A. Types of Narratives

1. Interviews, oral histories, life stories, etc.

Some researchers, often social scientists, work with oral narratives which are neither literature nor folktales. These could be interviews in depth, life stories, oral histories of regions, tribes or castes, etc. which must be transcribed. In some cases the material must also be arranged in a meaningful way. If you are working with this type of material, the book to read is Riessman’s *Narrative Analysis*. Riessman shows how transcribing a narrative is also a process of interpreting it. Oral narratives are full of break-offs, repetitions, unfinished sentences, flashbacks, flashforwards and so on. There is nevertheless usually an underlying structure, which is what the researcher wants to get at.

Two of the analytical concepts which Riessman uses are also used in analyzing other types of narratives. These are *story* (*fabula*) and *plot* (*szujet*). Fabula is the raw events in their chronological order. The szujet is the story as actually told, with the twists the storyteller gives it and the context in which it is placed. Narrators need not organize their stories in chronological order. They might equally well arrange them by subject. Riessman presents a way of transcribing text into numbered segments which help the interviewer find and encode not only events but emotions, cultural elements, context and so on.

2. Literature, folklore, performance

Some scholars are more interested in content and performance than in social science data. Such narratives include anything which tells a story, from novels to film or even cartoons. The useful books here are Mieke Bal’s *Narratology* or Toolan’s *Narrative*. A good introduction to narratology, in this sense of the term, can be found in Chapter 12 of Barry’s *Beginning Theory*. The distinction between *story* and *plot* is fundamental here also, but some North American scholars prefer the term *discourse* to *plot*.

Like Riessman, Bal defines a “story” as a fabula that is presented in a certain manner. A “fabula” is a series of logically and chronologically related
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events that are caused or experienced by actors. Actors perform actions, and they are not necessarily human (for example the dog in “Wallace and Gromit”). Events, actors, time and place taken together constitute the content of a fabula. Bal calls these elements. The relationship between fabula and story can be outlined as follows:

1. The events are arranged in a sequence which can differ from the chronological sequence (for example, a narrative with flashbacks).
2. The amount of time which is allotted in the story to the various elements of the fabula is determined with respect to the amount of time which these elements take up in the fabula.
3. The actors are provided with distinct traits. In this way they are individualized and transformed into characters.
4. The locations where events occur are also given distinct characteristics.
5. Other types of relationships [symbolic, allusive, traditional] may exist among the various elements.
6. A choice is made from among the various ‘points of view’ from which the elements can be presented, the resulting focalization (the relation between who perceives and what is perceived) colours the story.

These processes shape a particular story which is different from other stories. The traits which are specific to a given story are called by Bal aspects. Bal finds it necessary to distinguish three concepts when analyzing narrative: fabula, story and text. Texts have narrators, or focalizors, who are not the writers of the text, but the eyes, ears and voice of the character through whom the writer chooses to perceive the events. For example, a writer may choose to focalize the story through the viewpoint of a child, as South Asian writers have often done, with the result that even quite subversive fabulas may on the surface seem innocuous. I have found that when analyzing folktales, it is very useful to distinguish three layers. The fabula is the collection of motifs occurring in the tale, which occur in other related tales, and can be researched separately; a single narration of some combination of these motifs is the story, and the
transcription of the story (usually from a tape-recording), is the text.

In narratives, events are most often told in some other order than chronological. The narrator has options for manipulating this. So the sequence of events in a story can differ from the sequence in the fabula. Think of the sentence, “John would have been a passenger on United Airlines flight 93 if he had not missed the train.” In the story, Flight 93 is foregrounded, and comes first; John’s missing the train is backgrounded. But in the fabula, John missed the train before failing to board Flight 93. Differences in sequential ordering between the story and the fabula are called anachrony, and Bal finds three different types of anachrony, depending on whether the narrator looks back, sums up a stretch of time in a brief description, or looks ahead (anticipates). Another kind of ordering difference is the ellipse, in which the narrator skips part of the fabula, usually something insignificant. In novels, an ellipse often appears as a white space or a row of asterisks.

**Actors versus characters**

Actors are only structural positions in the narrative (for example, the *hero* versus the *villain*) until they are furnished with human characteristics (again, think of the dog in “Wallace and Gromit”). Traditionally, round characters are distinguished from flat characters. Round characters are complex personalities which undergo a change in the course of the story, and are always able to surprise the reader. Flat characters are stable, stereotypical characters which offer no surprises. “High” literature is supposed to have round characters, but some genres of literature, for example detective thrillers or postmodern novels simply ignore or mock this distinction.

