

**Production format and writing conventions  
Chinese and English news stories**

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**Summary**

The focus of this paper is on the format in which authorship is constructed. The matter is examined from the point of view of speech attribution. Types of speech attribution are classed as *introducing*, *describing*, and *ascribing* devices which, in turn, are considered to reflect a cline of involvement within the presentation of reported speakers to whom speech is attributed. Altogether 12 texts have been examined, covering the main news on two consecutive days of the reporting on a fire tragedy (10 texts being taken from Hong Kong [HK] newspapers, 2 texts from Shenzhen newspapers published across the border).

It is found that the amount of speech attribution varies with the change of the discourse task for the first and the second day of reporting across Chinese and English news stories, and that Chinese language newspapers attribute less, with the exception of a newly established newspaper (蘋果日報). It is further observed that the newspaper which shows the lowest ratio of attribution (大公報) prefers a detached presentation over an involved one.<sup>1</sup>

The paper concludes by drawing a tentative link between involved speech production and the functions carried by direct speech in English.

**Keywords:** Contrastive Discourse Analysis - Speech Attribution - News stories, Hong Kong.

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### 1. Introduction

The interest of this paper is derived from queries in regard to different practices in Chinese and English writing, the most immediate background of the discussion being the ‘Public Discourse Research Group’ at City University of HK (initiated by Ron Scollon, and Suzanne Wong Scollon). It will be examined how the ‘authorial self’ (Scollon 1994) attributes speech to participants in the reported event. As a first step, it will be explained why direct and indirect speech is combined in a class called *introduced* speech. In the following, other types of speech attribution will be treated, called *described* and *ascribed* speech. The inclusion of these other types becomes necessary since the distinction between direct and indirect speech appears not to be equivalent to this distinction in English.

### 2. Writing conventions

Textbooks in HK introduce students to direct speech, marked off by quotation marks, as a device for story writing. Modern Chinese novels make freely use of it, and it is also found in newspaper writing. Double quotes [“.”] and single quotes [‘...’], ‘borrowed from the European languages are more common in PRC publications to mark speech, dialogue and quotations’ (Yung (1996: 68). Texts published in Taiwan and HK use mainly the boundary markers [ ... ]. However, the device may be used differently from English.

Yung observes that there seems to be a “discrepancy in the use of punctuation in the Chinese newspapers (67)”, and that sometimes “it is hard to tell whether some indirect quotations are in fact direct quotations (74)”. In addition, she raises that, in Chinese writing, speech attribution may not play the same role as in English. Referring to *overt* and *covert* practices of quotation, she comes to the conclusion that “forms of citation in Chinese writing do not seem to be as well-defined as in English (73)”, and she adds, “... attribution does not appear to be an important issue in traditional Chinese writing (73)”. Sources in academic papers, for example, appear not to be acknowledged to the extent as is the practice in English contemporary writing (see Scollon on ‘plagiarism’, 1994). It has also been observed that English language newspapers in Hong Kong make considerable use of speech attribution to named sources, while Chinese language news reporting does not do so. Wong (1996) came to similar conclusions when comparing four English language news stories, published in Hong Kong, and four Chinese language news stories, published in Shenzhen, across the border in mainland China. She found that, in the Chinese news stories, attribution was used only to a small extent.

### 3. The texts

For this paper, like in previous studies conducted in HK on the difference between the presentation of the ‘authorial self’ (Scollon 1994) in Chinese and English language news stories, reports on a fire accident have been chosen. The reports are news stories on a fire which raged through one of the high-rises in HK, the Garley Building, on 20 November 1996. It was one of the worst fire accidents in HK’s history. All HK newspapers carried the news. The first day of reporting was still marked by the unexpectedness of the tragedy, the second day saw the reports already starting with the soul searching for the reasons why it could have happened. Each day, the HK newspapers did not only carry a single report. Up to five pages coverage were common even through the following days. - Only the main stories of 21 and of 22 November have been chosen, since they reflect the main discourse task of those days. The mainland

Chinese newspapers published in Shenzhen contained reports only on 22 November. The texts are from:

