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Newspaper literacy and communication for democracy: is there a crisis in South African journalism?

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Abstract: Media theorists such as Barnett (2002), Buckingham (1997 & 2000) and Sampson (1999) describe a perceived crisis hindering the media's ability to inform citizens for participation in democracy. One of the symptoms and causes of this crisis, they argue, is that the media use language that many citizens cannot understand. This article draws on theories and methodologies from linguistics to investigate whether this claim holds true for South African newspapers. The concept of the crisis in journalism is deconstructed in the light of Street's (1984) ideological model of literacy. In a pilot study, multiple readability tests were conducted on one article from each of three newspapers, *Business Day*, *The Herald* and *Daily Sun*. The findings of these tests, and a systemic functional grammar analysis of cohesion and lexical density in the three articles, show that all three newspapers tailor their language to fit their target markets. This, triangulated with the rapid growth in readership of the *Daily Sun* and the more modest growth of *The Herald*, suggests that many South Africans are better informed for participation in democracy than in the past, although newspapers can do more to help readers learn a plurality of literacy practices.

Introduction

Media theorists such as Barnett (2002), Buckingham (1997, 2000), Sampson (1999) and McNair (2000) describe concerns that there is a worldwide crisis in journalism which hinders the ability of the mass media to make political news available to the general public, so that they can participate in democracy in an informed, rational way.

Research is required to explore whether there is any evidence that a perceived crisis in journalism is affecting South African voters' decisions.

The media theorists cited above argue that 'the quantity of what is usually described as "serious" political journalism circulating in the public sphere has steadily declined' (McNair, 2000: 3), as the content of many traditionally 'quality' publications has become increasingly sensationalised or shifted from an emphasis on politics to other topics. These theorists argue that 'political journalism has at the same time become too elitist or insider-oriented' (McNair, 2000: 5). If these two trends are correct, then political news is becoming less accessible to those outside of the elite intended audiences of the remaining 'serious' political journalism in circulation.

These media theorists write mainly of the situation in developed countries such as the USA and UK. However, this crisis could be even more of a threat in South Africa, where English is used as a first language by only 8.2% of the population (Statistics South Africa, 2003), yet most political journalism in circulation is in this language. For instance, 81.09% of the total newspaper market is commanded by English-language titles according to our calculations based on SAARF (2009b). Thus political news must be even more inaccessible to most South Africans than to most British or American citizens, and a crisis in journalism would only serve to exacerbate this problem.

The pilot study reported on in this article aimed to use techniques from linguistics to examine the extent to which the language used by South African English newspapers is accessible to a variety of readers, and so make a contribution to the debate as to whether there is a crisis in South African journalism.

More specifically, the study set out to answer the following three research questions:

1. How does the readability of articles from three South African English-language daily newspapers correlate with these newspapers' stated target markets?
2. What linguistic features distinguish South African newspaper articles identified as more readable from those identified as less readable, according to a systemic functional grammar analysis?
3. How does the readability of these articles correlate with patterns of growth and decline in newspaper readership in South Africa, and what might this suggest about a perceived crisis in South African journalism?

In the course of the research, we found that both the concept of the crisis in journalism described by the media theorists and a monolithic notion of readability needed to be deconstructed in the light of our findings. The following section details the media theorists' view of the crisis in journalism, and the section thereafter critiques their view and a unitary concept of readability in the light of the ideological model of literacy.

The crisis in journalism

Possibly the easiest way to understand the crisis in journalism is to trace its intellectual roots to Habermas' (1989) model of the public sphere. Although they acknowledge many of its shortcomings, Buckingham (2000), McNair (2000), and Örnebring and Jönsson (2004) adopt the Habermasian public sphere as a reference point against which to measure the perceived crisis in journalism.

Habermas sees the public sphere as a space in which individuals can 'engage [public authorities] in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatised but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour' (1989: 27). This debate is rational and critical, and its subject matter is limited to a range of topics deemed to be 'matters of common interest', also called 'public affairs'. This includes national and civic politics and economics, which are purported to affect the lives of all citizens (Habermas, 1989). For such rational debate to extend further than one location in one capital city, the media are required to provide a forum for communication between different individuals in the public sphere, and information on public authorities' actions (Habermas, 1989).

Although the Habermasian model of the public sphere is theoretically inclusive of all individuals (Habermas, 1989), Buckingham (2000) concedes that the lower classes, rural dwellers and women have been largely excluded from it, essentially because they lack access to the fora where rational-critical debate takes place, including the news media. Once again, in countries such as South Africa, the majority is excluded due to lack of competence in the dominant language of discussion in these fora. Even if they had such access, many would not have been socialised into the conventions according to which contributions to this debate are judged to be rational and critical, because of inequalities in the schooling system and differential socialisation of boys and girls in many households.

Causes and symptoms of the crisis

Habermas (1989) sees the 18th century Enlightenment in Europe as a golden age of the public sphere, describing a free and diverse press stimulating discussion among educated middle-class people in places such as the coffee houses of London and the *salons* of Paris. He charts a path of general decline in the media's ability to inform people for participation in democracy from then onward, due mainly to the commercialisation of the media (Buckingham, 2000). The media theorists who describe the crisis in journalism tend to extend this path of decline to the present. They cite a loose aggregate of various trends, listed below, as both causes and symptoms of the crisis in journalism.

Commercialisation

As media owners have become increasingly profit driven, advertising has risen in importance and begun to influence editorial content. Buckingham (2000) argues that this leads to a situation where the media socialise audiences into consumer culture, rather than cultivating the critical mindset

required for debate on public affairs. Consumerism is perceived to cultivate an uncritical acceptance of advertisers' claims, which runs counter to the considered engagement that the media theorists see as essential to political debate in a democracy.

The rise of public relations

Buckingham (2000) argues that commercialisation of the media has extended to the political sphere; in that political parties are 'sold' to undecided voters through public relations exercises. Barnett (2002) notes that the public relations engines of political parties, governments and other organisations are able to manipulate the news agenda to their advantage through techniques such as timing press releases so that they appear when the news media are likely to give them optimal publicity. This creates a situation where those interest groups with the resources to hire the best public relations officers can shut down the voices of those less powerful. For example, the wealthiest political parties in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) and Democratic Alliance (DA), launched expensive television advertising campaigns in the run-up to the 2009 elections, but less well-funded parties were excluded from this medium of campaigning for votes (SAPA, 2009).

Intensified competition between media

Technological advancement has enabled the rise of various new media through which news can be transmitted, including radio, television and, most recently, the Internet. Buckingham reports how some believe that this trend has serious implications for political socialisation, arguing that television news, which has replaced newspaper reading for many people, merely creates an 'illusion of being informed' (1997: 352). Proponents of this view argue that television news is not remembered as easily as news that is read from a page, and simply presents audiences with a barrage of facts with scant contextualisation. However, it is argued that Internet news, which can combine multiple modes of communication such as video and text, can go some way to improving awareness of political events among those who are beginning to rely on this medium. Thus Sampson (1999) argues that the Internet may have to rescue journalism from its crisis.

Hyper-adversarialism

Barnett (2002) argues that in a backlash against the growing power of public relations, journalists have become increasingly adversarial and even contemptuous towards politicians. In keeping with tabloidisation, they have probed the 'private' lives of public officials and aired (sometimes untested) allegations of scandalous behaviour in ways which journalists from previous eras were often unwilling to do. As an example of this hyper-adversarial sentiment, Barnett (2002: 405) cites an editorial from the *Sun*, a UK tabloid, which reads, 'Too many politicians are sad, sordid, pathetic, inadequate wimps with private lives that would make ordinary people's stomachs churn'. Barnett (2002) and Buckingham (1997) argue that this encourages cynicism in audiences, fuelling political apathy instead of stimulating public debate.

Tabloidisation

As a response to intense competition, publications and news programmes on radio and television have sought to grow their audiences by making changes to their content. In the newspaper market, Sampson (1999) writes that newspapers targeting the middle class have come to resemble tabloids more and more by decreasing the amount of news on what Habermas' model would consider matters of public interest, and including more on the 'private' lives of individuals.

Elitism

McNair (2000) and Sampson (1999) argue that the last bulwarks against tabloidisation are business newspapers such as *Business Day* and prestigious broadcast services like the BBC. These, they argue, can only be understood by an elite who are already well informed about public affairs, because they do not give all the contextual information which would help those with little prior knowledge of these affairs to understand what is happening, but merely update informed audiences about the latest developments. This trend is encapsulated in a recent advertising slogan used

by *SAfm*, a South African news radio station: 'For the well-informed'. This means that those who previously have not had access to information on public affairs, through lack of the literacy required to understand these media texts, remain excluded from this information, which they require for meaningful political participation according to Habermas' model.

Postmodernity

Buckingham (2000) argues that postmodernity has eroded many of the assumptions on which the Habermasian model of the public sphere is based. Postmodernism in this context can be viewed as 'an incredulity toward metanarratives' (Lyotard, 1984, cited in Smart, 2005: 14), large-scale stories or unifying theories which attempt to explain a wide range of different phenomena and/or justify a wide range of social norms. This means that postmodern audiences tend to be sceptical first of all of the metanarrative of democracy, which seeks to explain how a state should be run in a free society, and secondly of Habermas' model of the public sphere, which is essentially a metanarrative saying that for democracy to be maintained, individual citizens should remain aware of what is happening in public affairs, so that they can contribute to political debate and make an informed choice when voting for a political party. Without this motivation for remaining aware of public affairs, many people see no reason to read or watch news coverage on public affairs, and so the media are producing less of this type of content.

