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APLICADA**

**THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF RESPONSIBILITY:
STRATEGIES USED BY POLITICAL AND MILITARY WITNESSES IN PUBLIC
HEARINGS**

**TRABAJO DE TESIS PRESENTADO POR
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ABSTRACT

From the perspective of current situated discourse analysis and the associated disciplinary strands of conversational analysis, narrative studies and critical discourse analysis, this study examines how political and military elite witnesses construct versions of reality in the context of the public hearing and argues for the contestable nature of such versions. This study draws upon a multimodal approach which views discourse as an inherently complex process and product involving various semiotic layers, particularly, language and gesture which are intricately interwoven. The examination of the data reveals the systematic and strategic concurrence of resources of various kinds. It is shown how carefully elaborated texts are constituted through the use of evasion strategies (refusal to answer, reformulation and impersonalization), sensemaking practices and argumentative moves (scrip-formulation, counterfactual account, recourse to the lesson-deriving frame), and choreographed non-verbal resources (bodily orientation, facial expression and gesture); and how through these resources participants manage to deflect damaging attributions of personal and institutional responsibility and blame. An exploration of conversational dynamics shows that elite witnesses are often allowed to disregard the responsibilities and obligations defined by their situational roles as interrogators fail to gain, exert and maintain interactional control. It is possible to suggest hence that these witnesses benefit from some special licences which ultimately permit them to shape content, form and information flow. This study concludes by tapping into the dialectical link between discourse and society unveiling the particular ways in which strategic public discourse represents an instrument of social manipulation and hegemonic control which, far from generating genuine public dialogue, works to manufacture a false sense of debate as well as an equally false sense of consensus and resolution.

Key Words: Responsibility, Multimodality, Discourse Strategies

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

The Iraq War began on March 20th, 2003 and ended on August 19th 2010 with the start of Operation New Dawn. From the beginning, its legality and legitimacy have been questioned because the decision was made by two countries, the United States and United Kingdom, without a formal authorization by the United Nations. On April 30th 2009, British troops ended combat operations in Iraq after six years of service in the country. With troops returning home, in a context of increasing domestic discontent, the British Labour government could no longer resist the calls made by British citizens and interest groups who required their political and military leaders to account for their actions during the war period. Later on that year, on July 30th, the Labour government launched an official inquiry into the UK's involvement in Iraq to be run by a private ad-hoc committee. Its public face, the long-awaited public hearings, started on November 24th at a crucial period when Britain approached a General Election.

Despite the official mandate of the inquiry specifying that it was solely concerned with ascertaining the facts of what had happened and identifying the lessons learnt for future engagements, responsibility was frequently topicalized and discussed at the sessions of the public hearings. Indeed, on many occasions, the inquiry board questioned witnesses to determine their responsibility for the political and military failure of the operation and the controversial management of the war. Witnesses also used the opportunity to locate and negotiate responsibility and blame and particularly worked discursively to deflect attributions of personal and institutional responsibility.

The public hearings of the Iraq Inquiry then provide a propitious site for the investigation of the discursive construction of responsibility. Through a multimodal, descriptive-interpretative-explanatory analysis, this study examines the mechanisms underlying such complex phenomenon and presents findings about current sensemaking and impression-management practices in public discourse. It concludes with a critique of government accountability in contemporary democratic societies.

1.1. Background

Previous work related to this study can be found in Ehrlich & Sidnell (2006, 2008), Gnisci and Bonaiuto (2003), Sidnell (2004), Bull (2008), and Matoesian (2002, 2005). These studies investigated the oral performance of politicians in adversative contexts such as the political interview, the public inquiry and the courtroom. These studies examined a number of discourse mechanisms through which politicians avoid having to account for possibly blameworthy actions. Particularly, Ehrlich and Sidnell analyzed a video recording of the oral testimony of the then-premier of Ontario, Canada, Michael Harries, in the context of the Walkerton inquiry in 2001. They found that Harries successfully employed different verbal manoeuvres to deflect disruptive constructions of the events and attributions of responsibility. They included the production of non-conforming type of answers, the denial of damaging presuppositions and the use of extreme case formulations such as “there is risk in everything” and “every meeting of Cabinet is important” (Sidnell, 2004). Gnisci and Bonaiuto compared answers by politicians in television interviews and courtroom examinations. They showed that politicians use equivocation to cope with difficult situations including responding to hostile or communicative conflict questions. Like Bull (2008), they concluded that political equivocation can be explained in terms of face management. Finally, Matoesian examined a questioning strategy in trial cross-examination designed to control an evasive witness and found that ‘nailing down an answer’ often involves the manipulation of multidimensional strategies, linguistic ideologies and epistemological criteria.

Other important studies are Atkinson (1999), Abell and Stokoe (1999), Clayman (1992), MacMillan and Edwards (1999), Achugar (2007), and Oteiza & Pinto (2008). They focused on the discourse strategies through which different kinds of socially accountable public actors, such as medical doctors, members of the royalty, journalists and military officers, manage personal and institutional responsibility. Specifically, Abell and Stokoe described the verbal strategies that Princess Diana used in a televised interview to manage blame in relation to her divorce with Prince Charles. MacMillan and Edwards examined how the British press worked to play

down their responsibility for the death of Princess Diana. Atkinson's ethnographic research focused on the linguistic practices of medical doctors and in-training doctors in the construction of professional responsibility in case presentation during medical rounds. He explained how zones of responsibility are carefully delineated among medical professionals. Achugar and Oteiza & Pinto explored the link between agency and responsibility in the representation of the Chilean and Spanish military dictatorships. They showed that impersonal structures have been systematically manipulated in official documents and textbooks to avoid responsibility, silence claims of injustices and restore a sense of social order.