South China Morning Post	(SCMP)	21 and 22 November
Hong Kong Standard	(HKST)	21 and 22 November
明報 Mihng Bou <sup>2</sup>	(MB)	21 and 22 November
蘋果日報 Pihng-gwo Yaht Bou	(PYB)	21 and 22 November
大公報 Daaiah Gung Bou	(DGB)	21 and 22 November
深圳特區報 Sam-jan Dahk Keui Bou	(SDKB)	22 November
羊城晚報 Yeuhng-sihng Maahn Bou	(YMB)	22 November

These newspapers all have a considerable circulation, and represent distinct editorial opinions. The *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) has been supportive of the (British led) HK Government, the *Hong Kong Standard* (HKST) is editorially independent. 明報 (MB) represents the quality press, it has the status of an elite paper. 蘋果日報 (PYB) has been newly established. It was launched on 20 June 1995, and is also often called by its English name (*Apple Daily*). *Apple Daily* (PYB) is a popular paper, and is 'not without its critics' (So 1996:489) for its touch with its common-people readership. 大公報 (DGB) is financially supported by mainland Chinese bodies, and has therefore an editorial board which represents an official mainland-Chinese stance. 深圳特區報 (SDKB) and 羊城晚報 (YMB) are published across the border in Shenzhen. They stand for mainland Chinese newspaper writing. (All newspapers use Modern Standard Chinese (MSC) as the written code. MSC is based on Putonghua, but is pronounced in Cantonese by Cantonese readers. Shifts into Cantonese are normally indicated by quotation marks.)

#### 4. Speech attribution

Both direct and indirect speech will be considered as *introduced* speech. It is further suggested to include other syntactic devices in the examination of how authors make use of the report of speech in order to construct a text. Altogether, the devices considered are: *introducers*, *describers*, and *ascribers*. Below (in section 4.1), some examples are provided which are meant to show why direct speech is not an equivalent phenomenon in the Chinese and the English texts.

##### 4.1. The problem of direct speech

In the English texts, the reporter-writer may construct her story line from the direct speech of a reported-speaker. In the example at (1), a resident of the Garley Building describes how he realized the beginning of a fire, its smell and smoke at first being associated with the repair work going on in a lift shaft.

- (1) Kan Kwei-wah, 66, ... said: "At first ..., we thought they were just repairing it [the lift shaft]." "We closed the door to keep the smell out but then the smoke came under the door." (SCMP, 21 November)

<sup>2</sup> Chinese words are provided in their Cantonese form and romanized according to the Yale system.

In the Chinese texts, there is only one reported utterance which seems to be long enough to be regarded as an equivalent to the direct quotations in the English texts. (AM: aspectual marker, CL: classifier, LW: linking word, PASS: passive marker)

(2) 張 比 德 憶 述 前 日 情 景, 形 容 爲  
 Jeung Bei-Dak yik-seuht chihn-yaht chihng-ging yihng-yuhng waih  
 (name) recall tell before day situation describe be  
 Cheung Bei-Tak described the situation the day before yesterday as (being)

「 環 境 非 常 惡 劣, 搶 救 非 常 困 難 」.  
 waahn-ging fei-seuhng ngok-lyut cheung-gau fei-seuhng kwan-naahn  
 condition extreme bad rescue extreme difficult  
 “an extremely evil condition in which the rescue efforts met with  
 extreme difficulty”. (明報 [MB], 22 November)

Only a portion of Peter Cheung's words is quoted. The quotation does not develop the story, but confirms and emphasizes the severity of the situation. Similarly, all the other “direct” quotes found in the Chinese texts do certainly not reflect full verbatim speech. They can be considered as “iconic” quotations (Yung, unpublished ms.), which make a point, sum up the foregoing, emphasize a perception, introduce a special term etc. They sometimes work like “scare quotes” mentioned by Bell (1991: 208), but not only.

In the example at (3), the quoted term is half borrowed from English ‘lift’ *lip*. The whole of it, *lip-daam*, refers to the *lift*, whereby *daam* describes its *container*-like dimension.

(3) 有 三 部 「*lip*<sup>3</sup> 膽」 被 取 去  
 yauh saam bouh lip-daam beih cheui-heui  
 have three CL lift-container PASS remove  
 Three “lifts” had been removed.  
 (蘋果日報 [PYB] 21 November)

In the quotation at (4), the cry “fire” has been transposed into the Cantonese form. A desperate cry, coming from the mouth of a frightened victim, could not have been reported in an MSC form - which would have been 火警 (*fo-ging*), and not 火 *juk* (*fo-juk*).