This article focuses mainly on two of the above trends, tabloidisation and elitism. These two trends at first glance seem to counteract each other, but as explained in the introduction to the article, media theorists see them in fact as working together to make news on public affairs less accessible to the general public. In the following section, the arguments summarised above are examined critically to ascertain the relevance of their concerns in the light of findings from some recent anthropological research on literacy.

A critique of the crisis in journalism

Many of the arguments for a crisis in journalism are challenged by a new perspective on literacy which emerged out of anthropological and ethnographic research conducted from the late 1970s onwards, the ideological model of literacy (Street, 1984). This research, like that of the media theorists cited above, has strong links to critical theory. While two of these media theorists, Buckingham (1997, 2000) and McNair (2000), recognise many of the problems with arguments for the crisis in journalism given below, Barnett (2002) and Sampson (1999) do not seem to.

The ideological model of literacy contrasts with the commonly-held autonomous model of literacy, which views literacy largely in cognitive terms as a closed system: literacy is a unitary competency that is taught, and which one either has or does not have (Street, 1993). Literacy is considered to be completely separate, or autonomous, from its socio-cultural and political context. In other words, literacy is seen as being an ideologically neutral technical skill, and promoted as such. The autonomous model also holds that reading has certain cognitive benefits (Solá & Bennett, 1991): those who are literate are able to think more abstractly and logically than those who are not, creating a 'great divide' (Gee, 1996: 48) between literate and non-literate societies in terms of development.

This explains the common argument, cited by Buckingham (1997), that television news is inferior to written news: if reading is somehow conducive to abstract, decontextualised, rational thought, then one will be able to process information and develop rational arguments based on it more easily than while simply watching and listening to audiovisual material.

Street argues that this autonomous model is obviously ethnocentric: it reduces literacy to competence in reading and writing in one particular way valued in Western culture, known as expository literacy or schooled literacy. As the latter name suggests, this type of literacy can only be learned through formal education. This ignores the wide variety of texts and sign systems used to communicate equally effectively in many Western and non-Western societies. Moreover, the privileging of this mode of communication over others, Rockhill (1993) argues, forms a strategy by which dominant groups can exercise control over the 'illiterate', by requiring that expository or schooled literacy be used to access certain jobs and resources such as higher education, as well

as to access the dominant public sphere in which debate about public affairs takes place. Because these dominant groups are competent in this type of literacy, they access these opportunities with ease, while other groups not competent in it struggle to access them.

By contrast, the ideological model views literacy in its socio-cultural and political context, acknowledging that various ideological meanings are attached to different ways of reading, or literacy practices (Adendorff & Nel, 1998). One must often investigate the history of these literacy practices to uncover how they are bound up with unequal power relations and the ideologies that sustain them. The ideological model acknowledges that literacy is not unitary: the literacy practice of reading Amerindian smoke signals, for example, requires a completely different set of competencies from that of reading this article (Gee, 1996).

It follows from this that there is no unitary, one-size-fits-all concept of readability in the ideological model. Just as we may be adept at reading academic journal articles but unable to read Amerindian smoke signals because of our particular patterns of literacy socialisation, so one reader may find tabloid articles easier to read than business articles and another reader the opposite because of differential literacy histories. Other readers may be well socialised in reading both of these types of article, thanks to their literacy histories. This appears to be corroborated by the findings of the study reported on in this article.

The ideological model also sheds some light on to several aspects of the crisis in journalism narratives. To begin at their roots, it alerts us to the probability that there are ideological reasons behind the privileging of certain topics as constituting ‘public affairs’. For instance, the feminist adage ‘the personal is political’ is an artefact of a popular struggle to bring the domestic into the realm of public affairs so that the mistreatment of women in the home could be the subject of open debate; it is in the hegemonic masculine interest for it to remain outside the realm of public affairs (Buckingham, 2000). To extend this argument (that the personal should be political), it may be seen as a positive development for democracy that tabloidisation has led to politicians’ domestic lives being put on the news agenda, so that people now have information about their personal character to add to information about their public conduct as a basis for their voting decisions. However, information on politicians’ domestic lives should not be substituted for information on their public decisions, as has occurred in the process of tabloidisation; both types of information can play an important role in informing voters’ decisions.

Moreover, the ideological model leads us to critique the two-pronged accusation of elitism and tabloidisation levelled against the media on the basis that the quality/tabloid distinction is itself an ideological construct developed over many years of class struggle. Historians report that a vibrant culture of popular literacy existed in much of pre-industrial Europe, which was marked by collaborative text production and group reading, non-standardised use of language and widespread self-publishing (Willinsky, 1991). This popular press was not restricted to what is now recognised as news: politics, educational and leisure content were mixed together (Donald, 1991). While Habermas’ (1989) 18th century golden age of the public sphere extended only to the middle class by his own admission, this popular literacy appears to have been widespread among the poor. The dominant classes began to view popular literacy as a threat to their power and attempted to control it through coercive means such as banning texts viewed to be subversive (Donald, 1991). There was a struggle among dominant classes between proponents of these coercive means and those who advocated ways of exerting control over the poor by consent, through extending mass schooling to them and educating them in dominant literacy practices, especially expository/schooled literacy, in the hopes that they would leave popular literacy behind (Donald, 1991). The proponents of this second approach won out in the mid-19th century, and were eventually so successful that dominant literacy practices became seen as the only literacy by the later proponents of the autonomous model of literacy.

The rollout of mass schooling in the UK coincided with the rise in importance of standard English. Collins (1991) shows that the literacy taught in schools became exclusively literacy in the standard language, which was, in turn, an ideological product of nationalism. This standard language was invariably a variety used by the middle or upper class, meaning that their children were better equipped to use the standard at school than working-class children were, helping the

ruling classes to maintain dominance even under the appearance of equal opportunities for all in the mass schooling system (Collins, 1991). Donald (1991) writes that under this new class regime, the browbeaten working class in 19th century Europe seemed to abandon their dreams of societal transformation, and the radical popular press was slowly supplanted by the commercially-driven ancestors of today's tabloids, which were (and still are) essentially produced by members of the middle class for the working class. These newspapers contain a mix of celebrity news and human interest articles seasoned with a small amount of hard political news. Meanwhile, the middle classes are catered for by a 'quality' press using the standard language and dominant literacy practices learned in school.

Under the ideological model, then, 'quality' and tabloid newspapers represent two distinct streams of literacy practice. We label these as *literacy cultures*, according to Martin and Rose's (2003) view of culture as a collection of genres, which is exactly what both streams of literacy practice are. 'Quality' newspapers represent the dominant literacy culture taught in schools and are addressed primarily to the middle and upper classes who are familiar with these practices, and tabloid newspapers represent the popular literacy culture, although they are very different from the texts produced by the working class themselves in pre-industrial popular literacy cultures. Table 1 presents a comparison of some of the most salient discoursal features of these two literacy cultures.

If popular literacy practices have the power to engage members of the working class in debate and help them find their voice in society, as it has been shown they did in pre-industrial Europe (Donald, 1991), then it appears these literacy practices are to be encouraged if one wishes citizens to be informed for democratic participation. Since tabloids are produced and controlled by the middle class, they may not be the ideal avenue through which to encourage popular democratic debate, but they can fulfil this purpose in the absence of a radical grassroots press run by the working class. In fact, Wasserman (2008) finds that South African tabloids such as the *Daily Sun* are doing exactly this by providing a forum for their voices through their letters pages and through encouraging readers to alert them to news happening in their neighbourhoods so that it can be reported in their newspapers. However, as Willinsky (1991) argues, if one encourages popular literacy practices, one must accept that the content of popular texts will reflect working-class tastes, even if educated members of the middle class find these to be vacuous at best and dangerously subversive at worst. Thus proponents of a more democratic literacy culture must learn to tolerate tabloid sensationalism. And on the other hand, if one must accept tabloidisation, one must also accept the elitism of 'quality' media as a means of catering to the interests of the dominant classes.

However in South Africa, it is important to bear in mind that the differences between these two literacy cultures are not the only obstacle to the ideal of egalitarian communication for democracy. Differences in language also present a formidable barrier: at present, most political journalism and political debate is in English, as shown in the introduction to this article. Therefore one's access to this information is to a large extent limited by one's competence in this language. To provide better communication for democracy, political news should be made available in every language spoken by South Africans as a first language.