The image of the character is constructed in the narrative through *repetition* of the character’s characteristics (reminding the reader and helping him distinguish between characters. But more than this, the character’s traits *accumulate* and fill out the image as the narrative progresses. Relations of the character to others tell us something. This inventory of traits must be clear in the reader’s mind before a character undergoes a *transformation*. A method for
determining the character’s main characteristics is to make an inventory of the most important semantic axes and see how the trait is distributed among the characters. Toolan (p. 96) and Bal (126-8) provide models for this exercise. Traits such as big and small can be a relevant semantic axis, or poor and rich, man-woman, good-wicked, reactionary-progressive, etc. So we can describe a character as “rich, wicked, reactionary man” or “poor, kind, progressive woman”. We can also mark that none of the traits is relevant. A plus sign means a positive pole, a minus sign means a negative pole, and “Ø” means the character is unmarked for this trait.

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This is actually a structuralist method which uses binary oppositions. It can be an oversimplification which forces us to distinguish characters in black-and-white terms, as in B-films and thrillers, where we might prefer shades of gray. However if used carefully, a character trait inventory can be a useful analytical tool even with complex literature, since characters in narratives generally embody contrasts. A novel in which all the characters had similar traits would lack conflict and suspense.

Here we turn for a moment from Bal to an earlier figure, Vladimir Propp, who studied the role of characters in a hundred Russian folk tales, and concluded that character traits are not distributed randomly, but cluster into roles (which are actually spheres of action). Most characters fit into one or more of these roles, of which there are only seven:

1. The villain
2. The donor (provider)
3. The helper
4. The princess (a sought-for person) and her father
5. The dispatcher
6. The hero (seeker or victim)
7. The false hero

There can be only one hero, and only one villain, though both can have others on their side (helpers), or there can be a false hero. Likewise, the hero loves only one princess.

Other important elements in analysis of narrative are time and place, which also have their own characteristics, focalization, which is also called point of view. The focalizor is the point from which the elements are viewed. It can be one or more of the characters (a character-bound focalizor), or an external focalizor, an agent who is situated outside the fabula. If a character is the major focalizor in the book, we call him/her the hero or heroine of the story.

The elements of the fabula, that is, the deep structure of the narrative text, can also be analyzed. Again, it is easiest to see how this is done with the example of folk tales, where the collector might have recorded eight different versions of the same tale (eight stories). The motifs they have in common is the fabula. But the same process happens when the police interview eight different witnesses to a bank robbery. They want to find the deep structure of the different testimonies (the probable facts of the robbery).

Events are central elements in the fabula. Events are changes: compare: “John was sick” with “John got sick”. Change is the first criterion of analysis. The second criterion is choice. In the eight folk tales mentioned above, a character (who may be a poor woodcutter, a Brahmin out on a begging tour, or a merchant) encounters a snake (who may have a snake-form or be disguised as a ruby or a button). The character decides whether or not to get involved with the snake (by rescuing it, picking up the ruby, etc.). The entry into the narrative of the snake predicts the third criterion of analysis, namely confrontation. Two actors or groups confront each other. Here the snake makes demands of its
rescuer, two characters disagree over what to do with the ruby, etc. All the functional events of the fabula consist of three components: two actors and one action. The events themselves are connected, and the fabula is defined as a series of logically and chronologically related events. The police when analyzing the witness statements determine that the robbers first got weapons from someone, then arrived at the bank, then rushed inside, then shot the tellers, then grabbed the money, but were confronted by the security guard before they could escape. Not every fabula for a bank robbery would have this structure. It is also possible that the security guard was shot first, so that the police were the first to confront the robbers.

At the level of the fabula there are not fully developed characters, but actors. These can be subdivided into classes, which Bal calls *actants*. Actants are a class of actors which share a certain characteristic. Bal’s actants have something in common with Propp’s roles, except that Bal adds the element of *aim* or *goal*. Thus the bank robbers and the provider of the weapons share one goal (robbing money), and the security guard and the police share another (opposing the robbers). Everyone in the bank can be classified in the actant of victims. The final criterion is *truth value*: is an actor what he or she appears to be? The victim who escapes and rushes to the doughnut shop to call the police is in reality an opponent. The snake which at first seems to be an opponent, turns out to be a benefactor.

3. Political narratives: hard news stories

Newspaper stories are a third type of narrative, where we need different techniques of analysis. First however I will present some sample analyses.