Despite the growing importance of inquiry testimonies for constructing a sense of shared meanings for a society and its key institutions, we know very little about how the concrete details of this communicative practice which mediates our interpretation and assessment of socially accountable actors. In this light, the present study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the complex interplay of verbal and non-verbal strategies employed in oral testimonies designed to generate interested narratives of the social world and support the legitimacy of political and military institutions. This study aims at unveiling some of the prevailing ideologies underlying public inquiries conducted by governmentally mandated bodies and their effects in shaping the interaction among witnesses and members of inquiry. By focusing on the interpenetration of speech and the bodily conduct in the contextualization of meaning, this work tracks the elusive, but crucial, reflexive relationship between discourse and ideology and its effects on the constitution of social reality.

1.2. Defining the research problem

Drawing on a corpus of videotaped recordings of six oral testimonies produced by three politicians and three military chiefs, this study examines the complex phenomenon of the discursive construction of responsibility in the context of a historically significant event: the first televised public inquiry in the UK.. It compares and contrasts the discourse strategies employed by both categories of witnesses and their effects. This study contributes to understanding the negotiation of responsibility

in public discourse by exposing the strategic mechanisms through which elite witnesses, in association and collaboration with other interested social actors, seek to convince an audience that they performed their duties diligently.

The questions that orient this study are: what verbal strategies do witnesses draw upon in the construction of responsibility in the public hearings of the Iraq Inquiry? What other semiotic modes accompany them? How does the use of these strategies vary according to category membership? And, what effects result from their use?

The hypotheses are: 1) given the socio-political conditions surrounding the speech event, it is plausible to expect witnesses to work out blameless accounts of the past; 2) because of their more prominent role as accountable figures and the closeness to a General Election, it can be expected that politicians will be more preoccupied with upholding a positive self and party image; 3) due to their experience in public speaking, politicians are expected to deploy more rhetorically oriented discourse strategies.

The general objective of this study is to contribute to an understanding of ways of managing responsibility in public discourse. The specific objectives are: a) to describe the discourse strategies employed by military and political witnesses in oral testimonies, and to examine their underlying ideologies; b) to identify the similarities and differences and to evaluate their implications in the circulation of social representations; c) to establish connections among discursive strategies, interactional alignments and socio-political conditions.

1.3. The theoretical framework

This study is grounded on the epistemological paradigm of social constructionism in discourse analysis, more specifically, in the traditions of Potter (1996), Fairclough (1995a), Van Dijk (1997a, 1997b) and Wodak (1999). This perspective rejects the essentialist view of language as a mirror or a mere representation of a reality and, alternatively, focuses upon what is constructed

between people in social interaction and the mental models about the world that are produced, maintained and contested through discourse. This perspective focuses upon how people construct versions of social reality and argues for the contestable nature of such social constructs. Its main interest is the ideological function of discourse, that is, the processes by which abstract values and beliefs are brought into texts.

Many definitions of discourse have typically foregrounded the linguistic properties of texts as well as backgrounded other aspects of it. From a more illuminating socio-semiotic perspective, Fairclough defines discourse as a complex type of social practice, involving language as well as other semiotic modes. In his words,

I shall use discourse to refer primarily to spoken or written language use, though I would also wish to extend it to include semiotic practice in other semiotic modalities such as photography and non-verbal (e.g. gestural communication). But in referring to language use as discourse, I am signalling a wish to investigate it in a social-theoretically informed way, as a form of social practice (1995b, p. 131)

This perspective, like that of Van Dijk (2006a, 2006b), Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006), views discourse as an inherently complex process and product, involving different types of discursive practices inevitably bound up with causes and consequences at different levels of social representation and cognition. This is the perspective that informs the present critical approach to discourse as socially significant mode of action.

From the late 70's the concept of discourse strategies has been a prominent one in linguistics and discourse studies. Gumperz (1982) originally referred to discourse strategies as "the communicative functions of linguistic variability and its relation to speakers' goals" (p. 29). Yet, as several authors such as Wodak (2001) and Carranza (2008) suggested, the concept of discourse strategy is not exhausted by the limited meaning of a means to an end. Wodak remarks "by strategy we generally mean a more or less accurate and more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social,

political, psychological or linguistic aim” (2001, p.73). This definition highlights the use of systematic and recurrent ways of using meaning making practices for achieving success in particular areas of social life. Carranza recognizes “ the fuzzy limits between behaviour that can be considered automatic and behaviour that can confidently be called strategic ” and defines the latter as a “ part of an overall plan that underlies multiple linguistic realizations at a variety of levels in a text and is meant to forward the speaker’s communicative and interactional ends ” (2008, p.33). In this way, she avers that automatic and calculated choices combine and coexist in a single text and thus not all choices or all texts can be regarded as the product of deliberate design. In spite of this complication, she notices that certain genres, such political speeches, can be confidently characterized as strategically designed and carefully rehearsed because they represent the work of a team of political and language specialists. Taking these issues into consideration, the present study focuses on an exploration of oral performance features which, due to their recurrence or systematic nature in oral testimonies, may be interpreted as the product of team effort rather than an individual’s idiosyncrasy.

Drawing upon a multidisciplinary theory of ideology which centres on the discourse-ideology link, this study seeks to expose the ideological function of discourse by exploring the system of beliefs that are present in textual manifestations. In this study, “ideologies are defined as basic systems of fundamental social cognitions and organizing the attitudes and other social representations shared by members of a group ” (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 243). That is, they are not seen as individual constructs but as socially shared representations related to socio-political structures involving a set of partisan and interested systems of beliefs (ideas, thoughts, judgements and values) which provide more or less relevant or efficient frameworks for the interpretation of particular social groups and their actions. On the basis of the theoretically grounded pioneer work of Habermas (1989) on the public sphere and its distinction between the apparatus of the state and public areas of citizen discourse, this study explores certain ideologies manifested in official public discourse, such as open access and participatory parity, which are central to a conception of the public sphere in democratic systems.

Finally, informed by literature on the socio-political conditions of late-modern democratic societies (Bostdorff, 1994; Fraser, 1990; Giddens; 1998, 2000; Goddard et. al., 2008; Lewandowsky et. al., 2005), this study concludes with a critique of contemporary systems of democracy.