Table 1: Characteristics of popular and dominant literacy cultures
Based on Collins (1991), Willinsky (1991) and Adendorff (1999)

Popular literacy culture	Dominant literacy culture
Remains subjectively close to topic	Remains objectively distant from topic
Refers primarily to immediate context of situation	Refers primarily to literary / intertextual context
Presupposes a close relationship between author and assumed reader	Presupposes a distant relationship between author and assumed reader
Is non-standardised	Is standardised
May be anecdotal or topic-centred	Is topic-centred
Uses mostly congruent language (things expressed as nouns, processes as verbs, etc.)	Uses grammatical metaphor to express processes as nouns

Thus the ideological model suggests that what is necessary for people to be informed for participation in democracy, and so to avoid a crisis in journalism, is a vibrant culture of popular literacy in which political socialisation and debate can take place for members of the working class in their first languages, as well as a robust sector of news media operating in the dominant literacy culture for members of the middle class in their first languages. However, as long as dominant literacy practices retain their hegemony, members of the working class will remain disempowered unless they are able to gain competence in dominant literacy practices and dominant languages, and so be able to debate with members of the middle class on a more even footing. Thus better communication for democracy would occur if the media addressed each group through its own literacy practices and languages, but provided a way for the working class to become more conversant with dominant literacy practices and languages. The study reported on in the following sections demonstrates exactly how closely three newspapers tailor not only their content but also their language usage to suit their target audiences' literacy practices and competence in English, although they do not necessarily take the further step of socialising readers into other literacy practices as well.

The study

To test the extent to which the South African news media use language that is clearly understood by potential readers, one of the authors of this article (hereafter referred to as 'the fieldworker') ran a pilot study that examined ten participants' understanding of three South African English-language newspaper titles: a tabloid, the *Daily Sun*; and two 'quality' newspapers: *The Herald* which targets the middle class, and *Business Day*, which targets the business elite. Newspapers are growing in influence as a medium of communication in South Africa: in 1999, 37% of South African adults were newspaper readers; by 2008, that figure had risen to 48% (SAARF, 2009a). Even though only 8.2% of South Africans speak English as a home language (Statistics South Africa, 2003), 78.73% of newspaper readership in South Africa is dedicated to English-language titles, according to our calculations based on data from SAARF (2008). This makes English-language newspapers a prominent news medium for South Africans of varying levels of competence in the language, making it especially pertinent to test how easily potential readers can understand the language used in them.

Data collection

If, as we argue above in our discussion of the ideological model of literacy, readability is contingent on individuals' various literacy histories, then to study the ease with which South Africans are able to read newspapers, one would need a sample of participants that fully represented all of their literacy histories and levels of competence in English. Since assembling such a sample would be nearly impossible, for the purposes of this study it was decided to try to hold one variable affecting literacy socialisation practices constant, namely socio-economic status. To achieve this, participants were selected from one particular level of employment ranking, that of secretaries of academic departments, residence halls or administrative divisions at Rhodes University. We decided to select ten participants as a manageable number for this study, since to provide detailed insights into literacy behaviour among the participants, the fieldworker would need to spend about 30 minutes with each participant. As Table 1 shows, the sample is diverse with regard to three variables affecting

Table 2: Research sample composition

Gender	Men: 2		Women: 8	
Home language(s)	Afrikaans: 1	English: 2	isiXhosa: 6	English and Afrikaans: 1
Education	Matric only: 4	Matric + 1 year: 2	Matric + 3 years: 3	Matric + 4 years: 1
Frequency of newspaper reading	Daily: 2	Weekly: 6	Less than monthly: 2	

participants' patterns of literacy socialisation: home language, education level and familiarity with the literacy practice of newspaper reading.

Data for the study was collected through supervised completion of two questionnaires, named the *biographical questionnaire* and the *reading questionnaire*. The *biographical questionnaire* was aimed at eliciting basic biographical information from participants, such as that reflected in Table 2, as well as information on which newspapers, if any, the participants read.

The data from the completed *biographical questionnaires* on which newspapers were read by participants was used to determine which newspapers to use in the *reading questionnaire*. This was done to add validity to the study by presenting participants with texts from newspapers they may normally have read. Since the study aimed to test the ease with which participants read and understand a variety of newspapers with different target markets across the socio-economic spectrum, all South Africa's regional and national newspapers were divided into three roughly equally-sized groups, based on the average monthly household incomes of their readers as reported in SAARF (2009a): a lower-income, middle-income and higher-income group. The following newspapers were selected (average income data from SAARF, 2009a):

- Lower-income group: *Daily Sun*, tied with two other titles as the most-read in this group among participants. Reader average monthly household income: R6 675.
- Middle-income group: *The Herald*, the most-read in this group. Reader average monthly household income: R11 099.
- Higher-income group: *Business Day,* not read by any participants, but readily available in the area in which the study took place. Reader average monthly household income: R20 583.

One article from each newspaper was chosen for use in the study. Since the crisis in journalism narratives focus on a need for media to equip citizens for political participation, a significant political event was chosen as the topic of the articles: the election of Jacob Zuma as president of the ANC in December 2007 at the party's national conference held near Polokwane. The three articles are reproduced in full in Appendix 1.

The *reading questionnaire* was designed to apply a combination of three commonly-used tests of reading ease to these three articles: a paraphrasing test, a cloze procedure test and participants' own ranking of the articles by ease of reading. Each of these tests has its own advantages and disadvantages, as shown in Table 3. It was believed that, by using three tests, the disadvantages of one would be counteracted by one of the other tests, allowing for a more valid test of reading ease. Each test yielded different insights into participants' understandings of the articles. Thus the study followed an exploratory approach based on the fieldworker's prior assumptions of what might make a text more or less complex for individual readers: the level of difficulty of its vocabulary, the level of its syntactic complexity, its cohesion as a text, and the extent to which its content conforms to the reader's background knowledge of its subject matter.

These three tests were combined in the reading questionnaire as follows: a sheet of paper was given to the participant showing the headline, and most of the body text of Article A, but with some paragraphs deleted at the end of the body text, to be used in the cloze procedure test. The typography of the three articles was standardised and authors' names were deleted to ensure that participants could not deduce which newspapers were the sources of the articles, which may have prejudiced them against one or another in their ratings of reading ease. Pictures were also deleted to simplify the study by limiting its scope to literacy in the written text of the articles and excluding the visual literacy often applied in newspaper reading. Studying visual literacy would require a semiotic analysis of the visual impact of newspaper articles as a whole; this would be a fertile area for further research into newspaper literacy, but would overcomplicate the analysis of the results of this pilot study.

Participants were asked to read the headlines and the first paragraph or two of the article given, which were printed in bold. Following this, they were asked to rewrite the bold text in their own words on a separate page. This formed the paraphrasing test for the article.

Next they were asked to read to the end of the sheet they had been given, and then were presented with another sheet containing the cloze procedure test for the article in question. The sheet contained the text of the article following on from that printed on the previous sheet of paper,

Table 3: Advantages and disadvantages of methods used to test ease of reading

Test	Advantages	Disadvantages
Paraphrasing	Elicits participants' understandings in their own words	Difficult to evaluate participants' responses consistently Participants may use words from text without truly understanding them
Cloze procedure	Tests participants' ability to recognise cohesive ties in a text, and use schemata to interpret text Very easy to evaluate participants' responses	Tests grammatical competence as well as text comprehension May frustrate participants if they cannot think of word to supply in gap Does not simulate a real-life task
Participants' rankings	Does not impose an analyst-centric definition of 'readability' on participants	Demands use of complex meta-cognitive skills to evaluate texts

but with ten lexical items deleted. This was done by counting back from the end of the article to the fifth-last lexical item, which was deleted if it was repeated from earlier in the article; if it was not, the next lexical item which was repeated from earlier in the article was deleted, until ten had been deleted. Participants were asked to guess which words belonged in the gaps left by the deleted words, and write them in on the sheet. This formed the cloze procedure test. A sample cloze procedure test is shown in Appendix 2.

This sequence of reading and testing was then repeated for Article B and Article C. Lastly, the readers were presented with a participants' rankings test sheet, as shown in Appendix 3. Participants were allowed to refer back to the printed text of the three articles in deciding which ones they found easiest and most difficult to read.

Analytic procedure

Once all ten questionnaires were completed, the data was coded. For the paraphrasing tests, each participant was given a score based on how closely their paraphrases resembled the meaning of the original material on which they were based. The original paragraphs were divided into clauses, and one point was allocated for every clause in the original paragraph that was judged to be reflected correctly in the paraphrase. This yielded a score out of the number of clauses in the material to be paraphrased in each article, which was then converted to a percentage for ease of comparison. In practice, it proved rather difficult to evaluate the paraphrases according to a uniform standard. Paraphrases were marked as correctly reflecting a clause in some cases when they did not reflect the main process encoded in the clause, but rather mentioned an important nominalised process in the clause, for example *Jacob Zuma won the election* would have been accepted as an accurate reflection of 'Jacob Zuma swept to a landslide victory last night' from Article B.

The cloze procedure tests were also coded by counting the number of words supplied by the participants that matched – or were judged to be close synonyms of – the words in the text, yielding a score out of the total number of deleted items for each test. These were all converted to percentages for ease of comparison with each other and with the paraphrasing test data.

Lastly, the participants' rankings of articles by ease of reading were coded, with the articles the participants chose as the easiest receiving a value of two, the ones they ranked second in difficulty a value of one, and those chosen as most difficult, a value of zero. These values were then added to produce a total participants' rankings score for each article.