4. Samples of analysis

Remember that Riessman distinguishes only two layers: fabula and szujet. Bal adds a third layer and distinguishes between *fabula*, *story* and *text*. This will get confusing, because Riessman’s and Bal’s *fabula* is Toolan’s ‘story’. If you are
doing narratological analysis, you need to choose one analytical technique and set of terms. Riessman is best for narratives belonging to a social science context, and corresponds to Toolan’s Chapter 6. Bal is best for written or oral literature and can be read together with Toolan’s Chapters 2–5. Here I am using Bal and Propp.

If we take our *frame story* or *metanarrative* for *The Button Prince* (made available last week) we can easily distinguish three layers of material. The basic raw material is this: a poor man rescues a snake, decides to give it to his wife, and when the shawl is opened, it has turned into a magic button, which later becomes a magic child).

This is one of many variants of a motif common throughout the western Himalayas: a poor man (usually a Brahmin) has an encounter with a snake, decides to give the snake to his wife, but when she opens the bag (shawl) etc. the snake changes into a beautiful child. In some other versions, the snake turns into a gem. These raw elements can be called the *fabula*. In our version, which comes from Muslim Kohistan, the poor man is not a Brahmin, but a poor woodcutter, and the gem is a button, the *fabula* is the orally transmitted knowledge of the tale, which exists only in the memories of individuals. Every time the story is narrated, one gets a slightly different version of it, and that is Bal’s story (Riessman’s *szujet*, Toolan’s *discourse*). The narrator, Ropi Jan, structured the fabula into story by developing details particular to the culture, and meaningful to the audience:

- The man is poor because he is lazy.
- He and his wife live by sweeping flour dust around a water-mill.
- The wife tells the man to start doing some useful work.
- The man goes into the forest to chop wood.
- The snake calls for help from a Muslim, as an act of charity.
- The poor man objects that the snake will eat him.
- The snake promises to benefit the poor man.
- When the poor man tries to deceive his wife, she at first finds nothing
in the shawl but potsherds, and gives him a good scolding. Then she finds a magic button.

- The man tries to sell the button, but the honest merchants tell him its real value, and in the end he sells it to the king for a fortune.

When Ropi Jan says “they say” (in nearly every sentence) she is referring to the fabula and affirming its separate existence.

The frame story ends, and Ropi Jan does not return to it – it is single-ended. But it effectively captures the listener’s attention, because it is more real than the main narrative, which is about kings, princes and princesses. No Kohistani is a king or princess, but many are poor.

We have two texts: the Shina text, and the English translation.

Even though Ropi Jan tells the story in a simple chronological sequence, it is still necessary to distinguish between fabula and story in order to explain, on one level, why the tale changes every time it is told; and on another level, to distinguish between the Kashmiri and Kohistani versions of the folktale. In Kashmir the snake is Nāgrāy, the serpent king (a divinity), but in Kohistan it is just a fairy. In all other recorded versions of the tale, the poor man is a Brahmin, but in Kohistan he is poor because he is lazy. The demotion of Nāgrāy to fairy status and the re-casting of the poor man is accompanied by the introduction into the tale of Islamic motifs, which show that cultural differences result in changes in the story.

Place and time

Ropi Jan has also chosen a place and a time, and given them characteristics. The place is recognizable as a Kohistani village, with its water mill, and its forest not far away. The time is “when everything used to speak”, including trees, stones, forests, animals; and the “time of truthful people” – in other words, mythical time. But it is also the Islamic period, as the snake appeals to the man in God’s name, and the man says the Kalima before he rescues the snake. Everything happens in sequence, and there are no flashbacks (analepsis), and no foreshadowing or anticipation of events to come (prolepsis). But some events
are told in detail, with quoted conversations (mimesis), such as the arrival of the man with the snake in his shawl, and others are summarized (diegesis), such as the chopping of the wood in the forest. (Later in the tale, however, when the crown prince wonders why the princess has invited a maulvi to a feast, there is foreshadowing of the princess’ request for a ruling of Islamic law about the status of the Button Prince.)

Events and actors

There are several events in the frame story: the scolding of the man by his wife, his trip into the forest, the rescuing of the snake, the transformation of the snake, the selling of the magic button. There are three main actors who cause or experience events: the poor man, his wife, and the snake (who is really a fairy). These are individualized into characters. The poor man is not only lazy, but (as shown in his dialogue with the snake) rather cowardly, and he holds a grudge against his wife for nagging him to earn money. The wife is tactless and disorganized (she can’t find a pot). The snake has enemies, from whom he wants to escape, and he negotiates persistently and cleverly with the poor man (though at one point he gets impatient [“You poor man, you wretch, no wonder you’re unlucky! This is no way to save me!”]).