1.4. The methodological approach

The methodology adopted for the present study is descriptive- interpretative-explanatory (Fairclough, 1989). The macro-sequential steps adhered to here consist of: describing the formal or surface properties of multimodal texts and examining the effects of those texts in social contexts. The design of this study is process-oriented, that is, it is flexible and open to changes as deeper understanding is gained from working with the data. What follows is a specification of the criteria for the selection and collection of the corpus and the procedures for handling the data.

1.4.1. Selection of the corpus

The corpus for this study consists of the digitalized video recordings of six oral testimonies produced at the public hearings of the Iraq Inquiry in the UK. This corpus is divided into two sub-corpora: the first one includes three testimonies produced by military witnesses; the second one, three testimonies produced by political witnesses. Working with a public forum allowed for access to large amounts of data. By the time I finished the data gathering phase, I had collected approximately 960 hours of video recordings comprising about 70 testimonies together with background documents: written testimonies, personal statements, letters to and from the inquiry board, declassified documents and protocols. Thus, for the purpose of creating a manageable and comparable corpus, three criteria based on visibility, category membership and a time frame were established.

On the basis of visibility, I decided to dispense with video recordings where speakers were not fully visible at all times or where the angle of the camera was not beneficial. On the basis of category membership, I narrowed the scope for research subjects by focusing only on two particular categories, namely, top-rank military

officers (Generals, Commanders and Air Marshals) and top-post politicians (Prime Ministers and Cabinet Members). Finally, on the basis of a time frame, I decided to include only those testimonies produced at the first round of public hearings, that is, from 29th January until 8th March 2010. This period was significant in the United Kingdom because it coincided with the run-up to the General Elections which were to be held on the 6th of May.

The result of this process yielded approximately 18 hours of video recordings comprising the oral testimonies of three political and three military witnesses. The collection of the testimonies included downloading ¹ the selected videos together with their transcripts from an official website (<http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk>) and saving them in computer data files and back-up copies ensuring high quality.

1.4.2. The procedures

The analytical procedures employed were adopted from various associated research traditions: conversational analysis (Pomerantz, 1984, 1986; Sacks, 1995; Schegloff, 2007a, 2007b), narrative studies in interactional contexts (Carranza, 1998; De Fina, 2009; Cotterill, 2003), discourse analysis (Johnstone, 2002; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Goodwin, 2007; Raiter & Zullo, 2008; Scollon & Levine, 2004) and, specifically, gesture studies (Alibali, Heath & Myers, 2001; Cassell, McNeill & McCullough 1998; Chui, 2009; Goldin-Meadow, 1997; Goodwin, 2007; Kendon 2004, McNeill, 1992, Montes, 2007). These traditions are deemed compatible as they share a

¹ Step-by-step procedure to download the video files from <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/>

1. Go to <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/transcripts/oralevidence-bydate.aspx>
2. Select the date of the hearing and then choose a testimony, for example, March 5th, 2010, testimony of Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/transcripts/oralevidence-bydate/100305.aspx>
3. Right click on the website and select the option "view page source"
4. Press Ctrl+F on your keyboard and a box for search words will pop-up
5. Write .flv in the search box
6. Copy and paste the URL in a new tab, for example, <http://www.cabinetoffice.c.bowtietv.net/IraqInquiry/IraqInquiry-2010-03-05am.flv>
7. Press the save option on the box that will pop-up

core objective: a search for understanding the ways in which speakers engage in meaning making activities to make sense of the worlds about them.

Specifically, the step-by-step processes followed in this study were five. First, after several readings of the transcripts and viewings of the videos, sequences were identified where the phenomenon of interest occurred. To delimit a sequence, identifiable boundaries were searched such as interactional turns, exchanges and topic shift. Secondly, the action(s) in the sequences were characterized by using questions such as: what is this participant doing here? What interactional goals orient their behaviour? Third, the packaging of the actions was described considering the selection of linguistic and other semiotic resources. Fourth, segments of such multimodal conduct were selected over alternative ones through questions such as: what options does this package provide for the recipient? Finally, these findings were interpreted drawing on contextual information and relevant literature.

This study has the potential to make relevant contributions at various levels. In the dimension of discourse as social practice, it can shed light on the complex interplay of semiotic processes underlying witnesses' testimonies and the systematic use of discursive strategies designed to managing responsibility in public discourse. Also, it may provide an account of the ways in which discourse practice constitutes and is constituted by social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge in specific ways. Finally, studies like this may promote and stimulate a more critical consumption of multimodal texts by revealing current ideologies in public discourse.

1.5. The organization of this document

Having provided an introduction to this study including the state of the art, the chosen theoretical and methodological perspectives and potential contributions, I can proceed to present the organization of this document. Chapter 2 provides an account of the historical, political and situational background to the production of inquiry testimonies. Chapter 3 presents an initial approximation to multimodal discourse phenomena by discussing some visual cues such as posture, head movement and facial expressions. Chapter 4 focuses on witnesses' recurrent use of three evasive strategies:

refusal to answer, reformulation, and impersonalization. Chapter 5 deals with argumentation, particularly, witnesses' use of script-formulations and counter-factual accounts, and their manipulation of the lesson frame. Chapter 6 complements the exploration of non-verbal strategies by focusing on speech-accompanying gestures and their contribution to an overall performance. Finally, Chapter 7 draws conclusions on the basis of the discursive phenomena identified and reveals some discrepancies between rhetoric and material reality.

CHAPTER TWO: The context

Viewing discourses as an integral and important part of a society implies, first, that they are a historically and socially situated mode of action (Fairclough, 1995b) and, second, that their study can shed light on complex social processes and relations (Duranti, 2000). In this light, the present chapter starts with a brief description of the historical, social, political and situational contexts surrounding their production. Contextual information is central to opening up a window to the examination of goal-oriented communicative behaviour and provides a sound basis for its pragmatic interpretation. Indeed, as Chilcot (2004) highlights, this information is vital to transcend the surface of texts and understand and explain why social agents act the way they do and to what effects.