The results from these three tests were analysed to see what trends emerged and whether one article clearly appeared to be the most difficult for participants to read, or whether certain types of participants found certain articles easier to read than others. In doing this, it was recognised that readers' knowledge about the subject matter of the articles would increase with each article they read, so that if participants were able to read all three articles equally well, they would be expected to achieve higher scores on the tests relating to Article C than on those relating to Article B, and so on. Once this analysis of the test results was completed, the newspaper articles used in the study

were analysed to identify which linguistic features could account for the differences in scores on the three tests for different participants. This was done using a systemic functional grammar (SFG) analysis.

SFG is an appropriate theoretical framework for this purpose, since it enables a close analysis of how the lexico-grammar of a text is used to create meanings in simpler or more complicated ways (Bloor & Bloor, 2004). One aspect of SFG that is particularly useful for this study is its concept of cohesion, which refers to how texts hold together through the use of cohesive ties, such as reference (e.g. in the clause *Zuma voted for himself*, where *himself* refers to *Zuma*), lexical cohesion (the repeated use of a word in a text to refer to the same thing) and conjunction (e.g. the use of *and* to join two clauses). SFG has a sophisticated system for describing the relations that conjunction sets up between clauses. Two independent clauses linked together are said to be in a paratactic relationship, and an independent clause and a dependent clause linked together are in a hypotactic relationship (Bloor & Bloor, 2004). There are two categories of logico-semantic relations that two conjoined clauses can have with each other: projection, where a first clause introduces the second clause as a quotation, reported speech or an idea which is being discussed; and expansion, where the second clause simply adds more information to what is conveyed in the first (Gerot & Wignell, 1995).

A text that coheres well may be found by many readers to be easier to read than one which does not, but what one considers a cohesive tie may be contingent on one's culture or patterns of language socialisation (Gumperz, 1982). For instance, if one said *Horace got some picnic supplies out of the car. The beer was warm*, some hearers may identify *beer* as a possible member of the category *picnic supplies*, in which case they would find the utterance cohesive; while some others may not find the utterance cohesive because they do not recognise *beer* to be a picnic supply (example from Clark & Haviland, cited in Widdowson, 1983).

This illustrates how patterns of cohesion are used to index readers' contextual knowledge in different ways. Widdowson (1983) writes that readers' contextual knowledge is organised into two types of schemata, or structures for storing and categorising knowledge in the mind: frames of reference, which carry factual information about the world, and rhetorical routines, which carry readers' knowledge of typical ways of structuring communication. Readers may find articles simple to read if they conform easily to these schemata, and difficult if they do not (Widdowson, 1983). Thus one ideally needs insight into the types of schemata which readers from different cultures are likely to have in order to predict how cohesive they are likely to find a particular text. One limitation of the analysis in this article is that it does not present such insight but merely highlights some possible cohesive ties that readers may or may not recognise as such.

Another concept drawn on in the analysis is that of nominalisation, which refers to the way in which processes (usually represented in spoken language as verbs) can be expressed by means of nouns and therefore can be modified as participants in a clause (Bloor & Bloor, 2004). This is an instance of grammatical metaphor: while in lexical metaphor one word is implicitly compared with another, in grammatical metaphor one syntactic role is implicitly used to substitute for another. An example is the nominal group *Zuma's election*, which encodes a process of electing Zuma. This device allows dense packing of information, resulting in a greater lexical density (number of lexical items per clause). Nominalisations are especially valued in the dominant literacy culture as a means of encoding un-commonsense information (Martin, 1993). Readers typically learn how to read and write nominalisations in secondary school (Christie, 1998). This task is usually more difficult to accomplish in one's second language, as the majority of South Africans must in order to interpret news in English.

Finally, recent patterns of change in the readership of the three newspapers used in this study were investigated briefly. This was done in the light of the impressions gained from the study results and the SFG analysis about whether newspapers are using language appropriate to the understandings of members of their target markets. Patterns of newspaper readership in South Africa's past under apartheid and as a fledgling democracy were also briefly investigated. These investigations were conducted in order to explore whether the newspapers used in the study were attracting more readers than they or similar publications had in the past. From this and the findings

of the readability tests, we hypothesised as to whether the appropriateness of their language for these readers could possibly be one of the reasons for these newspapers' growth or decline in readership. This gave some tentative indication as to whether South Africans are being better informed in language they understand for participation in democracy than they were in the past, or not, and hence gave an indication as to whether there is cause for concern about a crisis in South African journalism.

Questionnaire results

The participants' average scores in the paraphrasing and cloze procedure tests are shown in Figure 1. At first glance, both these tests seem to show that Article B (reproduced in Appendix 1) was better understood than the other two articles by most participants. However, the differences between the average paraphrasing exercise scores for the three articles are very small when one considers that the individual paraphrases were evaluated in scores out of three or four clauses before being converted to percentages. Therefore one should not draw conclusions from these averages with any confidence.

The cloze procedure test results are rather more enlightening: many participants battled with the Article A cloze procedure test (sample reproduced in Appendix 2) because they were unfamiliar with the type of test and had less background knowledge on the subject of the articles than they would have had by the time of beginning the cloze procedure test on Article B. However, there are also reasons to believe that the low result in the cloze procedure test for Article A reflects a real difference in cohesion between it and Article B, as is shown in the SFG analysis of these articles in the next section. The low cloze procedure result for Article C may be in part a reflection of participant fatigue by this stage in the questionnaire, but is also likely to be a reflection of that text's increased complexity in its patterns of cohesion and use of technical terminology which some participants may have battled to interpret, as is shown in the SFG analysis of this article in the next section.

The participants' rankings test shows a different pattern. Article A was given a participants' rankings score of 12, while articles B and C were given scores of eight each, indicating that most participants rated Article A as the easiest to read, and most rated either Article B or C as the most difficult. These results seem to contradict the results of the cloze procedure test, but this is true only if one views literacy as a unitary phenomenon under the autonomous model. On the

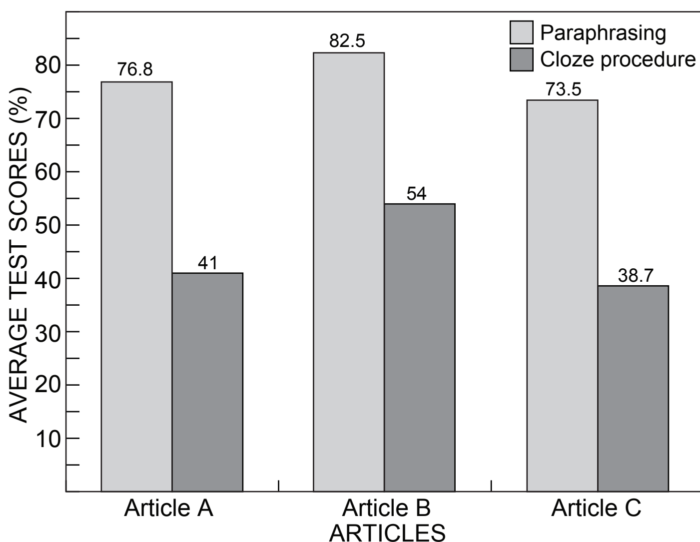

Figure 1: Participants' average scores for the paraphrasing and cloze procedure tests

contrary, according to the ideological model, literacy is composed of a range of various competencies and both the paraphrasing and cloze procedure tests model some of those competencies, while the participants' rankings show how demanding readers thought the texts were of their full range of literacy competencies. The cloze procedure test modelled participants' use of two literacy competencies, those of recognising cohesive ties in a text and of using their schemata to predict what the next lexical item in a text is most likely to be. Readers may have found that Article B was not very demanding on these two competencies, and hence achieved high cloze procedure test scores for it, but found it more demanding on other literacy competencies, justifying a low average score in the more holistic participants' rankings test.

If one examines each participant's individual rankings, as shown in Table 4, one finds more evidence to corroborate the ideological model of literacy. If literacy and readability were unitary phenomena, one would expect near unanimity among participants as to the way the articles should be ranked by readability, but in fact there is a wide diversity in the participants' rankings. This may be a reflection of the diversity of the participants' literacy histories, which have given them differential levels of competence in a range of literacy competencies, some of which are more applicable to some articles than others.

A more particular indication of the impact of participants' differential literacy histories emerged when the biographical data on the participants was compared with the reading test results. This is shown in Table 5, where the average paraphrasing and cloze procedure test scores of participants who had no tertiary education were compared with those who had some form of tertiary education.