Focalization and narrator

From what point of view is the story told (where is the narrative focalized)? In The Button Prince, the narrator freely enters the minds of all the characters, and does not restrict herself to the viewpoint of any of them. During the frame story, she enters the poor man’s thoughts, but when she moves on, following the button, she enters the king’s thoughts, and then those of his daughter. This is zero focalization, also called omniscient narration.

Who is the narrator? At first we are tempted to say Ropi Jan, because the narrator does not figure in the fabula, is not any of the characters in the tale (not a character-bound narrator). She seems to see the characters from the sky like a bird, and can say things like “there they are, they’ve arrived”, but she can also assume the traits of different characters. When she quotes the speech of
unimaginative characters, she uses plain, short sentences with simple grammar, but when the characters are clever, her sentences are more complex. And in the descriptive scenes, when she wants to give us a visual panorama, she can produce very complex sentences with internal rhyme. Ropi Jan conjures up a narrator who, like God (but unlike Ropi Jan), knows everything, and can also get inside the skin of different characters. Ropi Jan is the teller, and the narrator is the device she creates to tell the story.

If by contrast, we take the opening passage of the best-selling historical thriller, *Pompeii*, by Robert Harris, we find that the story is told from the point of view of the aqueduct engineer, Attilius:

> They left the aqueduct two hours before dawn, climbing by moonlight into the hills overlooking the port – six men in single file, the engineer leading. He had turfed them all out of their beds himself – all stiff limbs and sullen, bleary faces – and now he could hear them complaining about him behind his back, their voices carrying louder than they realized in the warm, still air.

Everything that happens is perceived by the engineer, and at this point, the reader only knows as much as the engineer hears and sees. The engineer is a *character-bound focalizer*. But the focalization does not remain with the engineer throughout the novel, but moves at points to three other characters, all of whom have different information and different perspectives on the impending disaster (the eruption of the volcano Vesuvius). This does not mean that the novel has four narrators, but that it is narrated in the third person with four focalizers. The narrator here is a storytelling device that can only see through the eyes of these four persons. But the narrator knows something that none of the focalizers know: he knows that the volcano is going to erupt in a few days and destroy Pompeii, and he strategically plants clues throughout the narrative, which have the effect of creating suspense. Again it is difficult to distinguish between the author and the narrator, and one might consider the narrator as a set of rules the author has established for imagining and telling the narrative. Such rules might look something like this:
I know that the volcano is going to erupt in a few days.

I can only perceive this event through the senses of four characters, none of whom has a complete picture of events.

I can tell the story only as my characters perceive it, but I can plant the clues they perceive.

All of my characters have their own objectives and limitations, and none of them can hear me, the narrator, or know what I know.

The narrator in Harris’ novel is, like the one in Ropi Jan’s story, a sort of eye in the sky, but unlike Ropi Jan’s narrator, he can only communicate what he knows through the characters he has chosen as focalizers. This creates a very different kind of experience for the reader (the narratee), who gets much closer to the characters, than does the listener to Ropi Jan’s characters.

5. More about characters

Remember that characters in narratives generally embody contrasts. Character traits are not distributed randomly among the characters, rather they cluster into roles.

We find that the four focalizers in *Pompeii* fit into Propp’s roles, although two roles may be combined in the same person. Attilius, the aqueduct engineer, is the hero, and his mission is to locate and repair an obstruction in the aqueduct. His simple, stoic lifestyle contrasts with that of the villain: a former slave, now millionaire boss of Pompeii, Ampliatus, who is depicted at a feast of grotesque proportions. Ampliatus has been embezzling public funds, and fearing that Attilius will find out, plans to have him killed by his henchman Corax, after the aqueduct is repaired. Attilius is walking right up the slope of Vesuvius on the eve of the eruption, followed by his executioner, and would not have a chance, but for the help he gets from the aged scientist, Pliny (who is also an admiral in the Roman navy), and from Ampliatus’ daughter Corelia, who finds out her father’s plot and comes to warn Attilius. Corelia is the princess, which makes Ampliatus both the villain and the king. But he is an evil
king, who mistakenly sees himself as a hero (a false hero). Pliny is both a helper and a donor, and has the knowledge and information Attilius lacks.