<sup>3</sup> Cantonese words, including loans used in Cantonese, cannot be presented by most Chinese text processing softwares, even though Chinese characters exist for their representation. Cantonese words for which no graphic representation is available are therefore, also in the first line of an example where a character is expected, provided in Yale romanization.

- (4) (at a moment when a police officer had discovered smoke rising from the outer wall of the 13th floor)  
 ... 已 有 人 驚 慌 由 樓 梯 衝 落 大 叫「火juk」.  
 yih yauh yahn ging-fong yauh lauh-tai chuhng-lohk daaih giu fo-juk  
 already have people frighten from staircase rush-down loud cry fire  
 ... there were already people rushing down the staircase loudly crying "fire".  
 (蘋果日報 [PYB], 21 November)

The expression "the wolf had come" describes the unexpectedness of the fire by using a condensed proverbial reference. Smoke and the smell of fire had disturbed the residents of the building already for a while. Examples at (5) and (6).

- (5) 連 日 聞 到 焦 味 變 「狼 來 了」 慘 劇  
 lihn-yaht mahn-dou jiu meih bin "lohng loih liuh" chaam-kehk  
 continuous-day smell-AM burn smell become "wolf come AM" tragedy  
 The smell of burning, which had been all over the place for a number of days, has turned into a tragedy which became real. The "wolf" had come.  
 (明報 [PYB], 22 November)

- (6) ... 是 一 個 「狼 來 了」 的 慘 劇 ..  
 sih yat go "lohng loih liuh" dik chaam-kehk  
 be one CL "wolf-come-AM" LW tragedy  
 .. it was a "the-wolf-has-come" tragedy.  
 (蘋果日報 [PYB], 22 November)

Whatever has been presented in the above examples (2-6) cannot be regarded as verbatim speech, but reflects points to be made during speech attributions in which reported speakers are presented with iconic highlights of their co-authored words.

Since the use of direct quotations is not comparable with that in English which constructs story lines by quoting participants directly, the distinction between direct and indirect speech will not be made.

#### 4.2. Introduced, described, and ascribed speech

Since direct speech is not readily comparable in the texts under study, both direct and indirect speech will be considered as *introduced* speech.

##### Introducers

Introducers are verbs of saying and thinking. They, most of the time, *introduce* clauses which include another verb.

- (7) The boy's family said he had gone ...  
 (SCMP, 21 November)

- (8) 消防 處長 張 比德 稱, 高 層 單位 內  
 siu-fohng chy-jeung Jeung Bei Dak ching gou chahng daan-wai noih  
 fire service president Cheung (Peter) claim high floor unit in

寫字樓 職員 起初 不以爲意, ...

se-ji-lauh jik-yuhn hei-cho bat-yih-waih-yi  
 office staff first not-use-aware

Fire Services President Peter Cheung stated (that) inside the units on the upper floors office staff had at first not been aware (of what was going on).  
 (明報 [MB], 22 November)

### Describers

Secondary verbs of saying like *yell* are grouped in this type, as well as performatives like *consider*.

- (9) On the streets, relatives and friends yelled to their loved ones and comforted each other. (SCMP, 21 November)

- (10) 不少 被 困 高 層 的 職員 被 逼 至 窗口,  
 bat-siu beih kwan gou chahng dik jik-yuhn beih bik ji cheung-hau  
 not-few PASS trap high floor LW staff PASS force to window

大 叫 救命, 揮 手, 拋 紙, 以至 拋 雜物 到  
 daai giu gau-mihng faih sau paau ji yih-ji paau jaahp-maht dou  
 loud cry help wave hand throw paper even throw object to

地下 以 求救, ...

deih-hah yih kauh-gau  
 ground for ask-help

Many of the office staff, being trapped in the upper floors and being forced to the windows, cried loud for help, waved and threw paper and even objects to the ground in order to beg for help.

(明報 [MB], 21 November)

- (11) Doctors were also considering sending a badly hurt boy, Lee Siu-kee, 15, to the Prince of Wales Hospital's specialist burns unit.