The participants who were educated only up to matric (Grade 12) level outscored those with some tertiary education in the paraphrasing tasks on average, regardless of whether they were first-language or second-language English speakers, while the reverse is true of the cloze procedure tests. A logical explanation for this result would be some difference in literacy competencies taught in these two tiers of the education system. In secondary school, learners are often taught to make close paraphrases of texts so as to reflect them as faithfully as possible; in higher education, paraphrases must usually reflect the authors' interpretation and critical engagement, and so be less

Table 4: Participants' rankings of articles by reading ease

Participant no.	Article ranked easiest to read	Article ranked middle	Article ranked hardest to read
1*		B	A, C
2	A	B	C
3	A	C	B
4	A	B	C
5	A	C	B
6	B	A	C
7	C	B	A
8	A	C	B
9	C	A	B
10	B	C	A

* Participant 1 chose not to rank any article as the easiest to read, but instead ranked two as joint most difficult to read

Table 5: Average paraphrasing and cloze procedure test scores for participants with and without tertiary education

Test	Para. A	Para. B	Para. C	Cloze A	Cloze B	Cloze C
School only	83.5	87.5	83.5	40.0	40.0	33.0
Tertiary educated	72.33	79.17	66.83	41.67	63.33	42.50

close to the facts conveyed in the text. Meanwhile, academics often complain that students entering tertiary education are often not able to make paraphrases that incorporate their own interpretations and make abstract arguments from what has been written (Bruce, 1992). This means that these two levels of education teach two different rhetorical routines for paraphrasing information. The higher education type of paraphrase will also be more difficult for second-language speakers than first-language speakers, because one is required to find synonyms for words in the text in order to avoid quoting it directly. This demands a large vocabulary, and that one use language to communicate the subtle nuances of one's position in relation to what is paraphrased. Tertiary education also tends to demand the higher-level literacy competencies of drawing links between different parts of texts and abstract reasoning to a greater degree than secondary school, and these are precisely the literacy skills modelled in the cloze procedure test.

In short, the results of the study show clearly that the concept we label as 'literacy' is in fact composed of a variety of different competencies. A newspaper will be successful in using language appropriate to its target readers if it draws on the range of these literacy competencies of which its target readers have an easy command. The following SFG analysis will show how the three newspapers under examination do this.

SFG analysis of articles

Here we report on a comparison of the lexico-grammar of the three articles used in the study (included in Appendix 1), paying particular attention first to patterns of cohesion and then to lexical density, two characteristics that, as explained earlier, often play a role in making texts easy or difficult to read, depending on the readers' literacy histories (Gumperz, 1982; Martin, 1993).

It would take too much space to attempt a satisfactorily close analysis of the entire texts of the three articles in question, so a selection of paragraphs from each article are compared, while bearing in mind their relations with other sections of the text, so that generalisations can be made about the features of the texts as a whole. These paragraphs were selected from the halfway point of each article, and comprise about four lines of running text each. They are broadly representative of the body text of their articles in terms of topic addressed and lexico-grammatical structure. The analysis is an analyst-centric one, but draws on the evidence of differential literacy competencies among participants in the study, as discussed above, for triangulation.

Article A, as the following analysis shows, is extremely dependent on a complex system of long-range intra-textual cohesive ties and extra-textual references for its cohesion, giving its language a dependence on its situational context similar to spoken language. This allows for short, simple clause complexes, but may well make the text difficult to read for those who do not possess this particular rhetorical routine, or a good knowledge of the article's frame of reference. The article seems to assume that readers have gained knowledge of this frame of reference by following news of the electoral contest between Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma for some time, possibly through reading the *Daily Sun* every day.

Extract 1: Article A: *Daily Sun*, lower-income newspaper (paragraph numbering corresponds to that in Appendix 1)

A9 *"It's going to be a walkover!" shouted one.*

A10 *But Mbeki loyalists warned: "It's not over till it's over!"*

A11 *They accused the media of unfairly boosting Zuma and said they would be "surprised" when they found out the strength of Mbeki's support.*

A12 *But the result seemed to be going Zuma's way.*

These paragraphs exhibit a device that shortens sentence and paragraph lengths by splitting one clause complex into two orthographic sentences and by extension into two separate paragraphs. Both A10 and A12 begin with the adversative conjunction *but*, indicating that the material in these paragraphs exists in a relationship of paratactic expansion with that of the preceding paragraphs, A9 and A11 respectively. The conjunction *but* in both these cases forms strong cohesive ties between the paragraphs.

The word *one* (A9) substitutes for the singular of *Zuma backers*, a nominal group that appears in paragraph A7, forcing readers to look two paragraphs back in the text for a possible substitute. Once readers have done this, they have to decode the idiomatic expression *a walkover* successfully and then establish who the Zuma backer believes will win in the *walkover.* The paragraph preceding the extract portrays the Zuma supporters as singing, dancing and ululating, from which readers must infer that they are in a triumphant mood, from which, in turn, they have to work out that the Zuma backer quoted believes that Zuma will win. They also have to bear in mind that this paragraph (A9) is set in an adversative relationship with the next, in which *Mbeki loyalists* (A10) say *"It's not over till it's over!"* (A10). Here, they have to recover from context that *it* (A10) refers to the contest for the ANC presidency, which the *Mbeki loyalists* (A10) caution should not be declared won or lost until it is finished, meaning that they are warning against predicting the outcome of the election in the manner that the Zuma backer is doing in the previous paragraph. This shows how a complex inferential process is required to understand this apparently simple extract, with cohesive ties indexing the rhetorical routines of a spoken dialogue.

Paragraph A11 begins with the pronoun *they*, a reference to *Mbeki loyalists* (A10) that builds a cohesive tie between the two clause complexes and, since its antecedent is not too difficult to recover, may aid understanding. However, the second and third instances of *they* in A11 do not have such an easily recoverable antecedent. These instances could co-refer with *the media* (A11), the nearest preceding plural noun, but they are more likely to co-refer with *Zuma backers* (A7), since they were the target of the warning "*It's not over till it's over!"* (A10). This creates another long-range cohesive tie. One cohesive tie that is not quite so long in range is the repetition of the names *Zuma* (A11; A12) and *Mbeki* (A10; A11), which creates lexical cohesion through the frequent appearances of these names in the article as a whole.

The long range of these cohesive ties means that long nominal groups do not need to be rewritten explicitly, so that lexical information is presented in a fairly easily accessible form with few nominalisations. One important nominalisation is *walkover*, an idiomatic expression, which someone without knowledge of colloquial English expressions may battle to interpret.

Article A's extensive use of cohesive ties to refer to contextual information is one likely reason behind the lower average scores it received on the cloze procedure test. In such a context-dependent text, deleting a few words can make it very difficult to reconstruct cohesive ties from one's schemata and successfully supply the missing words. However, the article received a high participants' rankings score, which indicates that many participants did not find it difficult to recognise these cohesive ties. This may be because they have enough knowledge of the article's frame of reference to recognise the cohesive ties without too much trouble, and because spoken language uses such long-range cohesive ties frequently (Halliday, 1989). Low lexical density is another feature which makes this article appear like spoken language in a way characteristic of texts in the popular literacy culture.

Extract 2: Article B: *The Herald*, middle-income newspaper

B9 All eyes will now be on the elections for the National Executive Committee taking place today to see whether the Zuma camp will rid that body of all pro-Mbeki elements, including the likes of Finance minister Trevor Manuel, a move that could have repercussions as far as the markets are concerned.

Article B does not have the long-range lexical ties or context-dependence of Article A, but does include some extremely complex clausal relations. These centre on the nominalisation *move*. The fact that the process of 'moving' is nominalised using this word allows it to be modified and related to other processes in extremely complicated ways. *A move* (B9) refers back to the process *rid* in the clause *whether the Zuma camp will rid that body of all pro-Mbeki elements, including the likes of Finance minister Trevor Manuel* (B9), and is hence a nominalisation. Several factors make it difficult to identify this antecedent. Firstly, readers have to recognise that *move* is in fact an anaphoric noun referring to a process. This task is made more complicated by the fact that there is no conjunction between the nominal group *a move that could have repercussions as far as the markets are*

concerned (B9) and the clause *whether the Zuma camp will rid that body of all pro-Mbeki elements, including the likes of Finance minister Trevor Manuel* (B9), to indicate exactly what the lexico-grammatical relations between this nominal group and that clause are. Readers must make hypotheses about what relations do exist between them, the most likely of which is that 'which is' has been elided from before *a move* (B9), meaning that the nominal group is an identifier in an implied relational process linked to the previous clause in a relation of hypotactic expansion. Next, speakers have to analyse *including the likes of Finance Minister Trevor Manuel* (B9) as an embedded clause which is a qualifier of *all pro-Mbeki elements* (B9), and so realise that the process *including* (B9) cannot be an antecedent for *a move* (B9). Instead, the process of the clause that this clause is embedded into, namely *rid* (B9), must be the antecedent of *move*. Readers then have to attach the qualifier *that could have repercussions as far as the markets are concerned* (B9), which is itself an embedded clause, to this process.

In addition to the complexity of these clausal relations, information is packed far more densely in this extract because clauses are longer than in Article A. However, there are only two nominalisations in this extract, *elections* (B9) and *a move* (B9). The complications surrounding the second of these have already been discussed, and the first should not pose much of a problem to readers as the word is commonly used in this nominalised form. Other lexical items in the extract might. If readers are not aware that *camp* (B9) in the nominal group *the Zuma camp* (B9) is being used figuratively here to refer to a group of supporters, this participant may cause confusion. A similar thing may be said of *all pro-Mbeki elements* (B9), where one element of the nominal group, *Mbeki* (B9), may be well known from the context, but the reader needs to know the meaning of the prefix *pro-* (B9) to decode the entire nominal group successfully. A further difficult term in this passage is *repercussions* (B9), which refers to consequences of a process and generally has negative connotations, suggesting that ridding the National Executive Committee of the likes of Trevor Manuel may have unfavourable consequences for the markets. A reader lacking experience in interpreting the dominant literacy practices in which this word is commonly used may either not know the denotation of the word, or not be acquainted with this connotation.