We can make an inventory of character traits for the four focalizers:

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<th>Ampliatus</th>
<th>Corelia</th>
<th>Pliny</th>
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Ampliatus stands in contrast not only to Attilius, but to his daughter Corelia. There is a partial contrast between Ampliatus and Pliny: both are old and powerful, but Pliny is realistic and wise, while Ampliatus has gained his power and wealth only through greed and cunning. The individual character traits embody structural contrasts that emerge as themes in the narrative:

- greed : renunciation
- realism : self-delusion

**Stark’s analysis of Bisrāmpur kā sant**

In interpreting a narrative, however, it is usually not enough to identify the fabula, characters, time, place and focalization. One has to look as well at the cultural ideas that are communicated and at the writer’s techniques for getting and holding the reader’s interest. In order to see how this is done, we will look

Stark begins by identifying the theme of the aged person as central character as a recent development in the Hindi novel, and naming other examples of this theme. She mentions that Indian social scientists and the general public share this concern with old age; thus from the first page we see that the author is concerned with the novel’s social setting. She then discusses the author as a master of social satire, setting this novel in the framework of Shukla’s corpus of other novels.

Stark then identifies two themes in Bisrāmpur kā sant: the old man’s own contrast between a successful career and a conflicted private life, and India’s collective experience of the bhūdān or land donation movement of the 1950’s. This becomes the novel’s historical setting. Finally, Stark looks at other critical readings of the novel, and claims that her discussion suggests a different reading, by focusing on the figure of the protagonist, who provides the integrating structural link in Shukla’s dual concern with an individual life on the one hand and a collective historical experience on the other.

When Stark talks about an integrating structural link, she announces that she will use some techniques of structural analysis in her analysis (Beginning Theory, Chapter 2). We already see this, in fact, from the care she takes to place the novel in a wider structural context (the whole corpus of the author’s work, the society’s concern with the issue of aging, the historical context of the bhūdān experiment).

After a brief synopsis of the plot (pp. 167-8), Stark identifies the use of time (narration which moves between the present and the past, in three crucial stages of the protagonist’s life), focalization which switches between omniscient narrator and the protagonist as internal focalizer, and the “dissenting voice” of the protagonist’s son Vivek, “who comes closest to being the author’s mouthpiece”.

Then Stark focuses on the paradox (or hypocrisy) of the protagonist’s life:
he is a powerful politician, the image of authority, but privately sad, fearful and lonely. Stark identifies the character’s conflicts in terms of structural contrasts or oppositions (p. 169):

- strength : weakness
- power : impotence
- self confidence : fear

She also identifies the symbol of the toilet which the protagonist has installed in the ashram before he retires there: he cannot completely retire to the backward rural ashram without bringing along the luxury that the others in the ashram must do without. It is a visual image of his hypocrisy.

Stark then sets about documenting the author’s basic intention, which is to “expose the protagonist”: underneath the facade of power there is a lonely person confronting old age. The experience of aging has three dimensions, which Stark explores individually: the biological dimension (decay and death), the social dimension (resisting obsoleteness) and the psychological dimension (sex, remorse and loneliness).

Stark shows how Shukla challenges accepted cultural notions of old age, which is shown not to be the blissful state of public veneration and personal serenity it is supposed to be in India, but a time when the protagonist loses everything: physical well-being, political power, his belief in his own innocence. These personal contrasts are paralleled by contrasts in society. The obsoleteness which the protagonist personally experiences is paralleled by the complete obsoleteness of the village and ashram he retires to, which is a monument to the failure of the bhūdān movement. The collective farm has been taken over by a local landlord, and for a while, the protagonist gets a new lease on life in his fight against the landlord. But he loses this struggle, which only shows him that even his past successes were due more to his influence than to his own capabilities.

The novel focuses on the protagonist’s sexual longing for a woman, Sundari, who was a volunteer in the bhūdān movement. Ironically, old age is
supposed to be the time when people are no longer tormented by desire. It is the protagonist’s feeling of remorse for his earlier misbehavior toward Sundari that draws him to the ashram in the first place. At the ashram, however, he is even more isolated than he was at home, until an accidental experience helping a child puts him in touch with another human being. The structural oppositions here are:

sexual longing/misbehavior : remorse/atonement
loneliness : human contact

But the protagonist is not meant for sainthood, for in a final twist, he finds out that Sundari had really wanted to marry his son Vivek, and that just as they were planning to announce their engagement, the protagonist’s misbehavior toward Sundari forced her to leave and retire to the ashram. Realizing that he has spoiled not only Sundari’s life but that of his own son, he resorts to suicide; but even that turns into a farce.

