



'No ordinary crowd': Foregrounding a 'hooligan schema' in the construction of witness narratives following the Hillsborough football stadium disaster

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Abstract

This article examines the linguistic appropriation and deflection of blame in the witness testimonies and evidence-gathering processes of the South Yorkshire Police (SYP) following the 1989 Hillsborough football stadium disaster. It specifically focuses on patterns of stylistic features, such as negation and syntactic foregrounding, which, it is argued, function to encode alternative institutionally congruent stories. It employs schema theory to explore how a 'hooligan' narrative was readily invoked and accepted by the SYP. Moreover, it addresses instances of both self-incrimination and the upgrading of police efficacy within statements produced by the South Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service (SYMAS), and offers a linguistic analysis that points to police involvement in the construction of the SYMAS testimonies.

Keywords

Hillsborough, negation, schema, South Yorkshire Police, South Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service, stylistics, witness statements

Introduction

On 15 April 1989, at the FA Cup semi-final match between English league teams Nottingham Forest and Liverpool Football Club at Hillsborough (a neutral venue and home to Sheffield Wednesday Football Club), a series of foreseeable institutional and operational failures

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(Hillsborough Independent Panel (HIP) Report, 2012) led to an 'inrush' of fans into the already packed spectator terraces before kick-off, resulting in a fatal crush in which 96 Liverpool fans died. Within minutes, a 'story' emerged that placed the blame for the crush on the fans. This story was predicated on a 'faleshood' (HIP Report, 2012: 366) from the South Yorkshire Police (SYP) match commander Chief Superintendent David Duckenfield, who told the FA chief executive, Graham Kelly, that fans had forced open an exit gate, known as Gate C, before rushing into the enclosed spectator pens 3 and 4 (located at the away end of the stadium and accessed via a central tunnel), causing the crush. The reality was very different: according to Lord Justice Taylor, who led the initial inquiry into the disaster, Duckenfield 'did little about'¹ the ensuing crush at the turnstiles and 'misjudged' the situation before finally conceding to repeated and panicked requests from one of his officers, Superintendent Marshall, to open the gate (Home Office, 1989 [Taylor Interim Report, 50]). This allowed around 2000 fans to enter the already packed pens, and without adequate signage directing them elsewhere, most headed straight for the tunnel and into pens 3 and 4.

Rather than acknowledge institutional and individual failures within his own force, Duckenfield portrayed the fans as 'hooligans', blaming them for the disaster. His lie spawned a 'hooligan' narrative that was to have a defining role in institutional and public renderings of the Hillsborough story. Blaming the fans by presenting them as hooligans also gained traction in the media, 'set[ting] off a widely reported allegation against the supporters which caused grave offence and distress' (Taylor, 50). Indeed, in the days following the disaster, newspaper reports referred to Liverpool supporters as 'beasts' (*Liverpool Echo*), 'yobs' (*Sheffield Star*), 'vile' (*Evening Standard*), 'thugs' and – most damningly – by the tabloid newspaper *The Sun* as 'pickpockets' 'urinating' on 'brave cops'. *The Sun*'s source originated from within the SYP (TPF000000010001, p. 4; HIP Report 2.12.96–117), whose unfounded allegations were presented as facts in a now infamous headline 'The Truth', despite being consistently denied by proximate witnesses. In short, as Phil Scraton – member of the Hillsborough Independent Panel, lead researcher and primary author of the Panel's Report (2012) – puts it, 'Duckenfield's instant reaction to blame the fans, thereby exonerating the police, had established a broad and seemingly legitimate constituency' (Scraton, 2004: 185).

The pursuit of exoneration was arguably predictable; the police came under heavy criticism for their handling of the situation both during and after the disaster, with Lord Justice Taylor, chair of the initial inquiry into Hillsborough, concluding that 'the main reason for the disaster was the failure of police control' (Taylor Interim report, 49). Scraton has documented in detail (Scraton, 1999, 2004, 2012, 2013) a series of failures by the SYP at Hillsborough that included the 'failure to close off the tunnel before opening Gate C', which would have prevented the fans from entering the already packed pens 3 and 4. This was compounded by the 'failure to respond immediately and effectively to the disaster unfolding on the terraces' (Scraton, 2004: 188). The South Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service (SYMAS) also received criticism for, among other things, not operating a triage system, lack of equipment and a slow response to the unfolding disaster. There were, in fact, many stories competing for legitimacy after Hillsborough, through which institutional and corporate voices sought to deflect blame while maintaining their professional 'face' (Goffman, 1967). These stories were not only played out in the press, but formed part of an institutional narrative mediated through a large corpus of witness statements which were subsequently subjected to a systematic process of 'review and alteration' prior to their submission to the Taylor inquiry (HIP

Report, 2012: Chapter 11). The HIP Report (2012) outlines institutional claims that amendments were made to SYP statements to remove criticism (of their officers) and offers some 'illustrative examples' (p. 2.11.48, *passim*) that demonstrate such practice was selective, 'leaving in' negative opinions about fans but removing negative appraisals of SYP officers (HIP Report, 2.11.96, and Chapter 11, *passim*).

This article develops the panel's findings by examining how key linguistic strategies employed in the wider evidence-gathering process functioned both to encode and to deflect blame by presenting fans as 'hooligans'. Specifically, it considers the relationship between mental representations (schemata) and topic control in the construction and reception of narratives of the disaster. In addition, it argues that negation, also presented as a form of topic control, promotes and reinforces institutionally favoured schemata. This article begins by offering an overview of the practical importance of 'narrative' in conceptualisations of events and experience, before considering the role of schemata in cementing plausible stories, in particular the story of 'hooliganism' in the aftermath of Hillsborough.