A figurative expression that may cause difficulty is *as far as the markets are concerned* (B9). 'As far as N is concerned' is a formulaic expression typical of texts from the dominant literacy culture, so readers with limited exposure to this culture may view this as a personification of 'the markets' and then wonder how 'the markets' could be concerned, and how they could be concerned for a particular distance.

Article B supplies readers with plenty of contextual information about actors and organisations mentioned in the text. Because this information is supplied in so full a form, readers are easily able to see which actors and organisations relate to which, developing their frames of reference on the subject matter of the article. These more well-developed frames of reference may have been what assisted participants to achieve a higher average score on the cloze procedure test for this article than on the other two. However, the article's low participants' rankings score seems to reflect that the positive effect that this supply of contextual information had on reading ease was outweighed by the negative effects of its complex structure of inter-clausal relations and high lexical density, both of which mark this as a text characteristic of the dominant literacy culture.

Extract 3: Article C: *Business Day*, upper-income newspaper

C8 *Some investors have raised concerns that a Zuma win could shift economic policy towards his staunch backers, the trade unions and SACP.*

C9 *Motlanthe said the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) could not vote in the election.*

This extract has a simpler system of cohesion than either Extract 1 or Extract 2, but knowledge of economic discourse is required to interpret some of the terms included in it, which is what made it difficult to read for many of the participants in the study. Paragraph C8 is a clause complex made up of a main clause and a long embedded clause, *that a Zuma win could shift economic policy towards his staunch backers, the trade unions and SACP*, while C9 is also made up of only two

clauses existing in a relationship of paratactic projection, where a person's comments are recorded in reported speech.

Use of the names *Zuma* (C8), *Motlanthe* (C9) and *SACP* (C9) form lexical cohesive ties between this section of the text and paragraphs preceding the extract. A further cohesive tie is crucial in linking paragraph C8 to paragraph C9: while C8 speaks of *the trade unions* as supporters of Zuma, C9 quotes Motlanthe as saying *the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu)* was not allowed to vote in the election, which Zuma won. Readers have to realise that *Cosatu* (C9) refers to a group of *trade unions* (C8) to understand the relevance of this statement to what is written in C8. This is made easier by the fact that Cosatu's full name, including the phrase *trade unions* (C9), is given. Readers also have to conclude that *the election* (C9) refers to *the African National Congress' (ANC's) landmark elections last night* (C8), but since this election forms part of the setting for the article as a whole, this too is not difficult for most readers.

However, the extract contains many instances of potentially troublesome vocabulary. *Concerns* is used as a nominalisation in *Some investors have raised concerns* (C8), which could be rephrased as 'some investors are concerned'. This nominalisation is used in combination with an abstract, figurative process, *raised* (C8). The other nominalisation in C8, *a Zuma win*, is also a participant in a clause with a figurative process, *shift* (C8). This process may be difficult to interpret for a reader not schooled in dominant literacies. In addition, the goal of this process, *economic policy* (C8), is a term that does not occur often outside specialist economic texts and business journalism. This term, like most technical terms, is rooted in nominalisation: the adjective *economic* comes from the noun *economy*, a nominalisation of the processes of buying and selling that occur in a country's markets, and the noun *policy* is a nominalisation of the process of making decisions on how one will choose what to do when future decisions present themselves. Such technical terms increase the lexical density and abstractness of text, increasing its reading difficulty for those not conversant with dominant literacy practices.

Even if readers understand how *shift* (C8) is being used figuratively and what *economic policy* (C8) is, they may not be able to identify what it would mean for economic policy to shift towards the trade unions and SACP. To comprehend this idea properly would require the word *shift* (C8) to activate a frame of reference which identifies that the trade unions and SACP both advocate economic policies that tend to favour the interests of workers, rather than the interests of the middle class, including the *investors* (C8), which is why these investors are concerned about the possible effects of *a Zuma win* (C8).

This means that it is not enough to have a general knowledge of who the main players in the Polokwane conference were, and what the ANC is, in one's schemata in order to read Article C with full comprehension. It also requires knowledge of economics, and economic literacy. If readers do not have this literacy, they will also battle to predict which term will appear next in the text, which may explain why participants achieved the poorest average cloze procedure scores on this article.

Table 6 summarises the main characteristics of each article's cohesion and lexical density patterns as revealed in the analysis.

As one goes from the working-class tabloids to the upper-class business newspapers, cohesive ties simplify and lexical density increases. It is enlightening to compare this with Table 1, which lists characteristics of the popular and dominant literacy cultures. Language in the popular

Table 6: Summary of main characteristics of cohesion and lexical density found in analysis of articles

Article	Cohesion	Lexical Density
A: *Daily Sun* ('lower-income')	High dependence on extra-textual and long-range intra-textual cohesive ties	Sparse distribution of lexical items in short clauses
B: *The Herald* ('middle-income')	Complex inter-clausal relations	High lexical density; some difficult lexical items
C: *Business Day* ('upper-income')	Simplest cohesion system	High lexical density; requires economic literacy to interpret

literacy culture is very close to its immediate context and alludes heavily to it, while language in the dominant literacy culture maintains an objective distance from its topic and alludes instead to literary tradition in a broad sense of the word. Hence the 'lower-class' Article A relies heavily on the immediate context of events surrounding Zuma's election as ANC president, while the 'higher-class' Article C alludes more to established economic literature which explains what it means for economic policy to shift towards the demands of trade unions. These contextual references suggest that there is a close association between the language used in these newspapers and the average socio-economic standing of their readers.

Newspaper target markets and readership trends

A brief survey of the target markets of *Daily Sun* (lower-income newspaper), *The Herald* (middle-income newspaper) and *Business Day* (upper-income newspaper), the source of articles A, B and C respectively, shows that these newspapers' language is also tailored closely to the literacy practices of their target markets.

The *Daily Sun* has focussed on a very specific target market, typified by its publisher, Deon du Plessis, as 'our guy in the blue overalls' (Du Plessis, 2008; Froneman, 2006). Du Plessis (2008) calls him 'the skilled working-class hero of the amazing boom in the middle of the South African market'. Meanwhile, *The Herald*'s deputy editor describes its target market as middle class, with a post-matric (post-Grade 12) education and living in the western half of the Eastern Cape or the Garden Route (Matthewson, 2008). He says that this target market includes English-speakers and people with well-developed competence in English as a second language. *Business Day*'s stated target market is 'the country's business and political elite' (IMFSA, 2008). All three of these target markets match relatively closely the data on readers' average monthly household incomes presented earlier in this article.

Readership statistics on the three publications, as shown in Table 7 reveals that both the *Daily Sun* and *The Herald* are growing in readership, while *Business Day* is maintaining its readership after having enjoyed a short spurt of growth between 2006 and 2007.

The *Daily Sun* was established in 2002 as the country's first tabloid-format daily newspaper (Froneman, 2006). While South Africa has a well-established 'quality' press targeting the middle and upper classes and a history of publications which can be said to be part of a popular culture of literacy, Hadland (2007) argues that the country could not have been said to have a mass popular press before the advent of the *Daily Sun* as the forerunner among a group of seven new tabloid titles. He writes that the first newspapers targeted at black people in the 19th century, such as *Izwi Labantu*, were aimed primarily at a missionary-educated elite, rather than the working class. Notably, though, they were mainly written in the first languages of their target readers, unlike many subsequent publications that targeted the working class.

In 1932, a newspaper called *Bantu World* opened, targeting the black working class across the nation (Hadland, 2007). It gained some appeal in the townships, but nothing near that of the order of the *Daily Sun* (Froneman, 2006). Rather more successful was *Drum*, a monthly magazine established in 1951 that grew to be distributed across Anglophone Africa with a circulation of 300 000 (Ngugi, n.d.). It featured a diverse mixture of content, from celebrity news and self-help columns to investigative journalism recognised as being of high quality (Ngugi, n.d.; Hadland, 2007). *Drum* also closed eventually, but was re-established due to popular demand and is now a weekly magazine with a readership of 1.98 million (SAARF, 2009b). In the much smaller South

Table 7: Readership by newspaper as a percentage of South Africa's total adult population at time of survey
Based on SAARF (2008, 2009a)

Newspaper	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Daily Sun	–	–	5.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	15.7	16.4
The Herald	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.8
Business Day	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.5

African Indian working-class market, the *Post* thrived in the 1950s and continues to the present day, with a fairly modest readership of 352 000 (Froneman, 2006; SAARF, 2009b). The *Sowetan*, another newspaper aimed at the black working class and lower middle class, has a long and proud history of political news reporting (Hadland, 2007). In 2003 it was read by 6.7% of South Africa's adult population, but it suffered heavy losses in readership in competition with the *Daily Sun* before recovering those over the past two years (SAARF, 2008 & 2009a).