The network of structural oppositions which Stark identifies characterize not only the protagonist’s life but his society. In the conclusion, Stark reduces these contrasts to one fundamental opposition:

self-confrontation : self-delusion

The article shows that it is useful to combine several methods of analysis: here, narratological analysis, structural analysis, and examination of the social and historical context. Note also the exploration of dimensions: the biological dimension, the social dimension and the psychological dimension. The discussion of the social dimension allows the writer to introduce the social and historical context of the narrative.

5. Narrative as political action

None of the narratives we have so far examined has lacked a political context, but it has not been necessary to focus on it. We turn now to Toolan’s Chapter 8, which deals with narrative as political action.
Toolan points out that the English-medium hard news story is oriented around the opening sentence, or *lead*, and that the order in which information is presented has more to do with its salience than its chronology. In other words, the most conspicuous and newsworthy information is presented first, and the story moves backward and forward in time. (Journalists are trained to do this, because among other reasons, if a story has to be shortened to make space for late-breaking news, the most newsworthy points are the last to be cut.) The headline and subhead are composed last, often by someone else than the journalist. Journalists take pride in reporting objectively, so can’t one expect the lead, or opening sentence, to be fairly objective (whatever the headline or subhead says)?

Toolan quotes a study (by Trew) that uses linguistic criticism of newspaper texts to show that mainstream newspapers accept and legitimate some version of a society’s dominant ideology (its *slant*). The same event can be interpreted very differently in different newspapers, to a point where the story eventually becomes “reformulated”. In the examples shown by Toolan, some of the ways this is done is by the use of the passive versus active voice in verbs (with the consequence that the subject of the first sentence is different), as well as different grammar and vocabulary. Trew compares newspaper stories over time, to show how reformulation takes place as follow-up stories are written, printed and read by the public.

Using Trew’s study as a point of departure, Toolan compares two stories on a protest march at the opening of the World Trade Organization talks in Seattle (p. 211). Note the different *leads* (in your handout, p. 2):

*Independent:* “Tens of thousands of protesters, cheering and whooping, thronged into downtown Seattle yesterday to form a human barricade blocking delegates from the World Trade Organization, turning the opening of the much-contested ministerial meeting into a colourful and passionate ‘carnival against capitalism’.”

*The Times:* “Demonstrators forced the World Trade Organization to postpone and then cancel its opening ceremony yesterday. Police firing pepper spray and rubber bullets waded into ranks of steelworkers and costumed environmentalists as the demonstration’s carnival atmosphere turned to menace,
threatening severe embarrassment for President Clinton.

The focus of the stories is completely different. The *Independent* has focused on the protest, which is seen as a legitimate activity. *The Times* has focused on the trade talks, which are seen as more legitimate than the protest which interrupted them. The subjects of the leads are subtly different: “(tens of thousands of) protestors” versus “demonstrators”. A protestor is someone who expresses dissent or disapproval (*Oxford English Dictionary*), while a demonstration is a show of public opinion on a political issue. The implication that the protestors have something to disapprove of is lacking in the term “demonstrators”, who are merely showing an opinion. Furthermore, the number of the protesters is foregrounded in the *Independent’s* story, suggesting that there is widespread disapproval of the trade talks.

The descriptive detail (gerunds and active verbs) which comes next modifies different agents: “protesters, cheering and whooping, thronged into downtown Seattle” versus “Police firing pepper spray and rubber bullets waded into ranks of steelworkers and costumed environmentalists”. In one case the reader gets a picture of excited and happy protestors, in the other, a picture of police attacking “ranks” of demonstrators (as though they were lines of soldiers marching side by side).

As Toolan points out, the described event transformed one thing into another in both cases, but according to the *Independent*, the opening of the [trade talks] was turned into a colourful and passionate “carnival against capitalism”, whereas *The Times* reported that the “demonstration’s carnival atmosphere turned to menace” and added the comment that this threatened embarrassment for President Clinton. The choice of vocabulary here is clearly governed by underlying assumptions (that the protest was as legitimate, or more so, than the opening of the trade talks, versus: the demonstrators stopped the legitimate opening of the trade talks and threatened the president.

Toolan then gives an extended analysis of newspaper coverage of the killing of Nigerian-born Damilola Taylor in London, focusing on headlines,
which he subjects to lexical analysis, using the *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary* as a source of collocations. This is an excellent example of the use of lexical analysis, and I suggest you read it carefully. When analyzing newspaper texts it is essential to check a good dictionary, because the vocabulary chosen often has connotations one doesn’t otherwise notice; and these connotations change the way a reader understands the event.

