific knowledge and the lay reasoning of the practical actor was considerable if not insurmountable. Thus the explication 'social facts' the production of which can only be found within the practical reasoning and actions of the social actor were viewed as the preserve of those with the necessary scientific training to perceive the 'real'. The data utilised and the conclusions drawn from it within the corpus of this work are inexorably linked to the occasioned examples of their user. Furthermore one cannot assume that any such social reality constructed in and from the text and explicated by the researcher can be interpreted as independent from the practical reasoning and local order work of which it is constituted. The methods used by this researcher to find meaning and reason in the text are those same methods used by the social member, the same categorisations and methods of common sense interpretation indicate that the purpose of this work is not to classify the social actor as distinct from the social structures of everyday life that her or his practical reasoning accomplishes, but to elucidate the methods by which these activities are made observable, intelligible and reproducible:

"Ethnomethodological studies of formal structures are directed to the study of such phenomena, seeking to describe members' accounts of formal structures wherever and by whomever they are done, while abstaining from all judgements of their adequacy, value, importance, necessity, practicality, success or consequentiality."

(Garfinkel and Sacks in McKinney and Tiryakian 1970:345-346)



Before I conclude I intend to examine briefly the notion of the 'documentary method of interpretation'. More specifically Garfinkel's assertion that it is observably in action in lay sociology, the processes of interpretation whereby actual appearances may be treated as 'the document of' an underlying pattern wherein each elaborates the other and can be conceived of as a gestalt phenomena. Members are naturally engaging in the documentary method in everyday life, this reflexive relationship between the 'actual appearance'; and the 'underlying pattern' enables interaction and compensates for the inherently indexical nature of language and meaning. Garfinkel argues that documentary method of interpretation makes society reportable, observable and describable in that way that it is as member's actions can be reinterpreted as contextually relevant expressions of patterns. Naturally then such an apparatus should not be discounted as a topic for inquiry or indeed a procedural guide for analysis simply because it is not the preserve of the 'professional sociologist'. Rather the processes by which society is made intelligible should be treated as problematic and examined as such. Much of society can be seen as represented if not respecified as incarnate in the text as a documentary phenomenon in its own right. The patterns that dominate our social existence and inform the observable structures of social activities are reproduced in the news media, not simply reproduced however but recognisably so using indexical and reflexively elaborative expressions of identity, meaning, place and time. It was my intention throughout this work to explicate this 'scheme of interpretation', a commonsense knowledge shared by journalist and reader. The interpretive process adopted by the member is informed by his or her cultural and contextual awareness and drawing from these resources they may constantly reassess the information they encounter be this in a conversation or by reading the news.



I return to my earlier point concerning the 'grammar of reporting an airliner crash'. I do not intend to generalise so far as to state that there exists a grammar for disaster reporting, it is not even clear whether airliner crashes might be categorised in this way, however, from the analysis noticeable strands have emerged to suggest that certain events featuring observably similar specificities may exhibit structural and categorial particulars conventionally tied to the contextual configurations of which an airliner crash can be the determinate factor. Throughout the data analysis has focused on the twin axis of categories and context. I refer in this instance to the work of Lynch and Peyrot (1997:27) and their statement that meanings are arrived at contextually. The notion of context and its place in Ethnomethodological study is extremely complex and should not be oversimplified as a practical accomplishment on the part of either the lay member or the professional researcher. Schegloff's (1992a) comments from the Introduction of 'Lectures on Conversation' appear to centre on the fact that employing the apparatus of category bound activities as a means for explicating member's practical reasoning is an exercise in unwarranted oversimplification and common sense observations. If all that the researcher can identify is conventionally tied category predicates then certainly this may stand as an accurate judgement. However the corpus of data for this work indicates that categorial order in a news report as an accomplished, temporally located practical action is only partially informed, and in retrospect reflexively constitutive of, members' prior awareness of category bound activities. I refer to the notion of 'context' in Ethnomethodological analysis because its significance is touched upon by Sacks (1992a; 1992b) in his lectures pertaining to membership categories yet not fully expanded upon. It seems likely therefore that Schegloff had identified such

shortcomings in this aspect of the analysis of members' activities and the danger remains of viewing categories and their inferred predicates as merely storehouses of observably applicable information thus forming the foundation of member's reasoning practices. Whilst Sacks (1992a) work on the MIR device may be misinterpreted in this way it is essential to emphasise the locally accomplished, temporally embedded and contextually constituted nature of categories and their predicates.