An account of the popular press in South Africa would be incomplete without a mention of the grassroots alternative press which arose mainly in resistance to apartheid policies. These publications most closely approximated the ideal of media in the popular literacy culture produced by the working class for the working class, and formed a vibrant arena for political discussion. A range of African nationalist newspapers appeared throughout the 20th century, mainly in Bantu languages (Switzer, 2000). The zenith of this alternative press, in the 1980s, was known for illustrious titles such as *South* and *Grassroots*, most of which were in English, although a significant minority were in Bantu languages (Switzer, 2000). Data from Keyan Tomaselli (cited in Switzer, 2000) shows that in 1987, alternative publications targeted at the working class claimed a combined circulation of 480 000 copies. However, with the demise of apartheid, this alternative press was seen as having fulfilled its purpose, and the external funding that had kept it running ceased, causing almost all of these publications to close (Hadland, 2007).

These publications' contributions to a popular press in South Africa are all notable, but Tim Couzens (cited in Hadland, 2007) writes that three factors hampered them from developing into a true mass popular press that could function as an extensive alternative public sphere for the working class. The publications ran into financial trouble selling newspapers to an impoverished market which did not attract advertisers in the apartheid era; both the government and advertisers feared that a mass popular press would provoke black people to militancy; and the popular press remained largely under the control of white businessmen who could suppress content they saw as running counter to their interests.

But after political change to a non-racial democracy in 1994, which removed the threat of black militancy, and subsequent black economic empowerment deals which transferred part ownership of most major media holding companies to black people, media owners began to see the potential profitability of tabloids, and so invested in starting them (Wasserman, 2008). Significantly, all nine newspapers which have lower reader average household income figures than *Sowetan* have been established since the advent of the new tabloids in 2002, except for *Soccer Laduma*, a weekly focussed solely on sport (SAARF, 2008 & 2009a). This demonstrates clearly that an entirely new sector of the newspaper market has been created, catering for members of the working class who previously were excluded from the market. Encouragingly, three of these titles, *Isolezwe*, *Ilanga langeSonto* and *UmAfrika*, are in isiZulu, marking a tentative step towards a possible revival of a Bantu/Nguni-language press in South Africa (SAARF, 2009a).

On the other hand, most 'quality' newspapers targeted at the middle class have shown a general decline in readership over the past few decades, according to Hadland (2007). He writes that this decline was most marked in the months following the 1994 elections, when people suddenly seemed to lose interest in politics and stop buying newspapers. For instance, the *Cape Argus*'s readership dropped by just under 20% from the middle of 1994 to the end of 1995, the *Daily News*'s readership went down from just under 100 000 in the first half of 1993 to 75 960 in the second half of 1995, and *The Star* dropped from 216 684 to 165 171 over the same period. However, data from SAARF (2008) suggests that some 'quality' newspapers have begun to reverse the downward trend in readership over the past five years, including *The Herald* and *Business Day*.

One of the reasons for the growth of the *Daily Sun* and the other new tabloids may well be that they address their readers in language suited to them. This study seems to indicate that the *Daily Sun*'s use of language is in keeping with the popular literacy culture. However, it could be improved by providing more contextual information and cohesive links that enable readers who have little knowledge of the subject matter of its articles to read them more easily. The *Daily Sun*'s language as well as its content is overwhelmingly successful in attracting readers, a sign that these readers are interested in being entertained by the news they read, while gaining a little awareness of political

issues along the way. This amount of political coverage, albeit small, can stimulate debate among readers and empowers them with an opportunity to be better informed for democratic participation, and Wasserman (2008) has shown that this is in fact happening among the new tabloids' readers.

Meanwhile, the readership of *The Herald* is growing as well, albeit at a much more modest rate. This may be in part because it has not generated the same rapport with its readers as the *Daily Sun* has. Its language appears to contain both highly complex patterns of cohesion, and vocabulary and idioms used chiefly in texts from the dominant literacy culture. This is language that its middle-class target market may understand, but may also find fairly cognitively demanding at times.

The SFG analysis suggests that the language of *Business Day* addresses its much smaller target market of the business elite well, as does its economics- and politics-oriented language. It demands a strong command of dominant literacies in economics and politics and an extended vocabulary of technical terminology from its readers, both of which draw heavily on nominalisation. In so doing, *Business Day* raises high barriers to comprehension. Thus it becomes a mark of prestige to read *Business Day*, and the attraction of this status may be one of the reasons for its growth in readership up to 2007, in the context of an economic elite expanding thanks to black economic empowerment. Its stagnation from 2007 to 2008 may have to do with reasons outside the scope of this article, such as the current global recession.

Thus all three newspapers under investigation appear to be succeeding in reaching their target markets and increasing their numbers of readers. This, together with the indication from the SFG analysis that, with some exceptions, each newspaper tailors its language fairly accurately to the literacies of its average readers, gives room for optimism that more and more people are becoming informed for participation in democracy, contrary to what the proponents of the crisis in journalism argue. This is true particularly of the working class, which has an entire new segment of the newspaper market dedicated to it. The fact that most of these publications are in English, a second language for much of the working class, limits their accessibility for those with low levels of competence in this language, but the emergence of three new publications in isiZulu is an encouraging sign that communication for democracy in South Africa is improving.

Conclusion

It must be observed that the findings of the study reported on in this article are to a significant extent shaped by the interaction of two differing perspectives: a largely prescriptive perspective viewing an apparent problem in the media's capability to equip citizens to participate in democracy, and a descriptive linguistic perspective that attempts to probe the existence of the problem and in the process, deconstructs it. Thus this article begins with concerns over a crisis in journalism and ends with a finding that newspapers may be making political journalism more accessible to more South Africans than it has been in the past, with a diverse array of publications catering for a broader range of target markets. Few of these address readers in the first languages spoken by the majority of South Africans, but the three new isiZulu newspapers are signs that this may be changing.

Naturally, one must be tentative about the findings reached in a study with such a small participant sample, analysing such small stretches of text. Instead of aiming for precision in language testing methods, the study took an eclectic and exploratory approach, driven by our prior understanding of where complexity lies in texts. However, it does suggest plenty of stimulating and creative avenues for further research.

One limitation on the study's analysis of texts is that although this article has extensively discussed the ways in which media texts speak to different people in different ways through their language usage, the interpersonal function of language has largely been ignored from an analytic perspective. The APPRAISAL system within SFG offers an excellent tool with which to look beyond reading ease and analyse the different ways in which tabloid and 'quality' newspapers address themselves to readers, which would shed more light on the differences between the popular and dominant literacy cultures these two types of newspapers represent.

Another limitation on the study is its analyst-centric nature. Even though findings of the SFG analysis were triangulated to some extent with the results of the tests for ease of reading, it is difficult to reach certainty about the conclusions reached. More certainty could be reached through

taking an interpretive approach to a similar study by finding ways to elicit from participants in detail exactly what they found easy or difficult to read about an article, or why they felt more drawn to one article than to another. This would be particularly helpful in analysing the ways in which first-language speakers of different African languages interpret texts in English, studying the interface between differences in literacy practices and second-language competence. Such a study would also be able to probe the content of participants' schemata in a way that this study has not done.[1]

A further place where interpretive research would be highly beneficial would be in investigating the reading of the new tabloids as a popular literacy practice. For instance, a fruitful line of research may be an ethnography of *Daily Sun* readers, observing the ways in which the newspaper is read and discussed, the meanings that are constructed from its content, and the ways (if any) in which these meanings are acted on. This type of research has the potential to tell us with greater certainty what contribution the new tabloids are truly making to democratic participation in South Africa and whether they are in fact symptoms of the perceived crisis in journalism, or one of its antidotes.

This study has produced no evidence that the new tabloids are assisting their target readers to engage with the dominant classes by socialising them in the use of dominant literacy practices. In other words, these newspapers do not seem to alleviate the great divide of power that separates the two groups. One simple way in which this could conceivably be done is through the use of articles or supplements explaining for working-class readers how the country's political and economic systems work, while slowly introducing them to the nominalised terminology of dominant literacy practices. Such texts would seek to relate broader political and economic concepts to issues faced in readers' own lives.

Although this study has shown that the South African newspaper sector has increased in the range of people it caters for, it does not suggest that all people have publications that address their needs. South Africa now has a newspaper that targets the 'guy in the blue overalls' (Du Plessis, 2008), but there does not seem to be a similar equivalent for the 'woman in the domestic worker's dress', for instance. Ultimately, this study's findings re-emphasise the importance of diversity in the media to a strong democracy: the more sectors of the population have access to news media that addresses their information needs in language to which they can relate, the more people will be empowered for greater participation in democracy.

Note

[1] The study reported on initially did include a measure of background knowledge, but it was found to lack sophistication in reflecting the contents of readers' schemata and so was omitted from the account given in this article.