I am not going to concentrate on headline analysis here, because composing headlines which both (a) sell newspapers and (b) fit into often limited space, are complex processes, and the editor has less choice in the vocabulary he uses than the journalist who originally wrote the story. Rather I will compare the leads in four newspaper stories that report on an event that took place in the run-up to the 2004 presidential election in the U.S., and which received a lot of coverage. On Monday 4. October/Tuesday 5. October 2004, the USA’s former administrator for the occupation government of Iraq said in two speeches that the US failed to deploy enough troops to Iraq, and then failed to prevent violence and looting after Saddam Hussain was toppled. Here are the headlines and leads from the 6th October’s edition of four international English-language newspapers (shown in alphabetical order).

*Guardian:* BUSH ALLIES ADMIT WAR BLUNDERS. America’s former proconsul in Baghdad delivered a damning critique of the Bush administration’s policy on Iraq yesterday, saying the US had made two grave errors of judgement in the early days of the war.

*International Herald Tribune:* BUSH TRIES TO STEM CRITICISM ON IRAQ. The White House sought Tuesday to fend off or explain away fundamental doubts raised about its Iraq policy by senior administration officials, and Senator John Kerry immediately seized on the negative comments as evidence of inadequate planning for the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

*USA Today:* BREMER: U.S. PAID ‘BIG PRICE’ FOR LACK OF TROOPS IN IRAQ. Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry seized Tuesday on new criticism of Iraq policy by the former U.S. administrator there to bolster his case that the Bush administration has mismanaged the war.

*Wall Street Journal:* FORMER ADMINISTRATOR OF IRAQ CRITICIZES U.S.’S EARLY CHOICES. The former U.S. official who governed Iraq after the invasion said Monday that the U.S. made two major mistakes: not deploying enough troops in Iraq and then not containing the violence and looting immediately after the ouster of Saddam Hussain.
Note that Bremer made more than one speech, and some of the newspapers had time to switch their focus from Bremer’s speeches to Kerry’s use of them in his political campaign, or to White House reaction to them; but their decision to do so has as much to do with editorial policy as the timeline of events.

Another thing to look at is where the story is placed in the newspaper, and which other related stories are covered in the same paper. The Guardian’s story was the leading headline in that edition, and also referred the reader to an editorial on p. 17 headlined “IRAQ AND 9/11: RUMSFELD’S MISSING LINK”. Here the Guardian’s slant against the invasion of Iraq becomes even more obvious. The Wall Street Journal on the other hand placed the story on p. 3, facing a feature story on p. 2 headlined: “BUSH SHIFTS GEARS TO REGAIN CONTROL OVER CAMPAIGN”. The Herald Tribune story was also a leading headline, but in USA Today the story was placed at the bottom of the page, below the fold. So readers would have seen the headline in the Guardian and Herald Tribune on racks at newsstands, but not in USA Today or the Wall Street Journal.

At first glance the most objective account of events is the one in the Wall Street Journal, which says merely that the US made two major mistakes in Iraq, and going on in the fourth paragraph to note that these comments “echoed contentions of many administration critics, including Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry…” But this objectivity is undermined by the feature article on p. 2, showing a drawing of a worried President Bush, and a headline suggesting that he is still in the driver’s seat (“SHIFTS GEARS”), and planning to deliver a speech that will shift the debate to more favorable ground. Furthermore, Paul Bremer’s name is replaced by “former administrator” in both the headline and the lead, although his name was at that time still familiar.

A slightly less objective version appears in USA Today. The lead focuses away from Bremer toward Kerry, saying that “he seized … on new criticism of Iraq policy … to bolster his case that the Bush administration has mismanaged the war,” and goes on to relate Bremer’s comments before hopping back to
Kerry. The verb “seize” deserves attention. It means to ‘take hold of forcibly or suddenly’ (OED). An army seizes a fortress, a general seizes power. “Bolster” means to ‘reinforce’ or ‘prop up’. Two questions are raised (though subliminally): is Kerry’s seizure of Bremer’s remarks legitimate? Does Kerry’s case that “the Bush administration has mismanaged the war” need propping up? The article treats Kerry’s remarks as equally salient to Bremer’s speech, but the verbs chosen raise doubts about the validity of what Kerry said.

For the *Herald Tribune*, the White House reaction to Bremer’s speeches (and also to Donald Rumsfeld’s statement that he has not seen any hard evidence linking Saddam Hussein to Al Qaeda) is the most conspicuous and newsworthy information. “Senior administration officials” have raised “fundamental doubts” about the President’s policy on Iraq, and Kerry “seized on the negative comments”, this time as “evidence of inadequate planning” (‘evidence’ being a more neutral term than ‘bolster’). The focus of the story is on White House efforts (“seek to” means “try”) to “fend off” doubts raised about its policy. “Fend off” usually collocates with “attack”, therefore Bremer’s and Rumsfeld’s statements are by implication attacks on the White House. The story makes this explicit in the fifth and eighth paragraphs, saying “…both comments tended to undercut crucial White House positions on the war … their remarks heightened a sense that the president’s Iraq policies were under damaging attack.”