The cognitive utility of 'story'

Writing in 1991, anthropologist Jerome Bruner (1991) notes that we 'organise our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative' (p. 4). Bruner (1991) outlines 10 features of narrative, one of which is the notion of 'particularity' or 'particular happenings', which he claims are emblematic of more general types. He cites the (rather outdated) example of a 'boy-woos-girl script' that 'calls for the giving of a gift' (p. 6). The gift can be flowers, perfume and so on, so that the 'particular' serves as emblematic of the gift. The 'embeddedness' of these particulars, argues Bruner, is what gives them emblematic status and, therefore, allows us to fill gaps in a narrative where they exist. Bruner (1991) concludes that 'the suggestiveness of a story lies, then, in the emblematic nature of its particulars' (p. 7). This is perhaps best understood through the idea of stereotypes in which the 'particulars' metonymically represent broader types. In other words, we use narrative to help us organise and make sense of experience.

Schemas and 'framing'

Central to the narrative construction of experience is the idea of a 'schema'. According to Bartlett (1932), a schema is 'an active organisation of past reactions, or of past experiences, which must always be supposed to be operating in any well-adapted organic response' (p. 201). Their utility in artificial intelligence has also been well documented, with Stockwell (2006) noting that 'the artificial language user would need a limited set of knowledge, and a principled, programmable means of drawing down the appropriate elements of that set' (p. 9). What these definitions foreground is the organised structure and accessibility of schemas in the process of 'making sense' of the world; as our knowledge of the world changes or grows, our schemata adapt to accommodate this new information. In their work on schemas and learning, Rumelhart and Norman (1976) propose that schemas 'undergo continual tuning or minor modification to bring them more into congruence with the functional demands placed on these categories' (p. 4). To offer an example from language acquisition, Griffiths (1986) cites the case of a young child aged 25 months, who when playing with his toy animals offers the

utterance 'cow, sheep, another cow' when handling a toy elephant ('another cow'). While not yet able to lexicalise 'elephant', the child does appear to have the necessary schematic knowledge to assign to it the (closest?) lexical 'category' of 'cow' (cf. Rosch et al., 1976).

Language is central to schema construction and selection at both micro and macro levels; in the former, linguistic expressions, evaluative lexis and syntactic ordering, for example, can invoke, reinforce, refresh or disrupt our interpretation and encoding of new or past experience. It is this 'text-drivenness' (to borrow from Werth, 1999) that is of particular interest here, not least because these micro elements are often part of a wider (or 'macro') discourse that is socially, culturally and politically inflected.

In critical discourse analysis, '*access to or control over public discourse*' is considered 'an important "symbolic" resource' (Van Dijk, 2008: 355, italics in original). According to Van Dijk, this control extends beyond the 'content' of talk or discourse to its 'structure' (p. 356). The constituent parts of that discourse consist of, among other things, 'topics' or 'semantic macrostructures' (p. 356) that can determine what gets talked about (and what does not). As Van Dijk argues, '*topics* may influence what people see as the most important information of text or talk' (p. 358, italics in original). Essentially, this constitutes 'framing' (Minsky, 1974), which, according to Entman (1993), 'select[s] some aspects of a perceived reality' making them more 'salient' (p. 52). In the investigation into Hillsborough, the evidence-gathering process fixated on key themes, principally 'alcohol' and 'disorder' (relating to fans' behaviour), introducing them as topics in both the elicitation and categorisation of evidence in preparation for the Taylor inquiry into the cause of the disaster. As part of that process, witness statements were collected by the SYP and indexed according to a 'category template' (SYP000049490001, p. 3). These categories offer insights into what was considered salient by the SYP; for example, under the category 'COACHES', the more specific sub-category 'alcohol' is listed first and thus foregrounded, making it more newsworthy than 'traffic delay', which is listed last despite traffic problems being a major factor in delaying fans' journey to the ground on the day.² Under the primary category 'INVESTIGATION', the list of sub-categories reads 'forged tickets', 'forcing gates', 'unauthorised access', 'alcohol' and 'disorder' (none of which played any role in the disaster). By selecting key topics such as 'alcohol' and 'disorder', police 'framed' the witness narratives by making those corresponding elements more salient.

The investigative focus extended to Hillsborough residents initially through questionnaires (at the request of the Chief Constable of the SYP), which then formed the basis for statements. In house-to-house questionnaires, the negative behaviour of supporters was foregrounded through a similar process of framing and priming through predetermined and thus selective questions that focused on potentially incriminating behaviours, such as 'Q6 DID YOU WITNESS ANY INCIDENTS OF DRUNKENNESS OR DISORDERLY BEHAVIOUR OF ANY OF THE FANS? (BRIEF DESCRIPTION) INCLUDE TIME OF INCIDENT' and 'Q7 WAS ANY DAMAGE CAUSED TO YOUR PREMISES? DETAILS' (SYP000125360001). By using the parallel syntactic structure 'x or y' ('drunkenness or disorderly behaviour') in question 6, the author confers a relationship of equivalence between the two (despite the fact that they are not synonymous; see e.g. Leech and Short, 2007: 113; Short, 1996), while in the subsequent question (Q7), 'damage' is an extension of the foregoing category 'disorderly behaviour' because of its chronological relationship to Q6. Therefore any 'damage', or any kind of 'disorderly' behaviour, is linked implicitly to