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Appendix 1: Articles used in the study

Article A: page 1, *Daily Sun* ('lower-income' newspaper), 19 December 2007
Zuma – but wait for it!
by Ramosidi Matekane

A1 The ANC was gearing up for a Zuma victory last night!
A2 But officials in Polokwane were dragging their feet about releasing the result of the historic battle for the party's top job.
A3 Having promised the result of the vote at 6pm, hours ticked by and delegates were kept waiting.
A4 Said one impatient delegate: "Perhaps they are still eating their supper. Maybe we will have to wait until the champagne runs out before they tell us."
A5 Delegates queued up in the rain all day yesterday to choose between the two giants of the movement in the party's most crucial vote in 15 years.
A6 Supporters of both party vice-president Jacob Zuma and president Thabo Mbeki cheered and demonstrated for their heroes.
A7 Zuma backers were the most vocal.
A8 *"Dedela abanye, iminyaka elishumi. Dedela uMsholozi"*, they sang and whistled and ululated outside the voting booths.
A9 "It's going to be a walkover!" shouted one.
A10 But Mbeki loyalists warned: "It's not over till it's over!"
A11 They accused the media of unfairly boosting Zuma and said they would be "surprised" when they found out the strength of Mbeki's support.
A12 But the result seemed to be going Zuma's way.
A13 Said Steve Friedman, of the SA Institute for Democracy: "I can't predict the outcome, but most delegates I have spoken to said categorically they want Zuma to lead the party."
A14 He said Zuma would win "unless something happens behind the scenes" to upset his chances.
A15 President Thabo Mbeki's camp had pulled out all the stops to regain the support of delegates, said Friedman, but it was too little too late.
A16 Cosatu's Patrick Craven said it was only safe to wait for the "official results".
A17 He told *Daily Sun*: "Democracy will prevail. We will wait for the ANC members to speak, and they are speaking in large numbers."
A18 In the nominations, Zuma had the backing for party president from the country's five provinces, the Youth League and the Women's League.
A19 Support for him was also evident from the non-voting Cosatu and SACP delegates.
A20 Apart from the leadership elections, delegates spent most of yesterday debating policies that will shape the party's future conduct.
A21 Most important among these was the introduction of a 50% quota of women in all elected structures of the party.
A22 Also being considered is the founding of an ANC Veterans League for party members over 60 with an unbroken membership of 40 years.

Article B: page 1, *The Herald* ('middle-income' newspaper), 19 December 2007
New era dawns for ANC as beleaguered Mbeki suffers humiliating defeat
Zuma tsunami!
by Patrick Cull

B1 South Africa woke up to a new ANC president this morning after Jacob Zuma swept to a landslide victory last night, polling 2 329 votes to the 1 505 for Thabo Mbeki in what amounted to a humiliating defeat for the former party president.
B2 The Zuma tsunami swept the opposition aside, heralding a new era for the ruling party and a total rejection of the Mbeki administration that has held the reins of power for the past 10 years. And it revealed the depth of divisions within the ANC.
B3 The conference hall exploded with joy as Zuma was announced the winner, with Mbeki among the first to congratulate the man who has fought a tireless campaign to wrest control of the presidency.

B4 It was several minutes before there was silence to allow the announcement of the next result.

B5 And an even worse humiliation could be in store for Mbeki. In terms of the rules of conference, as a losing candidate in the election for the top six he is now automatically nominated for the National Executive Committee. But given the climate at conference it appears unlikely he will be elected. As one elated Zuma supporter put it last night: “There is going to be a total clean-out of those people.”

B6 The Zuma camp captured all the top six positions. Kgalema Motlanthe took the race for the deputy presidency from Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma by 2 346 votes to 1 444 and National Assembly Speaker Baleka Mbete defeated ANC policy guru Joel Netshitenzhe by 2 326 votes to 1 475.

B7 The secretary general’s position went to Gwede Mantashe who polled 2 378 votes to the 1 432 of Mosiuoa Lekota. Mantashe, who is also national chairman of the SACP, does not intend to relinquish that position now that he is ANC secretary general.

B8 Thandi Modise was elected deputy secretary general with 2 304 votes ahead of Thoko Didiza’s 1 455, while Matthews Phosa claimed the position of treasurer general with 2 328 votes to the 1 374 polled by national deputy president Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka.

B9 All eyes will now be on the elections for the National Executive Committee taking place today to see whether the Zuma camp will rid that body of all pro-Mbeki elements, including the likes of Finance minister Trevor Manuel, a move that could have repercussions as far as the markets are concerned.

B10 Before the results were announced, Motlanthe said the ANC was finding the possibility of renewed corruption charges against Zuma “very difficult”.

B11 “The issue of comrade Jacob Zuma facing fresh charges is very difficult to deal with, for the simple reason that many people can face allegations at some point or the other,” he said. “The fact of the matter is the State makes allegations and (a person) can be charged and prosecuted … and it is difficult to act against anybody on the basis of allegation.”

B12 Motlanthe said the Zuma case had already travelled through the court.

B13 “The prosecution will have a second bite at him and we will see how that pans out. We will cross that bridge when we get to it.”

B14 In 2001 allegations surfaced that Zuma’s financial adviser Schabir Shaik was a director of a company that won a R400-million tender in an arms deal and that a French arms dealer had agreed to pay Zuma a R500 000 bribe.

B15 Shaik has since been jailed for 15 years for corruption and fraud, and corruption charges were put to Zuma, based on that verdict. The case was taken off the roll because the prosecution was not ready to proceed, but he is still being investigated.

Article B: page 1, *Business Day* (‘upper-income’ newspaper), 19 December 2007

Zuma ‘tsunami’ sweeps away ANC old guard

Clean sweep of top-six positions ushers in new era for party and SA

By Karima Brown, Hajra Omarjee and Amy Musgrave *(with Reuters and Sapa*)

C1 POLOKWANE – The unstoppable Jacob Zuma “tsunami” swept all before it at the African National Congress’ (ANC’s) landmark elections last night, toppling President Thabo Mbeki from the leadership and ushering in a new era for the party.

C2 Zuma beat Thabo Mbeki with 2 379 votes against 1 505, with eight spoilt papers and one abstention.

C3 Zuma’s election also ushered in a new-look party leadership packed with Zuma supporters, including ANC secretary-general Kgalema Motlanthe as deputy president, National Assembly speaker Baleka Mbete as national chairwoman, South African Communist Party (SACP) chairman Gwede Mantashe as secretary-general, North West speaker Thandi Modise as deputy secretary-general, and former Mpumalanga premier Mathews Phosa as treasurer-general.

C4 The outcome was announced to a tumultuous reception at the ruling party’s 52nd national conference in Polokwane, ending months of bitter fighting that has divided the party, which also jettisoned its long-held tradition of stage-managed support for its leaders.

5 Even before the outcome was announced, the ANC moved to allay investors’ fears of a radical turnaround in economic policies, which Zuma’s leftist allies have characterised as anti-poor and too friendly to business.

C6 The ANC has conceded that the threat of prosecution hanging over Zuma presented the movement with a

huge dilemma.

C7 Earlier, Motlanthe said economic policy was up to the decision making body of the party, the national executive committee (NEC), which did not have ideological differences.

C8 Some investors have raised concerns that a Zuma win could shift economic policy towards his staunch backers, the trade unions and SACP.

C9 Motlanthe said the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) could not vote in the election.

C10 “There is no room for payback. Cosatu has no voting rights so there is no way they can claim ‘we put you there’.”

C11 “Investors are concerned (but) basic policy will not change. The NEC sub-committee on economics pays attention to these issues,” Motlanthe said.

C12 Intelligence Minister Ronnie Kasrils had also said economic policy would not change under Zuma. Zuma has stressed he will not deviate from ANC policy, and analysts say markets had been prepared for Zuma’s victory.

C13 Cosatu has called on the government to loosen monetary policy and ramp up spending to help spread the benefits of an economic boom to millions of poor and unemployed.

C14 Motlanthe also said the ANC was finding the possibility of renewed corruption charges against Zuma “very difficult”.

C15 “The issue of comrade Jacob Zuma facing fresh charges is very difficult to deal with, for the simple reason that many people can face allegations at some point or the other,” he said.

C16 Motlanthe said the Zuma case had already travelled through the court. “The prosecution will have a second bite at him and we will see how that pans out.”

C17 He said: “If we elect him we’ll have to accept it, if he is charged, we will have to accept it. We will cross that bridge when we get to it.”

C18 He felt it was not right that people being investigated for crimes were identified.

C19 “If the prosecution announces ahead of time, we are likely to charge so and so, they put you in a very difficult situation. It affects your children.”

Appendix 2: Sample cloze procedure test

Article A
This is the text of the end of the article. Using the rest of the article, try to guess what the missing words are and fill them in:
President Thabo Mbeki's camp had pulled out all the stops to regain the support of delegates, said ____________, but it was too little too late.

Cosatu's Patrick Craven ____________ it was only safe to wait for the "official results".

He told *Daily Sun*: "____________ will prevail. We will wait for the ANC members to speak, and they are ____________ in large numbers."

In the nominations, Zuma had the backing for party ____________ from the country's five provinces, the Youth League and the Women's League.

Support for him was also evident from the non-voting ____________ and SACP delegates.

Apart from the leadership elections, ____________ spent most of yesterday debating policies that will shape the ____________ future conduct.

Most important among these was the introduction of a 50% quota of women in all elected structures of the ____________.

Also being considered is the founding of an ANC Veterans League for ____________ members over 60 with an unbroken membership of 40 years.

Appendix 3: Participants' rankings test

Please rank the articles below according to how difficult they are to read. Write "hard" next to the most difficult one, "middle" next to the second most difficult one, and "easy" next to the easiest one to read.
__________ Article A: Zuma – but wait for it!

__________ Article B: Zuma tsunami!

__________ Article C: Zuma 'tsunami' sweeps away ANC old guard