2.1. The Iraq War and its aftermath from a UK perspective

The UK's official participation in the Iraq War also known as Operation Telic in the UK, the Second Gulf War or Operation Iraqi Freedom in the US, and the Occupation of Iraq in other areas began on March 20th, 2003 and ended on August 19th, 2010 with the start of the American Operation New Dawn and the Iraqization of the conflict. The main justification for this military involvement provided by then British Prime Minister Tony Blair, was the false claim that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and therefore represented an imminent, urgent and immediate threat to the international community. Less overt reasons included political and economic interests shared by the former American President George W. Bush and his British counterpart Tony Blair such as the removal of Saddam Hussein, the end of Iraqi financial support for Palestinian militants and the exploitation of oil reserves in the country. From its outset, the legitimacy of the war was questioned, particularly, due to its implementation without the authorization of the United Nations. At present, the disclosure of secret documents and the coalition's failure to find a 'smoking gun' in Saddam's Iraq have significantly heated up that debate.

With the formal retreat of British troops from Iraq on April 30th, 2009², after six years of service in the country, the British Labour government could no longer resist a public inquiry³ into its management of the conflict with the old argument that such an inquiry could compromise an ongoing mission. On June 15th, 2009, Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced the setting up of the Iraq Inquiry to the House of Commons⁴. This announcement was met with a wail of criticism, mainly, by leaders of the opposition, bereaved families, and media critics. First, the selection of the ad-hoc committee to run the inquiry was discredited because of their connections with government. Particularly, the appointment of Sir John Chilcot as the Chairman was questioned due to his participation in a former related inquiry, the Butler inquiry, which acquitted former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair from responsibility for the intentional insertion of false claims about Iraq's possession of WMD in the 2002 September Dossier. Also, the initial decision to hold hearings *in camera* alleging reasons of national security⁵ enhanced public suspicion. Later on, Sir John Chilcot partially reversed this decision and some hearings came to be public while others

2Ministry of Defence Website. (2009). Retrieve from <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/FactSheets/OperationsInIraqAboutTheUkMissionInIraq.htm>

3Public inquiries, formerly known as royal commissions, have been run in the UK since the Middle Ages. At that time kings had the authority to appoint a commission to investigate and report on matters of public concern. Today, prime ministers have that power and they decide upon the establishment of an inquiry, its members, timing and objectives. Public Inquiries are usually set up in the aftermath of a tragedy or a conflict with political implications with the aim to restore public confidence or trust in government institutions or officials. The committee of an inquiry is ad hoc and chaired by a well-known public figure such as a professor, a lord, a judge or a senior civil servant. The mandate of the inquiry can be fact-finding, policy-based or a combination of both. Unlike criminal or civil trials, inquiries do aim to apportion blame and culpability; and their proceedings are not constrained by fixed rules of practice. During the public hearings phase, a committee seeks to gather information through inquisitorial hearings, taking evidence directly from witnesses.

4 UK parliament: House of Commons. (2009). Retrieved from <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090624/debtext/90624-0004.htm>

5 Neil, Andrew (2009, June 24). Iraq enquiry row rumbles on. BBC. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/dailypolitics/andrewneil/2009/06/iraq_enquiry_row_rumbles_on.html

remained private. Finally, the delayed publication of the final report also generated strong feelings as it would be conveniently published after the 2010 General Elections. This general dissatisfaction was reflected by the British newspaper The Guardian⁶ which soon published a headline announcing “ a t hird round of Iraq whitewashing” , after the Hutton (2003) and Butler (2004) inquiries which came up with the same comforting conclusions about the management of the conflict: mistakes have been made but they are not the government’s fault.

2.2. The Iraq Inquiry as a situational context

The Iraq Inquiry was officially launched with a press conference on July 30th, 2009. On this occasion, the chair of the inquiry, Sir John Chilcot, explained its nature, scope and purpose:

This is an inquiry by a committee of Privy Councillors. It will consider the period from the summer of 2001 to the end of July 2009, embracing the run-up to the conflict in Iraq, the military action and its aftermath. We will, therefore, be considering the United Kingdom’s involvement in Iraq, including the way decisions were made and actions taken, to establish as accurately and reliably as possible what happened, and to identify the lessons that can be learned.⁷

Despite the committee’s interest in generating public confidence, an online opinion poll published by The Guardian⁸ that same day reported that 93% of the readers who participated did not believe the Iraq Inquiry would lead to significant new information.

The first round of public hearings began on November 24th, 2009 and lasted until March 8th, 2010. At this point, the hearings were suspended during the run-up to

⁶ Hyde, Marina (2009, July 31). My alternative to another round of Iraq whitewashing. The Guardian. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/jul/31/iraq-inquiry-fourth-plinth-chilcot>

Ross, Carne (2009, November 15). The country needs the Iraq inquiry. What a shame it will be a whitewash. The Guardian. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/nov/15/chilcot-inquiry-iraq-war>

⁷ Chilcot, John (2009, July 30). Retrieved from <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/about/statement.aspx>

⁸ The Guardian. (2009). Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/poll/2009/jul/30/iraq-iraq>

the General Elections in May. In this round, the committee heard evidence from governmental officials with first-hand experience of the development and implementation of British foreign policy in Iraq. Media coverage of the hearings painted a hopeless and grim picture. The Guardian headline read “ Iraq Inquiry day one: No sound, no fury ”⁹ and Inside Story, a TV programme broadcast by Al Jazeera English, characterized the hearings as “a costly cover-up”¹⁰ for Britain”.