(SCMP, 21 November)

- (12) 消防員 要 高 聲 喝令 部份 在 該 處  
 siu-fohng-yuhn yiu gou sing hot-lihng bouh-fahn joih goi chy  
 fire-service-man have-to loud voice command part at this place

採訪 大火新聞的報章與電視台記者  
 choi-fohng daaih fo san-mahn dik bou-jeung yuh dihn-sih-toih gei-je  
 cover big fire news LW newspaper and radio reporter

速速 離開.  
 chuk-chuk leih-hoi  
 fast-fast leave

Firemen had to loudly order the reporters from TV and radio, covering the fire, to leave speedily. (大公報 [DGB], 21 November)

### Ascribers

Adverbs like *according to*, 據 (*geui*) may leave the source of speech general, unspecified or unknown. So does the English passive, the English nominalized noun (e.g. *investigation*) and the impersonal use of the verb in Chinese.

- (13) But teams were early today searching the block for as many as 40 more victims, according to police sources

(SCMP, 21 November)

- (14) ... it was revealed that a welder's spark was most probably to blame for the inferno at a Yau Ma Dei shop and office complex.

(HKST, 22 November)

- (15) A probe by two investigation teams, ..., will focus on the lift shaft.

(HKST, 21 November)

- (16) 據 現場 消息, 大廈 中 不少 門 均 上鎖, ...  
 geui yihn-cheuhng siu-sik daaih-hah jung bat-siu muhn gwan seuhng-so  
 according locality news building inside not-few door also lock  
 According to news from the scene, inside the building quite a number of doors had been locked. (明報 [MB], 21 November)

- (17) 而 昨 早 在 十五 樓 發現 的 廿一 具  
 yih jok jou joih sahp-ngh lauh faat-yihn dik yah-yat geuih  
 and yesterday morning at fifteen floor discover LW twenty-one CL

焦 屍 相信 是 該 批 被 困 職員.  
 jiu si seung-seun sih goi pai beih kwan jik-yuhn  
 burn body believe be this CL PASS trap staff

And the twenty-one burnt bodies, discovered yesterday morning on the fifteenth floor are believed to belong to the staff who had been trapped.

(大公報 [DGB], 22 November)

- (18) 估計 死者是被濃煙焗死, ...  
 gu-gai sei-je sih beih nuhng yin guhk-sei  
 estimate dead be PASS thick smoke suffocate-dead  
 It is assumed/ the assumption is that the dead have been suffocated  
 by the thick smoke. (大公報 [DGB], 22 November)

The above mentioned devices of speech attribution reflect a cline of specification of the sources of the speech report. While *introducers*, and *describers* tend to individualize and to name the sources of the speech report, *ascribers* allow for leaving sources unmentioned or to depict them as entities for which we don't know whether they are collective or individual. The difference between these devices reflects degrees to which an author calls on the co-authorship of other participants in the discourse event. *Introducers*, and *describers* involve the co-authors more, since they specify them more. *Ascribers* exhibit more 'detachment' from the quoted source, co-authorship becomes thus more impersonalized.

#### 4.2. The amount of speech attribution

In the following, an account is given of the amount of attributed speech in the texts examined. The ratio figures have been arrived at by projecting the amount of words under the scope of the devices of attribution onto the total number of words of the texts. Table 1 provides an overview of the writing of 21 November, table 2 is on the writing of 22 November.

Table 1: The reporting of 21 November, HK

	SCMP words: 608	HKST words: 514	MB words: 985	PYB words: 784	DGB words: 592
Introducers	0.307	0.245	0.143	0.246	-
Describers	0.173	0.147	0.076	0.147	0.126
Ascribers	0.049	0.195	0.030	0.195	0.090
Unattributed	0.471	0.412	0.751	0.412	0.784

Table 2: The reporting of 22 November, HK and Shenzen

	SCMP w: 587	HKST w: 487	MB w: 864	PYB w: 917	DGB w: 487	SDKB w: 293	YMB w: 184
Introducers	0.487	0.507	0.350	0.487	0.230	0.098	-
Describers	0.090	0.137	0.110	-	0.160	0.060	-
Ascribers	0.107	0.050	0.020	0.050	0.100	0.426	0.125
Unattributed	0.316	0.306	0.520	0.463	0.510	0.416	0.875

It can be seen that all HK newspapers have more unattributed speech on the first day of reporting than on the second day. This can be explained by the unexpectedness of the event and its tragic dimension for which no one had been prepared. The first information did not yield many possibilities to report sources. The situation changes on the next day, when all texts show an increased ratio of speech *introducers*.