The grammar of reporting an airliner crash constitutes a body of locally ordered and relationally pre-configured meanings and identifications. It can be used as a member's apparatus for making the news story available in the way that it is. Crucially this depends on the same apparatus being available to the all parties to the device including the journalist. Necessarily the categorial order of the event is constructed in terms that are describable recognisable and recognisably describable. Persons, actions and reasons may be identified using conventionally understood configurations of category pairs, devices, predicates and behaviours although the concept of a 'grammar' for reporting this kind of incident does not detract from the indexicality of such specificities. That these properties can be seen as ordered are the results of practical reasoning and may be respecified as occasioned productions. To be avoided in these circumstances is the classification of such a category based mechanism as the grammar of reporting an airliner crash in constructivist terms whereby categorial and contextual particulars are taken as the basis rather than the product of member's local order work. Before examining the grammar of an airliner crash it is essential to note that in such cases the very fact of noticeable and recurrent grammatical inferences relies on member's prior knowledge of a 'counter grammar',

that is the grammar of an (uneventful?) airliner journey. I relate this to Hester and Eglin's comments on the grammar of suicide "*Seeing that a fiancé committed suicide because his fiancée broke their engagement*". (Hester and Eglin, 1997: 39) In this example the grammar of a predicated future (conventionally tied features of engagement and projected future marital state) can be used to find two key aspects; firstly that these events will no longer happen as the engagement is broken off and secondly that the counter grammar of a broken engagement reflexively invoked by the former infers counter 'conventionally anticipated features'. Clearly one cannot exist without the other, the absence of one constitutes the other and each infers a projected future state. This notion as applicable to my data differs slightly from the above example. However in both cases the specificities (categorical and otherwise) of the projected future disjuncture can be used to identify the persons, actions and reasons. In the case of airliner crashes though the notable mechanism is the grammar of the observable present, a document of the situation, the contextually embedded configurations of categories, devices and predicates are seen as unproblematic. The course of action category pair of 'airliner journey' and subsequently 'airliner crash' both have conceptually pre-configured boundaries applicable to persons, activities and objects. Both are pertinent to explicating a members' grammar for 'finding' (and indeed for making) the story of the airliner crash.



## **The unproblematic adequacy of categorial identities**

Thus far it is apparent that observably unproblematic categorial identities have considerable recourse to contextual resources in order that they can be found as 'appropriate'. The reflexively constituted sense of co-selection adequacy is an accomplishment of the social actor; it appears that categories are not simply co-selected but co-selected in this instance, at this time and within specific boundaries dictated by a grammar of actions and motivations for actions bound to these contextually embedded categories. Using the documentary method of interpretation they can be seen as mutually elaborative elements in an occasioned scenario. Conventionally tied features of the airliner crash report are examined below.

I have divided the observable features of what might constitute a grammar or airliner crash reporting into categories, predicates, devices, contextual allowances, and elements to the story. If I might borrow a term from Francis and Hart (In Hester and Eglin, 1997), each of these components contribute to the 'motivational texture' of reporting an airliner crash; there is a noticeable consistency to their co-selection and in a gestalt contexture they 'make' the story of an airliner crash. Firstly the categorial foundation of the news story is constructed around the observability or possibility of six main categories or category collections.' Detailed in an earlier chapter they are remedial categories, resolution categories, emphatic categories, professional commentators, victims and offenders. I argued throughout the work that the construction of the reports was categorially structured so as to address several pertinent questions.

- Who Died?
- Who survived?
- Who did it?
- What is being done about it?
- What does this mean for the rest of us? (or why should we care)

The categories and subsequently all that they infer seemed to address these queries. In essence these form the basis of many disaster articles, they are the obvious questions and categorially the reports are structured accordingly. Meaning, motive, actions and identity are all dictated by these queries, thus part of the observable grammar of airliner crash reporting is the practical application of categories to these elements. For the reader, for it is her or his methods we are explicating, this structure lends narrative coherence and a perceivable accomplished practical orderliness. Via the documentary method of interpretation this conceptual grammar can be mapped onto the report and subsequent persons, activities and objects are inhered with an observable 'fit', a contextual adequacy reflexively constituted by the 'document of' this instance and the particulars at hand.