2.2.1. The protocols

The protocols of the Iraq Inquiry ¹¹ defined its public hearings as an instance of open participation in the process of decision making. During the hearings, the inquiry committee had access to oral testimonies through direct interaction with the interested participants. For this purpose, the committee, with the funding of the government, set up an institutional space so that all those who could be affected by evidence or had interest in it could participate by giving testimony, presenting questions or observing the procedures. The public hearings were broadcast live on television and radio and published on the internet. They were the most visible part of the inquiry process and attracted most of the media and public attention.

The public hearings consisted of three consecutive phases: the preparation, the presentation of oral evidence and the publication of written transcripts. The first instance was private. Following the protocol for witnesses giving evidence ¹², the committee invited at its discretion a variety of subjects to appear in the hearings in the capacity of witnesses. During this phase, the committee instructed future witnesses on

⁹ Bates, Stephen. (2009, November 24).Iraq inquiry day one: No sound, no fury of war. Just very agreeable. The Guardian. Retrieved from:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/nov/24/iraq-war-inquiry-first-day>

¹⁰ Inside story. Al Jazeera English. (2009, November 24). Retrieved from: <http://vodpod.com/watch/2575576-inside-story-the-iraq-inquiry-24-nov-09>

¹¹ <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/background.aspx>

¹² Protocol for witnesses giving evidence to the Iraq Inquiry. Iraq Inquiry. Retrieved from:

<http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/background/protocols/witnesses.aspx>

Protocol for hearing evidence by the Iraq Inquiry in public, and for identifying witnesses. Iraq Inquiry. Retrieved from: <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/background/protocols/hearing.aspx>

the topics to be explored and discussed in their sessions and offers them legal advice. In accordance to what was agreed on the protocol of the 29th of October 2009¹³, witnesses could be requested to submit written testimony at this stage in order to decide whether the session would be public or private. If the content was considered suitable, the witnesses were required to attend a public session. At the public hearing, they were interrogated directly by the members of the inquiry committee. After the interrogation, witnesses were given the opportunity to make a final comment on a topic of their choice. Testimonies obtained in this way were of consultative and nonbinding character. Yet, witnesses were required to sign a written transcript certifying that the evidence was true, faithful and accurate. If witnesses were not satisfied with a transcript, they were allowed to make corrections or modifications which were inserted as footnotes. This transcript was later published on the inquiry website for public consultation¹⁴.

2.2.2 The participants

Like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings (TRC) in South Africa (Verdoolaege, 2009), the public hearings of the Iraq Inquiry in the United Kingdom can be described as “podium events” or high profile media events. Verdoolaege stressed the theatricality of such mediatised public events and classified them as “sensational drama spectacles” (p. 444). Moreover, he pointed out that such complex discursive settings imply a highly intricate and layered participation framework (Goffman, 1981) including: 1) the members of the inquiry board, 2) the witnesses, 3) the co-present and the extended audience. That is, due to their public nature, these hearings clearly transcended the immediate context of situation and its co-present participants and reached out to people who watched, listened to or read the testimonies on television, radio, the web or in newspapers. This audience may thus encompass

¹³ Iraq Inquiry information sharing Protocol (2009, October 29) Iraq Inquiry information sharing Protocol. Cabinet Office. Retrieved from <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/conduct-ethics/iraq-inquiry-protocol.aspx>

¹⁴ Oral Evidence. Iraq Inquiry. Retrieved from <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/transcripts/oralevidence-bydate.aspx>

groups as varied as the opposition party, the Labour party, Crown members, governments and citizens of allied countries, pro-Sunni or pro-Shíia groups, pro-Israel or pro-Palestine groups and members of the banking or petroleum industry. The status of this extended audience clearly had a significant effect on the discourse produced by the situated participants in this mediated event. As Montes & Charaudeau (2009) note, the staging of a scene can be very frequently rightly understood as directed to producing certain effects on those experiencing it particularly through the media.

2.2.2.1. The inquiry board

The inquiry board ¹⁵ was made up of an allegedly non-partisan committee of five counsellors: Sir John Chilcot, Sir Roderic Lyne, Sir Martin Gilbert, Sir Lawrence Freedman, Baroness Usha Prashar. Sir John Chilcot is the Chairman, after whom the Iraq Inquiry was referred to as the Chilcot Inquiry. He is a well-known career diplomat and senior civil servant. He participated in several inquiries in the past.

Sir Roderic Lyne is also a long-standing civil servant. He was the Private Secretary to the Prime Minister for Foreign Affairs, Defence and Northern Ireland (1993- 1996) and a member of Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service from 1970 to 2004. Sir Lawrence Freedman is a military historian and professor of War Studies at King's College London. He was the foreign policy advisor to the former Prime Minister Tony Blair and he is recognized as the author ¹⁶ of the humanitarian arguments Tony Blair used in his 1999 Chicago speech to justify the Kosovo War. Sir Martin Gilbert is a lecturer on military history and international affairs at Oxford University. He is Winston Churchill's official biographer. On December 26 th, 2004, he published a

¹⁵ Official Biographies of the inquiry members. Iraq Inquiry. Retrieved from <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/people.aspx>

¹⁶ Memo from Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman to Jonathan Powell. (1999, April 16). Retrieved from <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/42664/freedman-powell-letter.pdf>

controversial article¹⁷ in the Observer entitled “Statesmen for these times” where he argued that Tony Blair and George W. Bush may one day be seen as akin to Churchill and Roosevelt; “they may well (...) join the ranks of Roosevelt and Churchill. Their societies are too divided today to deliver a calm judgment”.

The last member of the committee is Baroness Usha Prashar. She is a crossbencher in the House of Lords and the current chairwoman of the Judicial Appointments Commission. She has a distinguished career in public service in matters of Human Rights, Race Relations, and Literacy and Women. She is the only female and immigrant panellist as well as the only member of the panel who was not educated in the traditional British universities such as Eton, Oxford or Cambridge.¹⁸ This committee takes secretarial support from Margaret Aldred, former Director and Deputy Head of the Foreign and Defence Policy Secretariat in the Cabinet Office.