'drunkenness'. In contrast, the question relating to the behaviour of the SYP (who were severely criticised for their conduct on the day), 'Q10 DO YOU HAVE ANY COMMENTS CONCERNING THE SOUTH YORKSHIRE POLICE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MATCH/OR INDIVIDUAL POLICE OFFICERS ON DUTY?' (SYP000125360001), is open ended and neutrally framed, guiding respondents to consider police 'arrangements' rather than 'conduct'. Questionnaires were also collected from licensed alcohol outlets around the football ground. Some of the questions explicitly elicit incriminating information: 'Q12. WERE YOU SUBJECTED TO ANY THREATS OR VIOLENCE BY FOOTBALL SUPPORTERS? BRIEFLY DESCRIBE' and 'Q13. WAS ANY DAMAGE CAUSED TO YOUR PREMISES? IF SO, DESCRIBE' (SYP000144540001). While these questions foreground or negatively frame perceptions of fans, other questions are ambiguous, such as 'Q10. DID FOOTBALL SUPPORTERS STEAL ALCOHOL **TO YOUR KNOWLEDGE?** EXPLAIN BRIEFLY AND ESTIMATE QUANTITY' (SYP000144540001, my emphasis). This question contains an embedded question (in bold) that could potentially undermine the validity of a negative response. Taking this further, if the witness answers 'no' meaning 'no supporters stole alcohol', the post-positioned clause 'to your knowledge' means that the 'no' governs the respondent's *knowledge* of a theft of alcohol rather than the *fact* of a theft of alcohol. In other words, following the recency principle (Guthrie, 1952), which holds that the more recent proposition will govern interpretation, the final clause 'to your knowledge' epistemically weakens a negative response, introducing doubt regarding the respondent's commitment to a truth proposition. Moreover, it may compel some respondents who may have ordinarily answered 'no' to answer 'not to my knowledge' (e.g. such a response was given by a witness in SYP000145270001). To offer a flavour of the semantic ambiguity entailed by this clause, Figure 1 outlines some possible interpretations of a negative response to this question, from which the same logical deduction ('it is possible') can follow. By focusing on specific pejorative behaviours at various stages of the evidence-gathering process, the SYP constructed an interpretative 'frame' through which causality was inferred, one that accorded with (and was precipitated by) the lie issued by Duckenfield.

The invocation and reinforcement of a 'hooligan schema' can be seen in many of the witness statements given by the SYP (Chapter 11, HIP) through a pattern of deletions and amendments that, according to the Scrutiny Secretary (paraphrasing Lord Justice Stuart Smith), '[tended] to remove opinion and intemperate language about senior police officers but leave in similar material about misbehaviour by Liverpool fans' (HOM000039450001). 'Leaving in' negative reports about fans exploited a pre-existing negative stereotype of football fans as hooligans because it reinforced a culturally plausible schema, one that gained credence throughout the 1980s: for example, the Kenilworth Road riot of 1985 at the FA Cup match between Luton and Millwall ended in a pitch invasion and was deemed one of the worst incidents of football hooliganism. Around the same time, Chelsea fans rioted as their team was being beaten by Sunderland in the League Cup semi-final, a riot that became known as 'the battle of Stamford Bridge' (Chelsea's ground). More prolifically, in 1985 at the European Cup Final between Liverpool and Juventus at Heysel in Belgium, Liverpool supporters charged at the Juventus fans causing a crush. In total, 39 died at Heysel, and the Liverpool fans' culpability was widely acknowledged. Following Heysel, all English teams were banned from European club competitions for 5 years. With cases of football violence

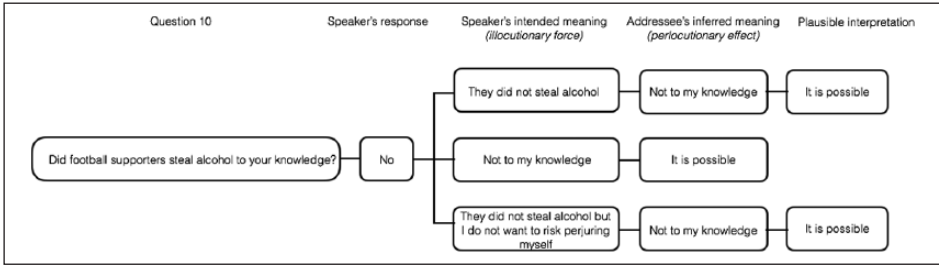


Figure 1. Possible interpretations of a negative response.

already cemented in the public consciousness, the ‘football hooligan’ schema (particularly with regard to Liverpool fans) was an easily invoked plausible story that was proactively constructed in an overwhelming number of SYP witness statements. The amended statements demonstrate this salience explicitly and have been discussed in some detail in the HIP Report. I offer an example (SYP000119290001, my emphasis) in which PC Burkinshaw summarised his perception of events in his original statement as follows:

Again, I have heard other officers comments about the policing which include statements that the [sic] was no other option open to Mr Marshall but to open the gate and relieve pressure on the wall. Others have commented that there were not enough officers outside the ground at that point to cope with the numbers arriving. [...] The general feeling is that **the fans arrived too late, and a lot of them under the influence of drink, to get into the ground in time for the kick-off.**

However, in his final statement, this section was deleted, leaving only the emboldened element which was reconstructed as a new sentence (SYP000100810001). The perception modality in the first impressionistic statement (‘the general feeling is that [...]’) conveys a weak epistemic stance towards the proposition. Moreover, the mental perception process ‘heard’ governs the entire component ‘other officers comments [...]’, and so further weakens Burkinshaw’s epistemic commitment about these events. Yet in the amended version, the modality has been removed, and the proposition has been re-framed as fact: ‘The fans arrived too late [...]’, which I argue is a clear manipulation on the part of the SYP in their aim to remove ‘expressions of opinion’, by *only* removing the reporting clause that introduces (and constitutes) that opinion.