The six categories or category collections mentioned above can be subdivided further still. I cannot state that all airliner crash reports feature these characters but for my data they were consistently recurrent. Each report featured remedial categories which included "paramedics", "rescue workers", "Police", "coastguards" and so on. In this instance the very simple solution is offered by the remedial potential of a number of membership categories. In fact the remedy is offered by what we know the predicates of these categories to be. Remedial categories address the problems at

hand and are temporally close to the crash itself. Emphatic categories such as the eyewitness or categories with some personal connection to the victim help construct the story-able element of the report. They appear crucial in the construction of the embedded narratives of horror and tragedy. Connected to the crash itself by either temporal or categorial course of action characterisations they represent the story as those with warrantable claims to recount the story (as horrific) or the loss of a loved one (as tragic). The 'eyewitness' is an interesting categorial construct within the news report. Observably neutral, the claims of this category are afforded warrantability by dint of them 'being in the right place at the right time' or the vice versa depending on your opinion. Nonetheless although the entitlement to experience aspect to this category is apparent via a course of action characterisation their noticeable recurrence across the data and indeed as a prevalent figure in a significant majority of news reports establishes them as generic disaster report category. In my opinion the significance of the 'eyewitness' lies not in their observably warrantable recounting of the event but by the very nature of their categorisation their temporal location to the incident at hand; the incident as it happened. Practical logic dictates that the activity of journalism is one step behind the news, the concept of warrantability for a claim has thus far been examined in relation to those observably making a claim; the eyewitness (entitlement to experience) and the professional commentator (entitlement to speculate as to the cause). But these are claims within the report, what must also be considered is that the report itself is a claim; to know what happened and to relate this accurately. Again temporal logic dictates that characters such as the emergency services, the police, FBI, aviation or terrorist experts and journalist are removed from the incident insofar as the incident at hand is why they are present, thus they have no entitlement to experience. This is the significance of the eyewitness; journalism



depends on the perceived correctness of the reporting, factual accuracy is reliant on the categorial particulars of the article but the reader is aware that neither the journalist or professional commentator know what happened, at that time and in that place. Temporal warrantability of claims lies only with the category whose course of action characterisation is not linked to the incident at hand. The eyewitness, whatever they saw or whatever claims can or cannot be made from their account is a fundamental category for the factual integrity of the report. As Stetson notes :

“Offender/Victim/Witness are, canonically, the exhaustive categories of ‘parties to an offence’ ”

(Stetson In Jalbert 1999: 86)

Although this is equally applicable to the device ‘parties to an airliner crash. Necessary then to the emplotment of the news story is categorial inclusion of these characters although one could argue that the event as story-able does not depend on there being eyewitnesses. If there had been none the story would still be perfectly acceptable and indeed accessible by the reader. The grammar of reporting an airliner crash is not reliant on the eyewitness category as a device for getting things done, i.e. for telling the story. Rather one can see that entitlements to experience are differentially available, and in terms of an airliner crash this entitlement is applicable to only two of the three categories as listed above. Members know this, they know the regulations applied to experiencing something and that the eyewitness is logically the only category that might feature in a news report. The significance of the eyewitness to the grammar of recounting an airliner crash is of having a categorially distinct spatiotemporal connection to the incident which constitutes part of the framework of warrantability built up by the journalist over the course of the article. Sacks (1992b) states that part of the rules of experiences is that the teller ‘owns’ them

in a way that those he recounts the story to cannot. Plainly if we see a story in the news we don't have entitlement to recount it in the way that an eyewitness did. However entitlement to re-tell the experience, (not as your own) is warrantable. So the inclusion of the category eyewitness in this (and I suspect many other contexts) is a device for recounting the incident as it happened and warrantably so, not claiming it as your own but providing observable categorial justification for this account.

The characters within the collections 'remedial and resolution categories' form what appears to be a two stage grammar of examining a 'disaster' such as an airliner crash. Given the context, 'victim' is perhaps the most prevalently inferred category which suggests people needing help, medical or otherwise. In this context the report must address two key issues, what is being done about the crash *now* and what is being done about it *afterwards* i.e. finding out the cause. This split occurs as the news article attempts to address and recount an event which will shortly become temporally redundant in light of the new story, the search for the truth. Each report has two elements, the story of the airliner crash and the story of why the airliner crashed. By necessity then categories must become sequentially distinct but chronologically valid. The article must therefore recount what is happening now and later and what happened then and now, at least for the sake of narrative coherence. The categorial construction of the piece must reflect this. The sequential positioning of the remedial categories in regards to the resolution (short term and long term) is crucial to the practical logic of the report, the two story-able facets should be temporally sound but categorially distinct. These are not guidelines for the reporter, but documentary resources for the reader. He or she is aware that whatever is being reported (at least in the print media) is not breaking news. Nonetheless the narrative of the events requires



old news to temporarily become new news, before it is superseded by more current events. As a 'document of' or 'pattern for' reporting 'old news' this is a fundamental method for making sense of the text.