2.2.2.2. The witnesses

The six witnesses selected as research subjects for this study are:



Figure 1: Tony Blair

Labour Prime Minister (2001- 2007)



Figure 2: Gordon Brown

Chancellor of the Exchequer (2001-2007)
Labour Prime Minister (2007-2010)

¹⁷ Gilbert, Martin (2004, December 26). Statesmen for these times. The Observer. Retrieved from <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1379819,00.html>

¹⁸ Haywood, Lindsay (2009, July 30). The Iraq Inquiry: Members of the Panel. The Global Herald. Retrieved from: <http://theglobalherald.com/the-iraq-inquiry-members-of-the-panel/612/>



Figure 3: David Miliband Labour

MP (2003-2006)
Secretary of State for Foreign and
Commonwealth Affairs (2007-2009)



Figure 4: Air Chief Marshal Jock Stirrup

Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (2002-2003)
Chief of Air Staff (2003-2006) Chief of
Defence Staff (2006- 2009)



**Figure 5: General Michael Walker,
(Retired) Lord of Aldringham**

Chief of the General Staff (2001- 2003)
Chief of the Defence Staff (2003-2006)



Figure 6: General McColl

Senior British military representative in
Bagdad (2004)

The first political witness from our sample to appear at the inquiry was Tony Blair. On the 29th of January, 2010, he gave oral testimony for approximately six hours in his capacity as former Prime Minister. Specifically, he testified about his foreign-policy decision to invade Iraq, the decision-making processes employed to this effect, the international diplomatic negotiations he undertook at the United Nations and with

the United States, the way in which he presented this new policy to Parliament and the British people, and the planning he undertook for the actual invasion and its aftermath.

After Tony Blair, his successor Gordon Brown voluntarily decided to appear at the public hearings. The committee had already decided not to take testimony from him until after the May General Elections as he was running as candidate for the Labour Party. But, he particularly requested to appear before that time and the committee accepted. Thus, on the 5th of March, 2010, he gave testimony about his decision to support the invasion of Iraq, the economic measures he implemented as head of the Treasury for financing the military operation, his approach to the aftermath of the invasion as Prime Minister and his decision to shift military effort from Iraq to Afghanistan from 2006. The last political witness from this corpus to appear at the hearings was David Miliband. On the 8th of March, immediately after Gordon Brown, he gave testimony about his support for the invasion, the Foreign Office decision to negotiate with militia groups in Basra, but not with the kidnappers of British citizens, and the diplomatic relations Britain undertook with Iran and the new provisional Iraqi government.

The first military witness from our sample to appear at the hearings was Air Chief Marshal Jock Stirrup. On the 1st of February, 2010, he gave testimony about the procurement of the military kit for the invasion, the British capability for air mobility in Iraq, the growing insurgency in Basra and the military strategy to terminate engagement in the region. In the afternoon, General Michael Walker, Baron of Aldringham, resumed the day session by elaborating on the military planning for the invasion, the aftermath and the drawdown. Like his air force counterpart, his testimony focused mainly on the procurement process for the military kit and the counterinsurgency operations undertaken on the ground.

The last military witness to appear before the committee was General Sir John McColl. On the 8th of February, 2010, he gave evidence about the coalition perspective from Baghdad, the actual decision-making mechanisms on the ground and the partnership established between the UK and the US in Iraq as well as their

relationships with other foreign representatives and the local Iraqi authorities. Due to the positions of institutional authority that these elite witnesses occupy, their stakes at the inquiry are particularly high. That is, they face a very real danger of having their professional or personal reputations seriously affected or damaged by such public exposition.

2.2.2.3. The audience(s)

The co-present audience was mainly made up of journalists from different media outlets covering the event. Yet, as documented in the Parliamentary debate of the 9th of February, 2010¹⁹, the UK Broadcasting Pool, a partnership between the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), Sky News and ITN (Independent Television News), had exclusive access for broadcasting as set up in a contract with government. This contract included an obligation for distributing footage conforming to the Cabinet Office rules of coverage and prohibited the use of individual recorders. This agreement stipulated that all broadcasting of the public hearings relied on the same high-resolution set of video recordings which conveniently decides on a camera angle and excludes some information such as background noises.

Representatives of the general public were also present at the sessions. Public access to the hearings was generally granted on a first-come first-served basis and anybody interested in attending a session could do so provided they arrived in advance to go through registration and security. Most sessions were not oversubscribed so it was not difficult to ensure a seat. Yet, high profile sessions significantly increased public demand and, consequently, at those times, seats were allocated in advance via public ballots. This was the case at the hearings of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown where a portion of the seats in the room were set aside for

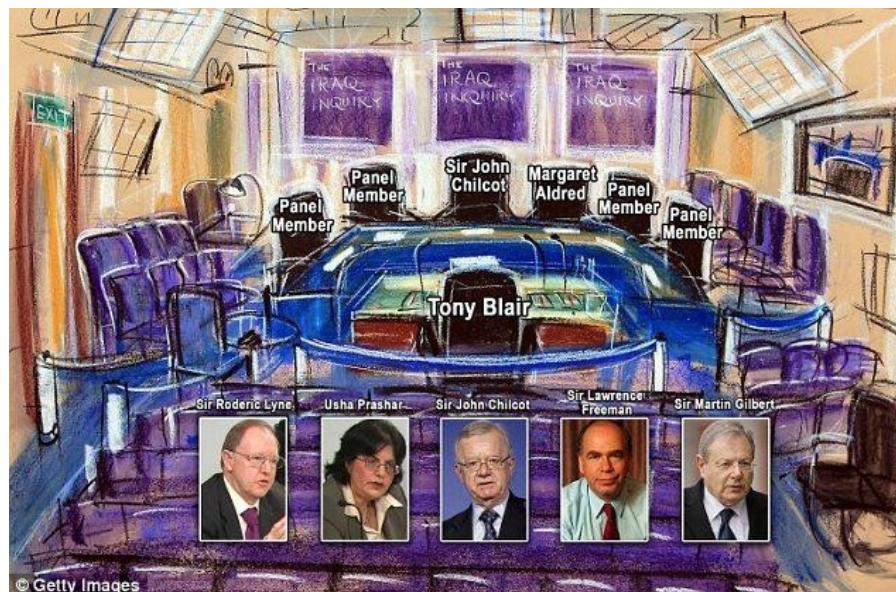
¹⁹ UK parliamentary debates: records and publications. Date: 09/02/2010. Issue: Iraq Committee of Inquiry and the Mass Media. Retrieved from: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100209/text/100209w0021.htm>

family members of those who died or are missing in Iraq while the rest was distributed among other individual citizens.