For both days of reporting, it is interesting to see that the ratios for 明報 [MB], 大公報 [DGB], 深圳特區報 [SDKB], and 羊城晚報 [YMB] seem to confirm earlier statements on Chinese writing concerning a reluctant use of speech attribution (Scollon 1994, Wong 1996, Yung 1996). But, in the first day of reporting, the newcomer among the HK newspapers, 蘋果日報 [PYB], shows a profile which is similar to the English language papers.

It seems that the observation that Chinese news reports use less speech attribution needs to be qualified. Below, an attempt is made to consider other factors regarding the question of how authorship is constructed.

#### 4.3. Other differences: beyond the ratios of attribution

What is not shown in table (1) and (2) concerns the nature of a) the complement clauses in *introduced* speech, and of (b) the *describers*. While on the first day of reporting, the victims' physical verbal reactions were transformed into verbs of saying (*yelling to loved ones*), the second day, almost exclusively, had performative descriptions of acts like *set up an investigation, confirm the death toll, identifying bodies*, etc. in this speech class of *describers*. The latter observation holds for all newspapers, Chinese and English alike.

On the first day of reporting, speech *introducers* include for all newspapers, except for 大公報 [DGB], complement clauses which indicate *sorrow, desperation*, and reasoning why previous on-going construction work had led people into the belief that they needed not to worry about the smoke and the smell of burning. 大公報 [DGB], the HK newspaper aligned with China, does not refer to feelings. On both days of reporting, speech introducers are typically followed by information about official action. Someone *states* or *announces*, for instance, that *a hotline for enquiry has been set up*. Involvement with the subject matter is not expressed as in the other papers, it is kept to a minimum.

The reports on the Garley fire, published in Shenzhen (深圳特區報 [SDKB], and in 羊城萬報 [YMB]), have been very brief, but not without involvement devices.

(19) 誰 也 沒 料 到 香 港 油 麻 地 嘉 利  
 seuih yah muht-liuh- dou Heung-Gong Yauh-Mah-Deih Ga-Leih  
 who (ever) not-imagine- AM Hong Kong Yau-Ma-Tei Garley

大 廈 昨 天 十 六 時 四 九 分 發 生 的  
 daaih-hah jok-tin sahp-luhk sih sei-gau fan faat-sang dik  
 building yesterday sixteen hour forty-nine second happen LW

大 火 竟 是 香 港 有 史 以 來 死 傷 人 數  
 daaih fo ging-sih Heung Gong yauh-si-yih-loih sei-seung yahn-sou  
 big fire unexpected-be Hong Kong ever-since casualty figure

最 多 的 一 場 火 災 ！

jeui do dik yat cheuhng fo-joi  
most many LW one CL fire-disaster

Who would have imagined that the fire which happened yesterday in Hong Kong, Yau Ma Tei, Garley building, at 16:49, would turn into a disaster claiming the highest number of casualties ever!

(深圳特區報 [SDKB], 22 November)

The introducer 料到 *liuh-dou* '(would have) imagined' expresses involvement with readers and with the subject matter, it is not a neutral verb. Its effect is heightened by choosing the form of a rhetorical question.

### 5. Concluding remarks

Speech attribution in Chinese writing may not use the devices available in the same way as in English. But the Chinese texts examined do attribute. To class the report of speech, as has been done in this paper, is a preliminary attempt at the matter and could be made more precise with regard to the questions raised in section 4.3. If direct speech is missing as a form of speech attribution in the Chinese texts, functions associated with direct speech (in English) should be found elsewhere. It is suggested that expressions of involvement are candidates for such functions.

Writing conventions approached from the point of view of speech attribution, present a challenge to the linguistic inquiry of reported speech, and to semiotic concerns regarding the "governing tendencies of speech reception" (Voloshinov 1929/86:119) as re-constructed in journalist writing. When dealing with differences of writing conventions across the languages in HK, it seems that seemingly clear-cut notions of reported speech need even more qualification than have been attempted so far.

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