Continuing with the legitimacy of claims the role of the professional commentator is observably recurrent in my data. Although as noted they do not possess entitlement to experience the categorial qualifications of 'terrorism or aviation expert' warrant speculation as to cause. The professional commentator completes the three warranted claims present in my data, the other two being the eyewitness and the claims of the journalist or the article itself as an accurate document of 'real life' events.

Resolution categories signify an address to the members' analysis of the situation which might be conceptualised as the airliner crash as an observable outcome of the document of 'travelling'. For this reason resolution categories such as the police, FBI, Federal Aviation Authority refer to the questions '*What is being done about it?*' and '*What does this mean for the rest of us?*' Where such a mundane, institutionalised context such as an airliner journey plays host to the unexpected, the horrific and tragic members have the categorial resources available to them to classify themselves as potential victims should the events repeat themselves. War reporting for example is harrowing but given that the majority of the readership will not be enlisted in the armed forces the member is categorially and contextually distant from the occurrences. In relation to airliner crashes however it becomes personally and categorially pertinent to seek information regarding how this happened and what it means for us.



I will briefly address the categories of victim and offender before attempting to broadly conceptualise some concluding comments for the data. Naturally offender and victim are prominent categories throughout the data. Perhaps more so in the case of victim as this is observably verifiable whereas the presence of 'offender' is one of a number of possibilities for cause. In terms of their classification throughout the corpus of data one salient fact seems apparent and this relates to Sacks' (1992a) economy rule. Firstly that when categorising the offender one category is not simply referentially adequate but an observable resource dependent on implicative logic to allow members' practical reasoning to find 'guilt' or 'motive'. Classifications are 'active' insofar as they become modified or qualified categories within this context. They are highly context sensitive and for the reader their economy of use may be utilised as noticeably and reflexively constitutive of the category 'offender'.

Secondly when categorising the victim is evident that reports use categories that are most definitely not context sensitive and indeed may have no relevance other than the fact that they happened to be so. Yet such de-economising of victim classifications forms a prominent part of the grammar of airliner crash reporting at least in the data I have studied. This is noticeable only for the fact that member's notion of news worthiness enables an apparatus by which they can see apparently surplus or non-relevant information as significant. Thus weather reports whilst not explicitly referred to as a causal factor can be seen in that way. In category terms the characters in the report are referred to in such a way that their relevance is obvious. The professional commentator is characterised in terms of the warrantability of their claims. The eyewitness is described predominantly in ways which might provide for

an observable course of action characterisation for them to be incumbent of the 'eyewitness' category. As noted above the offender will be co-selected with descriptors consistent with the activity of implication. Thus again this may be considered a pattern to this kind of reporting. Different things can be done by different categories, victims are many things but offenders are only one. Offenders may be classified by the crimes they perpetrated; the victims may be classified by what they were and will no longer be.

**Context, Category and Predicate**

The task for the reader becomes an exercise in temporal categorial significance; the report must examine the parties to the airliner crash in the first instance and the parties in the second instance. By this I mean that logically only the two categories of victim and witness can be present in the first instance. The offender category in this sense is an anomaly as naturally the offence is geographically distant from them if the act is perpetrated via an explosive device. In the second instance the categories of the emergency services, the journalist and the professional commentator naturally appear on cue. These two chronologically distinct collections of categories form the document of the airliner crash report. I would argue that the construction of the reports, and perhaps this is true for other reports of this type, is ordered around member's practical reasoning for finding that the two most significant descriptors of 'victim' and 'offender' are being addressed in the contextual, categorial and predicative sense that the incumbencies of their specific classifications infer. Throughout this work attention has been paid to the categorial particulars of the reports as resources for accomplishing natural intelligibility. Of similar importance however is Garfinkel's (1967) documentary method of interpretation; in these instances members' practical logic and understanding is informed by prior orientation to the contextual specifics afforded by common sense cultural knowledge. Given the context of an airliner crash, the known co-selection of descriptors persons, activities, and objects this infers members can project a pattern of documented specificities which adhere to and are constrained by known boundaries of relevance. All of the categories, predicates, behaviours, specifications of identity and meaning within the report have observable connections to the categories of 'victim' and 'offender' (where 'offender' is cause rather than just a person or persons). The document of the airliner crash report is the observable processing of the first instance context categories by the



second instance context categories. In both cases these categories are context sensitive certainly, but not context specific.