As a mediatised event, the audience clearly extended beyond the boundaries of the inquiry room to those who watched, listened to, or read the testimonies from home. As it has been mentioned before, this wide extended audience encompassed sympathetic as well as apathetic TV watchers, radio listeners, web surfers and news readers. Most frequently, testifiers as well as inquisitors were very much aware of this broad public and, on many occasions, they were perceived to be acting for the media rather than for the gallery. In other words, they seemed to be addressing these virtual participants rather than the co-present ones. Undoubtedly, this mass audience played a significant role in shaping the utterances and meanings conveyed by the situational participants.

2.2.3. The hearing room

The public hearings took place at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre located at Broad Sanctuary, Westminster, London, SW1P 3EE. This facility has a capacity for approximately 110 people distributed in two main areas. The first area is the hearing room. It can be seen in the background of the videos decorated in grey and blue. It is illustrated in the sketch below.



This room consists of a platform or stage where the witness and the committee sit facing each other. In addition, there is a public gallery separated by a fence with 60 available seats available for those observing the proceedings. In this arrangement, the audience sit facing the inquiry committee. That is, the audience in the inquiry room can only look directly at the back of the witnesses but have to rely on the flat cameras hanging on the right and left corners or the ceiling to look at their faces. The second area is in an additional viewing facility located separately within the QEII. There, approximately 50 members of the public can watch a televised closed circuit feed live from the hearing room.

2.2.4. The meanings of responsibility in inquiry testimony

Politicians and military chiefs in the UK, as elsewhere, routinely invoke the value of accountability. Their testimonies at the public hearings of the Iraq Inquiry were no exception in this respect. Tables 1 and 2 show the tokens identified for the word responsibility in the six sessions analyzed. In total, 104 tokens for responsibility were found in this corpus and, interestingly, most of them appeared in the speech of the witnesses (71) rather than in that of their interrogators (33).

Table 1

Political testimonies	Blair's hearing		Brown's hearing		Miliband's hearing	
	Blair	Committee	Brown	Committee	Miliband	Committee
responsibility	11	5	9	7	6	2
responsibilities	0	1	1	4	4	1
responsible	2	0	5	0	1	0
Irresponsible	1	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal	14	6	15	11	11	3

Table 2

Military testimonies	Stirrup's hearing		Walker's hearing		McColl's hearing	
	Stirrup	Committee	Walker	Committee	McColl	Committee
responsibility	6	2	1	3	13	5
responsibilities	0	1	2	0	12	0
responsible	1	2	0	0	6	0
Irresponsible	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal	7	5	3	3	31	5

In her study of collocation and connotation in the courtroom, Cotterill (2004) argues that close micro-linguistic analysis, in particular, paying analytical attention to the lexical aspects of witnesses' testimonies may reveal how the repetition of a particular lexical item may function to introduce a particular image of the self. In these lines, it is plausible to suggest that the high frequency of use of related words such as *responsibility*, *responsibilities* and *responsible* in the inquiry testimonies analyzed here may manifest the witnesses' orientation to presenting an image for themselves as responsible social agents or to casting their behaviour as responsible.

Let us now look at one fragment from the testimony of Tony Blair to see how this works. The following exchange begins when the interrogator brings to the foreground the issue of the UK government's legal responsibility as an occupying power for stabilizing Iraq after the removal of Saddam Hussein. Even though this question may look tough and challenging, it actually provides the witness with a great opportunity to silence the opposition and to show off. Indeed, it is the same sort of question that a TV show interviewer makes when interviewing a senator from their own party. It is worthwhile to notice how the interrogator presents a controversial proposition, *There is no doubt that this was not British troops killing Iraqi civilians*, as being a generalized assumption or some undisputable common ground.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just go back to this question of **responsibility**? There is no doubt that this was not British troops killing Iraqi civilians. This was violence on a major scale, but isn't it, to some extent, to a considerable extent, our **responsibility**, if we have gone into a country, initially as an occupying power, and then unable to provide the basics of security?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I agree with you it is our **responsibility**, but here is the point that I think we have got to get ourselves into in the western world, if I can put it like this, or when we are doing these types of operations: yes, it is our **responsibility**, but let's be quite clear why we face the difficulty. We face the difficulty because these people were prepared to go and kill any number of completely innocent people in suicide bombings, because, as you know, in the first half of 2004, I think we had 30, in the first half of 2005 that then went up to 200. We should be prepared to take these people on, and the fact that they are prepared to act like this should not be a reason for our not being there or fighting them. (p.220)

As we can see in the following answer, Tony Blair skilfully and gracefully takes on this opportunity and exploits his turn at talk to present a favourable characterization of himself. Specifically, notice how he assertively and energetically stresses his sense of responsibility to protect the Iraqi people through the repetition of the formulation *it is our responsibility* employed at the beginning of his turn and immediately after the emphatic positive polarity adverb *yes* in the middle of his turn. This strategic repetition has the effect of casting the speaker as a responsible head of state who was willing and committed to fulfilling his obligations but who could not fully accomplish this due to the negative influence of some other external actors who *were prepared to go and kill any number of completely innocent people in suicide bombings*. In other words, by exploiting polarized strategies of positive self-characterization and negative other-characterization in this turn, Blair works to dilute his government's responsibility for the failure to deal with the insecurity situation in the post-invasion Iraq by attributing blame and responsibility to others who he claims were prepared to prevent the reconstruction and stabilization of the country.