The headline uses the verb “stem” (‘check’ or ‘stop’) rather than “fend off”. Although this may be more an issue of space than editorial policy, it is a collocational incongruity: one stems rot, or the tide, but not criticism. The question raised in this story appears to be quite different than those raised in *USA Today*: is the White House being attacked by its own senior administration officials? Is rot setting in, which must be stemmed, or is the tide turning? Kerry’s seizing on this attack is less salient than the attack itself; after all he is Bush’s opponent, while Bremer and Rumsfeld are on Bush’s team. (And suddenly the *Wall Street Journal*’s stress on “former official” falls into place –
Bremer’s no longer a member of the team, even if Rumsfeld still is [in 2004])

Finally, the *Guardian* comes right out and says that Bush’s own team have acknowledged “blunders” (clumsy mistakes) in Iraq. “America’s former proconsul in Baghdad delivered a damning critique of the Bush administration’s policy on Iraq…” A proconsul is the governor of a colony, implying that the invasion of Iraq was a war of imperialism. A “damning” critique is one that shows or proves someone to be guilty (OED). Thus Bush is shown by his own team to be guilty of stupid mistakes in a war of imperialism.

The agents of the action in the four stories vary: from Bremer to Kerry to Bush (“The White House”) to Bremer and Rumsfeld. It is a question of focus chosen by the journalists, doubtless in line with editorial policy. I have not needed to use any grammatical analysis here; the issue is not so much what was said or done, as what the implications of the statement(s) are. I think I have shown that much can be achieved simply by comparing four news stories on the same topic, and carefully looking up the vocabulary in the lead in a good dictionary. The analysis would have been even better if I had followed the story in the same newspapers over the next two days.

Toolan makes a list of key linguistic phenomena the analyst can look for (pp. 221-228):

1. **Transitivity, with consequent change of subject**
   
   *Police kill rioter in lathi-charge*
   
   *Rioter dies in lathi charge*

2. **Passivization, especially with agent-deletion.** See the examples given by Toolan on p. 223, and consider the following:
   
   *Bush allies admit war blunders*
   
   *War blunders admitted*
   
   *Police kill rioter in lathi-charge*
   
   *Rioter killed in lathi-charge*

3. **Replacement of agentless passives with intransitive clauses**
   
   *Rioter dies in lathi-charge*
4. **Nominalization.** As Toolan says, nominalization de-narrativizes a process, reducing it to a thing:

- Admission of war blunders
- Death of rioter in lathi-charge

5. **Modality and description.** This refers to Appraisal Theory, for which references are given on p. 225. Unfortunately I am not in a position to comment on it.

6. **Namings and descriptions.** This covers lexical analysis of the type I have done here.

- protester versus demonstrator versus rioter
- former official versus Bush ally
- administrator versus proconsul
- Bush shifts gears versus Bush tries to stem criticism

7. **Collocational incongruity.** Words which don’t naturally go together:

- Bush tries to stem criticism on Iraq

8. **Presupposition.** This is the insertion into the record of slanted propositions (but in the background, as if they were facts). An example of this is “America’s former proconsul in Baghdad delivered a damning critique…” Although many are of the opinion that the US wish to make Iraq a colony, this is not a proven fact (at least in October 2004). The presupposition that this is the case is inserted into the story in backgrounded text.

    Toolan concludes with a brief discussion of news stories online, describing the Internet as an anti-narrative device (as we jump from hotlink to hotlink we abandon the narrative with its teller, its internal conflict, its crisis point, and its resolution. Sidebar menus are also more highly evaluative than presentation of news stories in traditional print format. Those who are interested in this can compare the presentation of a single news story in print and internet formats, and for that matter, its presentation in television news (where a viewer has no hotlinks, but can channel-surf).
Abbreviations
OED = Oxford English Dictionary

References
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Questions
1. What kind of texts do you think you might be dealing with in your MA research?
2. Which of these narratology methods might be of use in dealing with your texts?
3. To what extent is structural analysis a part of narratological analysis?
4. To what extent does Toolan’s linguistic analysis of news stories rely on lexical analysis?
5. What does an inventory of character traits have in common with componential analysis?