Naturally the data analysis conducted has concentrated on the elements of the reports as identifiable, analytically distinct elements of an observable narrative. Discussed previously have been the recurrent and reflexively constituted elements to the data which could be explicated as accomplishable and ordered relational configurations common to the activity of reporting and understanding a media account of an airliner crash. An unintentional result of this procedural and methodological approach may be to confer the impression that the media text as a member's phenomenon, as an accomplishment of practical logic and reasoning, is the result of a 'fact finding' or 'step by step' exercise by the reader. This however is misleading; one of the most significant achievements of the social actor is that such texts, providing technical challenges inherent of the indexicality of modern language use prove so unproblematic. However it is the small scale accomplished orderliness of categories in context which may be reflected in the societal structures encountered daily by all social actors.

For analytic purposes it has been necessary to approach the news text as not a 'whole' but an indefinite number of constitutive elements. Logically though, this is not the methodology advanced by the lay social actor as he or she reads the news. Members are naturally oriented to the *configurations* of context, category and predicate not only in a gestalt contexture but insofar as such elements are seen as being 'together', in that time and in that place. That such events as airliner crashes or any other item of news are recognisably describable is dependent on these elements

being viewed in relation to each other. The story-ability of given events are not imbued by reading categories and applying them to a context. Rather those categories, those actions, and activities are viewed in the context, as being co-selected descriptors that are observably consistent, practically ordered and reflexively constituted.

Such categories and their accompanying specificities as have been encountered throughout my data are intelligible not in and of themselves but in and of their use. As indexical expressions they are intelligible as the locally assembled mechanics of members' order work. They are inexorably linked to the occasioned particulars of their use and from an Ethnomethodological standpoint are critical. The importance of the investigation into the 'occasioned corpus' is imperative if we are not to impose misleading external frameworks of understanding onto activities whose very existence depends upon the temporally located accomplishments of the social actor *at that time*.

Thus far my concluding observations indicate a preference for the notion of a grammar of if not disaster reporting then reporting an airliner crash. These however are exploratory comments drawn from the evidence collected and are not intended as any absolute conclusion regarding a generic categorial framework for this kind of incident. However I believe the distinctiveness of this work is firmly located in the procedural and analytical devotion to the methods employed by social actors in making sense of such cultural phenomena and in the commitment to elucidate the structures of understanding, to respecify the interpretation of news texts as examples

of practical action and reasoning. For the data I have studied there is an observable pattern to, or document of, the organisational particulars of the airliner crash report.



## **Conclusion**

Necessarily news texts and one might argue the mass media in general trade off the distribution of common sense knowledge, recipient design in its broadest sense is a necessity rather than an absent feature of the news article. The notion of the anonymous yet culturally aware readership means that all media genres can exist as they do. Given the wider significance of such inter-subjective, indexically ordered categorial and 'cultural' resources it is inevitable, even desirable that procedural frameworks for media text analysis be recognised as practically applicable to a far greater corpus of investigatory projects. Certainly for future study this work gives ample scope for the focussing of many of the ideas contained herein, to build upon the procedural specificities towards a framework for the analysis of texts. As such it continues the developing trend toward remedying the relative neglect of categorial studies in instances of members' practical action and practical reasoning that do not depend on sequential and discursive considerations. Limitations of time and space have prohibited any extensive analysis of the differing ways national identity is used across cultures when reporting the same event, nonetheless in this instance I feel this was beneficial. Typical of the considerations of Garfinkel (1967; 1971; 1992), Sacks (1976; 1992a; 1992b;) and the authors who have diligently continued their seminal work, this study is an analysis of data at that time, in this place. It is not a policy of ethnomethodology to conceive of situated, accountable actions in ways other than this.

The subject of this work is a further example of the warrantable topics of inquiry classified by Garfinkel's agenda for the Ethnomethodology and remains consistent with his concern for the ways in which they should be studied:

*“Thereby, in contrast to certain versions of Durkheim that teach that the objective reality of social facts is sociology’s fundamental principle, the lesson is taken instead, and used as a study policy, that the objective reality of social facts as an ongoing accomplishment of the concerted activities of daily life, with the ordinary, artful ways of that accomplishment being by members known, used, and taken for granted is, for members doing sociology, a fundamental phenomenon. Because, and in the ways it is practical sociology’s fundamental phenomenon, it is the prevailing topic for ethnomethodological study. Ethnomethodological studies analyse everyday activities as members’ methods for making those same activities visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes, i.e., “accountable,” as organisations of commonplace everyday activities.”*

(Garfinkel 1967: vii)

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