There are also numerous references to fans drinking alcohol, for example one officer notes that ‘[f]rom me and the other officers taking up this position the thing that became most apparent to me *other than their drunken states* was how late thousands of them had left it to go to get into the ground’ (SYP000078000001, my italics). Another officer observed ‘a large gathering of Liverpool supporters on the front car park, most of whom were *still* drinking and *in a rowdy mood*’ (SYP000084040001, my italics). The adverbial presupposition trigger ‘still’ in the last example implies an ongoing state of affairs despite this being the first reference to alcohol in this officer’s statement. Many of the SYP statements that include references to drunken fans exhibit over-explicitness; for example,

'Many of them were drinking or carrying "*four packs*" or *plastic 2 litre bottles of beer and lager*. Most of them appeared to have been drinking to some extent' (SYP000120650001, my italics). The same over-explicit complex nominal group was used in another officer's statement (although with slightly altered syntax) in the following passive construction: 'Many of these supporters were seen to be carrying *not only six-packs of beer and lager; but 12 packs EACH*. They were also seen drinking beer/lager from *large two litre plastic bottles*' (SYP000114340001, my italics, capitals in original). The narrative position of references to alcohol in the SYP statements is often incongruous: for example, in describing the fatal crush, one officer noted that

[t]he crowding was very tight and it was becoming difficult to raise my arms from my sides. To be closely compact [sic] was becoming claustrophobic [sic] and because we were so close, *the smell of stale ale on the breath of the supporters was strong*. (SYP000082950001, see also SYP000118000001)

The *placement* of references to alcohol foregrounds its salience as a topic, yet its newsworthiness is incommensurate with descriptions of a traumatic deadly crush; indeed, sensory observations such as the 'smell of stale ale' and 'stench of beer' hardly seem like 'reportable events' (Labov and Waletzky, 1967), which according to Labov (2010) 'justifies [...] the claim on social attention needed to deliver it' (p. 547). While these are just a few examples, they typify a disproportionate and irrelevant institutional focus on the instances and volume of Liverpool fans allegedly consuming, buying or simply carrying alcohol. The ubiquity of such references throughout the SYP evidence corpus makes it difficult to consider their inclusion as anything other than a collective, institutional attempt to foreground a hooligan schema. In fact, despite alcohol playing no role in the cause of the disaster, the SYP thought it prudent to produce a police incident report dedicated to the issue of alcohol, recording 232 'mentions' in SYP statements of alcohol-related 'incidences' involving Liverpool fans, ranging from 'empty beer cans etc kicked under turnstiles' to off-licences who 'sold out of alcohol' and had to 'replenish stock' (SYP000110270001). Given the redundancy of alcohol as a contributing factor in the events that precipitated the crush, these references to alcohol should have been of no narrative or judicial importance, and so their placement at such key points (and their presence at all) does little other than reinforce a causal connection and, by extension, shift blame for the disaster to Liverpool fans.

I now want to consider the ways in which established schemata overlap, and the impact of schema 'mismatches' on physical responses to the Hillsborough disaster.

Schema mismatch

As disaster unfolded on the terraces, desperate to escape the crush, some fans climbed radial fencing or found their way onto the pitch. Recollecting these events, many of the SYP statements demonstrate that officers processed fans' distress as hooliganism. This can be seen in the pervasive use of nominalisations such as 'crowd trouble', 'disturbance' and 'pitch invasion', indicating that hooliganism was an easily (and singularly) activated schema.³ These nominalisations occur at early stages of the SYP witness narratives and include the following: 'I assumed at this point that there must have been a pitch invasion

and we were needed for crowd control' (SYP000108140001) and 'the only information I could obtain was that there had been a pitch invasion/crowd trouble' (SYP000038830001; see also officers' testimonies SYP000114340001, SYP000074130001, SYP000091650001, SYP00011155000, HOM000000430001, SYP000039150001, SYP000096810001 and SYP000118000001). In schema theory terms, when there are genuine clashes between schematic taxonomies, the phenomenon is referred to as a schema 'mismatch' (Tannen, 1993, Tannen and Wallat, 1987), which 'triggers a shifting of frames' (Tannen and Wallat, 1987: 207). In the SYP statements, the action of people 'spilling' out onto the pitch during the game fits a 'pitch invasion' schema (and by extension, a 'conflict' frame), but it also fits a schema for a 'medical emergency' (and thus an 'assist' frame). Yet most officers interpreted the events on the pitch as befitting the former even though overcrowding and distress could be clearly seen by viewers at home (of which I was one) watching television. As many of the SYP statements show, no further cognitive effort was expended once a plausible story of 'pitch invasion' was reached until officers claim to have processed the overwhelming evidence to the contrary (e.g. 'By 3:06pm I had realised that what was happening was not a pitch invasion and that there had been a problem with overcrowding [...]'; SYP000111350001). The SYP statements indicate that they were indeed primed to expect 'crowd trouble' and responded to events through that interpretative frame at the expense of proactively ensuring crowd safety, making them slow to act. In fact, a Crown Prosecution Service report on the disaster noted that match commander Superintendent Duckenfield's 'preoccupation with the possibility of a pitch invasion caused him to delay putting the Major Disaster Plan into operation' (AGO000003030001: 34), demonstrating Axelrod's (1973) claim that 'a person does not try out every conceivable schema in an attempt to find the best fit of all', but rather invokes 'the most accessible schema for that type of case' (p. 1252).

The copious references to 'alcohol' and 'disorder' in SYP narratives could be read, then, not only as evidence of such priming (by relying on properties that are schematically congruent with a 'pitch invasion' schema), but also as an attempt to substantiate and justify the (mis)interpretation of distress as disorder by fleshing out a plausible hooligan narrative that relied on pre-existing negative behaviour. In fact, pre-existing knowledge frames were offered as a rationale for invoking a hooligan schema in some SYP statements. To offer an example, PC Groome wrote,

In previous matches which have involved Liverpool at Hillsborough, there have been many drunk supporters getting into the ground, fighting broke out in the league match at the end of the 1984/85 season, and at last years semi-final there was a pitch invasion at the end of the game, Liverpool fans swarmed onto the pitch, attempting to goad and fight with Nottingham supporters. (SYP000078330001)

Similarly, PC Dearden demonstrates the ease with which such a negative frame is adopted when she writes that 'I had assumed at this point there must have been a pitch invasion and we were required for crowd control, but I soon became aware that this was not the case [...]' (SYP000108140001). The epistemic modality 'must have been' indicates the accessibility of a 'disorder' schema in the absence of explicit information, demonstrating Emmott and Alexander's claim (2014) that schemata 'compensate for any

gaps in the text' (p. 756). The problem is that once selected, 'the schema [...] determine[s] the interpretation of the situation [...] and direct[s] processing attention to selected aspects of the situation' (Rumelhart and Norman, 1976: 11). Framed in this way, it is likely that the SYP response would have been more effective had they processed or framed the situation for what it was: a large-scale disaster.

Negation as 'framing' and topic control

While some officers may have experienced a genuine schema mismatch, citing a 'pitch invasion' schema in their statements could just as easily have been an attempt to exploit the history of violence that pervaded English football in the 1980s in order to preserve the professional 'face' of the SYP by offering it as justification for their poor response on the day. Whatever their reasons, it is clear that the SYP did mitigate institutional culpability in their witness testimonies. However, they were not the only institutional body who attempted to maintain their professional 'face' in their statements; what was then known as the South Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service (SYMAS) also sought to mitigate culpability, largely through amendments to their original testimonies that conveyed greater efficacy. For example, one SYMAS officer writes of an 'abandoned' ambulance in his original statement (YAS000000700001) which was amended to 'parked' in a later statement (YAS0000001350001). Similarly, modalised assertions are expressed with more certainty in final statements than in original versions; 'I *believe* I saw an ambulance but cannot be sure' (YAS0000001010001, my italics) is changed to 'I *am sure* that I saw an ambulance' (YAS0000001820001, my italics). The HIP Report (2012) points out that the process of review and alteration was less explicit with the SYMAS statements than with the SYP's, and it could not determine who, if anyone, was involved in the construction of the statements. The Report acknowledges it was 'possible' that statements were the 'product of interviews' or possibly 'responses to questions or prompts' (2.11.141–5). I now want to consider the presence and impact of negation in a sample of the SYMAS statements,⁴ which, I argue (following Coulthard, 2002), indicates dialogicity and functions as a way of framing interpretation through controlling topics. The following section offers an analysis that substantiates the HIP Report's 'suggestion' of prompting through question/answer turns, yet goes further than the HIP Report's findings (specifically, 2.11.145–2.11.156), addressing patterns of police 'upgrading' alongside SYMAS 'ineffectiveness' throughout some of the ambulance service personnel's statements.

Constructing efficacy

Negation in discourse is considered the 'marked' variant (Horn, 1978: 127) in terms of polarity, which means that its use is generally more discursively and pragmatically foregrounded than its affirmative counterpart. Negation often carries presuppositional meaning (see Givón, 1993: 188; Hidalgo-Downing, 2000; Jordan, 1998), for example, when it foregrounds certain propositions for which there is an expectation for the opposite to be the case. To offer an example, when I was paying for a meal at a café in New York, I saw a cup at the cashier point with the following sticker: 'This is not a tip jar.' Given that cultural practices dictate that it is customary to tip restaurant staff and that this is often

done at the payment point, it would be reasonable for me to assume that the cup was, in fact, a tip jar. Jordan (1998) notes that it is a commonly held view that negated propositions are typically 'less important' (Jordan, 1998: 708) or 'less favoured' (Leech, 1983: 100) than their positive counterparts. Moreover, it will imply that 'when negative sentences ARE used, it will be for a special purpose' (Leech, 1983: 100, capitals in original). In one of the SYMAS statements, the following negation 'I asked a policeman where the control point was, *he did not know*' (YAS000000700001, my italics) does seem informative as the reader of the statement 'might reasonably hold such a presupposition at that point in the text' (Jordan, 1998: 710). In other words, readers' cultural schema for 'policeman' might lead them to deduce that police officers are knowledgeable and practised at taking and maintaining control (and therefore that he *did* know where the control point was). In this instance, you have what Wason (1965) calls a 'context of plausible denial' – in other words, the function of the negated clause 'emphasise[s] that a fact is contrary to an expectation' (p. 7).⁵

In many of the SYMAS statements, instances of negation are marked, particularly in references to time which occur with striking regularity, as the following example demonstrates:

the police guided me out into Penistone Road. **I do not know what time this was** [...] I drove up Herries Road South and from there to Herries Road bus station where I reported to Station Officer Eason. **I did not note the time.** He told me to stay with my vehicle and I waited with a group of other drivers [...] [Name redacted] and I were instructed to go to Northern General, I think by Mr Eason or by Mr Jones.

Again there were no traffic problems in getting there **but I have no recollection of what time we arrived.** (YAS000001730001)

The emboldened clauses appear to be reconstituted answers to undocumented questions which have then been inserted as monologue (see, for example, Coulthard and Johnson, 2007: 175–176, for examples of the common police practice of rendering polarity responses as monologue in witness statements). In another of the SYMAS statements, a temporary topic shift (below in bold) interrupts the flow, and as such, constitutes a meta-narrative through the summarising clause 'up to then':

11. I spoke to someone in control, I told them who I was and where I was. I described to them that it was a major incident and that I had seen possibly forty people dead. Control told me that they were already aware that it was a Major Incident.

12. Up to then I had only seen a Red Cross ambulance. I ran back out onto the pitch to the West Stand [where fans were killed].

13. The situation was chaos; – casualties were lying all over the place. The police, St. Johns and many members of the public were doing their best to give what help they could, to the injured people. (YAS000001790001)

This evaluative clause is foregrounded and emphasises its relative importance; what is considered significant here is the *lack* of SYMAS vehicles and, by implication, the

SYMAS response. In addition to these examples, in several of the statements in the small corpus I analysed, the negations seem to serve three primary functions: (a) they constitute ‘meta-narrative’ (Coulthard, 2006: 6) by evaluating events at certain points (Labov and Waletzky, 1967; Rock, 2001); (b) they suggest dialogicity (Bakhtin, 1981; see also Bakhtin’s notion of a ‘superaddressee’ or ‘third party’ to which the discourse is ultimately addressed; Bakhtin, 1986: 126), for example as answers to undocumented questions (Rock, 2001); and by extension (c) they indicate attempts to control topics. Following Leech (1983), these negative clauses are, on the surface, ‘uninformative’ in that they offer no information about timings. However, their uninformativeness is precisely what makes them informative; in the investigation into Hillsborough, the coroner established a 3:15 p.m. ‘cut-off’ time for survival of those caught up in the crush, but the first ambulance on the pitch was at 3:17 p.m. Consequently, the actions of the medical response to the disaster never came under scrutiny. The ‘relative importance’ of the negated propositions, then, is determined not by the witness alone (or even at all). As such, in what should be monologic narratives, negated clauses indicate topic control, a way of foregrounding the salience of the occurrence – or not – of particular narrative events. In the context of a witness statement, it has the effect of orienting the reader’s focus towards elements of the witnesses’ experiences that would not ordinarily be considered important or narratively significant without the priming focus of the questioning that introduces these elements as (hot) ‘topics’. Their inclusion at various points in the narrative mirrors police guidelines on interview management, summarised under the acronym PEACE (Plan and Prepare, Engage and Explain, Account, Close, Evaluate), particularly ‘A’ ‘account’, which asks officers to ‘pick a topic’, ‘probe’ it and ‘summarise’ it (PEACE guidelines). In fact, in many of the SYMAS statements, the sequencing suggests that the discourse situation is being tightly controlled by the police and not by the statement provider.⁶

I now want to consider the interpretative effect of these negations, which I argue offer further insights into (co)authorship. Many of the negated clauses in these statements reflect negatively on the SYMAS and present them as ineffective agents during the disaster (and this is in marked contrast to the SYP corpus in which great effort was made to preserve positive face). Examples from the selected statements along with their corresponding amended versions (where applicable) are outlined in Table 1.

What appears to be self-incrimination in these examples clashes with schematic expectations of paramedics’ conduct in which they are effective responders to emergency situations. Moreover, in addition to downgrading their own performance, some of these SYMAS statements *upgrade* police efficacy, either through the omission of material that would negatively evaluate the SYP or by foregrounding the SYP’s facilitative response to the disaster. For instance, the negated statement (mentioned earlier) ‘as I alighted from my car I asked a *Policeman* where the Control point was, *he did not know*’ (YAS000000700001, my italics, see Table 2: vii and viii) reappears in an amended version as ‘I asked the *ambulance crew* in the area where the control point was. The[y] said *they did not know* and they left with casualties. I do not know who that crew was’ (YAS000001350001, my italics).

Table 2 outlines further examples of police upgrading through agent substitution in the SYMAS corpus.

Table 1. SYMAS efficacy downgraded.

No.	Original statement (o) (YAS000000700001)	Amended statement (a) (YAS000001350001)	Gloss
i (see vii, viii, ix in Table 2)	After this I entered the Gymnasium itself and was shocked to see all the bodies laid out along the side wall. I tried to compose myself and think what needed to be done.	I then looked around for something else to do and went into the gym. Bodies were laid down the right hand side of the gym as I went in (down the east wall) and I was shocked by the number which were there. I5. At this stage I had not yet met an ambulance officer, or been designated a duty and had no ambulance.	(o) negation is not realized in this example and as Sweet (1891: 146) concedes, the idea of 'trying' naturally suggests that of 'succeeding'. Here, 'tried' indicates the ensuing action was difficult, and the position of the clause implies that this difficulty was due to shock. (a) This temporary shock has been reconfigured in the amended version as apathy: 'I then looked around for something else to do', whereas the negations in paragraph 15 signal summing up (cf. PEACE police guidelines). These negations defeat an expectation that the opposite should have been the case, and therefore negatively appraise the SYMAS.
ii (see vii, viii, ix in Table 2)	Doctors and Ambulancemen were treating the injured but I still could not see an Officer , so I made a quick check of how many people were ready to go to hospital and went outside.	The casualties were being treated by doctors, all in civilian clothes and ambulance men. [...] There did not seem to be anyone organising stretchers into the gym to get patients away when they were ready.	(o) The epistemic commitment here ' I could not see ', although stronger than in the amended version, does not necessarily entail there was no officer. In (a) ' there did not seem to be [...] ' explicitly points to the absence of any commanding (and thus efficacious) ambulance officer.
iii	YAS000000670001 (o)	YAS000001290001 (amended version; annotated as below)	Gloss
		Once inside, people were lying on the floor there was no officer in charge, no one to say who was most seriously hurt, and needed to go to hospital first.	As in the above example, this officer's statement includes a reference to the absence of an officer in charge that upgrades the level of epistemic commitment to the negated proposition. The underlined text was added replacing the original entry ('did not seem to be'). This full text does not appear in the original statement.

Table 1. (Continued)

	YAS000000790001 (o)	YAS000001480001 (a)	Gloss
iv	I was approached by Station Officer Eason and instructed to drive a West Yorkshire Ambulance to the Northern General as the crew were not sure where the hospital was.	I was instructed by Station Officer Paul Eason to drive a West Yorkshire ambulance, which had reversed into the ground up to the gymnasium, to Northern General Hospital, because the driver of that vehicle did not know his way to the hospital.	(o) the negation exhibits weak epistemic commitment. (a) the negation exhibits strong epistemic commitment, and negatively evaluates the SYMAS crew more explicitly than in (o).
vi (see xiv in Table 2)		YAS000001910001 (Morley)	Gloss
		One of our vehicles, I believe <u>S.407</u> had difficulties leaving the ground nearly jamming his vehicle in a gate post. I considered this could become a serious problem.	Bold type indicates negation – this negated sequence has been added (as have the underlined segments) – the event did not happen, and is thus uninformative, serving only to negatively appraise the SYMAS. The evaluative term ‘serious’ upgrades the problem amplifies the potential consequences more than is suggested by the original.

Table 2. SYP efficacy upgraded in SYMAS statements.

No.	Original statement (YAS000000700001)	Amended statement (YAS000001350001)	Gloss
vii (i Table 1)	As I alighted from my car I asked a Policeman where the Control point was, he did not know	I asked the ambulance crew in the area where the control point was. They[] said they did not know and they left with casualties. I do not know who that crew was	(o) SYP negatively evaluated through lack of knowledge. (a) SYMAS negatively evaluated through lack of knowledge.
viii (i Table 1)	I then found out where the Casualty Clearing Point was and went through the line of Police which was by this time stretched across the pitch	I asked a policeman if he knew where the control point was and he said that people were being taken towards the gymnasium	(a) SYMAS officer is the proactive agent (a) The police officer is the proactive agent
ix (i Table 1)	An Ambulance was parked outside the entrance to the Gymnasium with patients on board and the attendant in the back and a policeman in the front. I radioed Control and told them that a Policeman was driving the vehicle.	There was a group of policemen outside the gymnasium door and a police sergeant in the driving seat of the ambulance that was parked near to the gym. I contacted control over the ambulance radio and told them that the policeman was going to drive the ambulance to hospital.	(0) implicit negation (that an ambulance officer was not driving the vehicle). (a) negation upheld, but addition of police as agents is markedly increased.
	YAS00000890001 (o) Patrick Higgins, SYMAS Station officer	YAS000001620001 (a)	Gloss
x	From the start of the incident, I had tried to make a route available through the gymnasium area using both entrances, one in – one out, but this was impossible until later as Police vehicles were parked at the junction of the gymnasium area.	At some time afterwards, I filled two police vans with walking wounded. These were two of the vehicles which were actually blocking the access area. [...] At approximately 1600 hours, this area was cleared of vehicles to allow ambulances access into the ground.	The implicit presuppositional content of the negation in (o) (' tried ', ' impossible ') relates to the obstruction of the entrance by police vehicles, but this obstruction is only alluded to in the subsequent version (emboldened sentence); the adverb 'actually' implies anaphoric reference to the blockage, but explicit reference to it is omitted from the amended version.

Table 2. (Continued)

	YAS00000890001 (o) Patrick Higgins, SYMAS Station officer	YAS000001620001 (a)	Gloss
<i>xi</i>		a Police Sergeant came to our vehicle, shouting at me to go down to the Leppings lane end to assist because on the police cameras inside the ground they could see that at least 30 people had died.	the annotations on this amended version of the officers statement indicate a higher level of epistemic knowledge than was originally offered ('it was thought'), thus greater SYP control.
<i>xii</i>		I asked a police inspector to clear the gymnasium because of the need to make room for casualties. He responded immediately. It should be noted that the gymnasium was the designated point for such an incident, a fact of which I was aware of.	Underlined text has been added. In this case, it would have been newsworthy if the police officer had not responded immediately, and so the positive polarity is marked here. Arguably, the immediacy of the officers response serves to foreground his efficacy.
<i>xiii</i>	The Police Officers both men and sergeants seemed unaware of the incident plan for the ground. They wanted to put casualties and bodies into the nearest ambulance.		This conclusion was omitted (along with several other points of conclusion) from this station officers amended statement.
<i>xiv</i> (see <i>vi</i> , Table 1)		YAS000001910001 (Morley)	Gloss
		Alan and I alighted from the Range Rover. Alan left me by the Range Rover and he went to speak to a superintendent and following a short exchange to the effect 'Come on Alan , lets get this sorted out ' with that officer he ran down the vehicular access slope and onto the pitch.	Final statement exhibits upgrading by the annotator/reviewer through the inclusion of direct speech (bold type) that explicitly presents the police as more efficacious than the SYMAS officer ('Alan').

By downplaying SYMAS officers' efficacy on the one hand and upgrading the police response on the other, these amendments and additions strongly suggest that police served as co-authors in the construction of SYMAS witness statements, in which negation is employed to advance negative-assessment relations (of SYMAS; Jordan, 1998: 718) or to deny schematic expectations of the ambulance service as efficacious in an emergency.

Conclusion

In a study exploring the 'genesis of a witness statement', Rock (2001) points out that witness statements 'are seen to "stand in" for the witness, to speak throughout investigations when witnesses themselves are not present' (p. 46). However, when that narrative is framed through a particular lens (in this case by employing topic selection and salience), the resulting narrative is not *only* the witness's story. Axelrod (1973) notes that 'a common error in recalling an experience is to recall the part that fits a schema and forget the part that does not fit' (p. 1255). What I have demonstrated in my analysis of these statements so far is that information seems to have been elicited in order to 'fit' not only with a 'hooligan' schema, but with an effective policing schema, thus producing a 'framed' narrative that concords with other witness statements. For example, negated references to stewards (i.e. not being present or seen) were significantly high, particularly amongst the fans' statements. Further research into the archive yielded minutes from a meeting a few days after the disaster in which the process for generating statements was discussed with key SYP figures. In them, Superintendent Mole (Duckenfield's predecessor) considers it important to address the 'value of stewards being seen' in the evidence-gathering process (SYP000096290001). The linguistic evidence suggests that what may not have been salient in the recollections of witnesses was given prominence in their statements by a third party who was controlling the discourse situation. Axelrod continues that 'in general, material is recalled in a manner which indicates that it has been selected, organized and interpreted' (p. 1255). When someone other than the witness is controlling the 'selection' and 'organisation', they are by default partly controlling the 'interpretation'. Unfortunately, as Rock (2001) acknowledges, 'juries are not typically urged to consider what questions might have been asked by a police officer during the taking of a statement' (p. 47). This is bad enough when only one or two statements in a particular legal case constitute evidence, but when thousands of statements are involved the scope for reinforcing a particular narrative is overwhelming; as Bruner (1991) notes, 'narratives [...] accrue, and, as anthropologists insist, the accruals eventually create something variously called "culture" or a "history"' (p. 14). The plausibility of institutional stories is even greater when a history of 'cases' of football hooliganism exists, giving rise to a new 'cultural schema' – the hooliganisation of Liverpool fans – that may have been, for those who sought to blame them, a very convenient 'truth'.⁷ When more powerful witnesses in a case select and act upon incorrect schemata, inadvertently or intentionally, the result is often a dangerous, *precisely because* plausible, story.

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This was a pejorative description of the fans given by Marshall, the police officer who opened gate 'C' at the ground (reference item SYP000002190001, HIP archive). I use it here in a positive sense.

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Notes

1. At the time of writing, Duckenfield is currently awaiting trial for manslaughter of 95 of the 96 killed at Hillsborough.
2. The reviewer of this article rightfully points out that this particular category list is alphabetised, which may give chance salience to 'alcohol'. However, as the remaining categories are not listed alphabetically, 'alcohol' is more likely to be intentionally foregrounded here than not.
3. Speaking in Parliament on 17 April 1989, Roy Hattersley, deputy leader of the Labour Party at the time of Hillsborough, acknowledged the specificity of a 'hooligan' schema when he corrected fellow speaker, Douglas Hurd, who noted that 'the purpose of the barriers (at the ground) is to [...] improve protection from one type of threat – violence'. Hattersley responded with 'not violence – hooliganism' (YAS000003060001: *Parliamentary Debates*, 6(151): 23).
4. The sample ($n=14$) includes some of those highlighted in the HIP Report as having undergone review and amendment.
5. Coulthard, for example, has drawn attention to the relative informativeness of the negation of reasonably derived inferences in the statements of Patrick Molloy and Derek Bentley (2002: 31).
6. There is also frequent use of the phrase 'this I did', which subsumes a great deal of the embedded foregoing proposition by ellipsis and which appeared in over half of the SYMAS statements in my small sample. I deal with this elsewhere (in preparation) and argue that it is indicative of a police register, strengthening the suggestion of police involvement in the co-construction of SYMAS statements.
7. According to minutes of a meeting with Police Federation chairperson Paul Middup and members of the SYP on 19 April 1989, Chief Constable Peter Wright urged the SYP 'to prepare a rock solid story' in anticipation of their 'defence'. The minutes note 'Once we have the history we can then produce the facts' (TPF000000010001, p. 11).

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