Moreover, even when the interrogators did not raise issues of responsibility, witnesses still brought this issue to the foreground. In the following turn, for example, Tony Blair introduces the issue of responsibility while he asks the audience to consider the alternative to removing Saddam.

²⁰RT HON TONY BLAIR: That's up to them, but my view, the view of the US, I think the view of many other countries -- after all, when the Iraq action took place, half of the members of the European Union were also with America, Japan was with America, South Korea was with America, but I think there is an interesting point, I think you are absolutely right to raise the judgment. In the end, this is what it is. As I sometimes say to people, this isn't about a lie or a conspiracy or a deceit or a deception, it is a decision, and the decision I had to take was, given Saddam's history, given his use of chemical weapons, given the over 1 million people whose deaths he had caused, given ten years of breaking UN Resolutions, could we take the risk of this man reconstituting his weapons programmes, or is that a risk it would be **irresponsible** to take?

²⁰ The form of address used here has taken from the official transcripts. It stands for Right Honorable Tony Blair.

In this segment, Blair vigorously denies accusations that the 2003 invasion of Iraq was based on false grounds, *this isn't about a lie or a conspiracy or a deceit or a deception*. Instead, he claims that it was based on a judgment, *it is a decision*. Interestingly, the justification he presents for this decision does not rest of evidence but rather on history, *given Saddam's history, given his use of chemical weapons, given the over 1 million people whose deaths he had caused, given ten years of breaking UN Resolutions, could we take the risk of this man reconstituting his weapons programmes, or is that a risk it would be irresponsible to take?* This turn strategically concludes with a rhetorical question through which Blair works to persuade his audience that, given Saddam Hussein's historical records, removing him from government was indeed an act of responsibility.

As it has been shown, inquiry testimonies present a natural and propitious site to investigate the organization of accounting as well as the ways in which accountability is manipulated. Before proceeding with the analysis of discourse strategies deployed in doing so, let me define the meanings of responsibility.

Like any polysemous word, responsibility has different but yet related meanings or senses. To account for the meanings of responsibility realized by the participants, I looked for semantic frames in the corpus. Three main frames resulted from this search. They are: 1) the duty or obligation frame, 2) the good judgement or moral frame and 3) the culpability frame.

The first one represents a requirement to do something because it is your job or it is imposed by the law. The next exchanges illustrate this formal or institutional origin of the bond. In the first one, responsibility is derived from holding a particular post. Particularly, in this exchange, the word responsibility is used with the meanings of activity or task. This sense is specific to the British variety of English.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: What were your main **responsibilities** in that post?

ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: The principal **responsibility** was to construct annually the equipment plan for all three services' equipment and to do the financial programming over the ten-year period for that plan. Also, of course, **responsible** -- and this became a very significant part of my job -- for the construction of urgent operational requirements in an operational context.

It is interesting to notice in this sequence how the witness's reply implicitly reveals some sort of difficulty in achieving his tasks or job responsibilities efficiently. Indeed, what this witness seems to suggest is that the preparations for the Iraqi operation had to be dealt with mainly at the last minute which may point to some sort of deficiency with the long-term planning for the equipment of the forces.

In the next exchange, the sense of responsibility is derived from its usage in legal agreements, specifically, the responsibilities assumed by countries as occupying powers under the Geneva and Hague conventions. That is, the word responsibility here is used as synonymous with authority and jurisdiction.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Didn't we still have legal **responsibility** at that time?

ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: We still had **responsibility**, in that we had not handed over provincial control to the Iraqis, but we were not in a position militarily to be able to deliver that security, for the reasons that I have just described. So from our perspective, the best way to advance the security within Basra was to do precisely what Mohan was asking us to do.

In this exchange, it is worthwhile to remark on the use of *but* in the answer. This conjunction establishes a contrast between the UK's responsibilities in Iraq and their ability to fulfil them. Surprisingly, this representation seems to suggest that for this witness being unable or incapable of meeting a requirement does not generate responsibility.

The second frame, the good judgement or moral frame, enacts the obligation of a subject binding upon their conscience to act in a direction that is perceived as fair, right or desirable. This frame is evoked by Tony Blair in the following answer where he frames his actions as being guided by a moral drive to do 'the right thing'.

THE CHAIRMAN: And no regrets?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: **Responsibility** but not a regret for removing Saddam Hussein. I think that he was a monster, I believe he threatened, not just the region but the world, and in the circumstances that we faced then, but I think even if you look back now, it was better to deal with this threat, to deal with it, to remove him from office, and I do genuinely believe that the world is safer as a result.

Finally, the last semantic frame identified for the word *responsibility* in this corpus is the culpability frame. It is important to remark here that, even though only a few instances are presented in this text by way of illustration and exemplification, there are several cases which support this classification. In this frame, the word *responsibility* establishes relationships of accountability and blame by holding somebody accountable, answerable or blameworthy for some failure to comply with a duty or for some wrongdoing. In the examples below, Gordon Brown enacts a culpability frame just to deny his participation in it.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: What went wrong with the planning for the aftermath?
RT HON GORDON BROWN MP: think this will be debated for many years to come, and I hope that your Inquiry can make some recommendations about how we deal with it in the future (...) I cannot take personal **responsibility** for everything that went wrong. (p. 68)

Through this overtly evasive and slippery answer, Brown avoids referring to the well-known flaws of his government's planning for the aftermath. Instead, he claims a personal inability to assess this management and expresses his hope that this assessment may be done by the inquiry committee. In this way, Brown works to skirt round issues of governmental accountability for a clear imbalance between planning for the removal of Saddam and planning for the political, economic and structural reconstruction of a broken country. This case is no exception. In fact, no clear admission of personal responsibility for some wrongdoing was found in the corpus.

This section presented an account of three semantic frames frequently realized in the inquiry testimonies analyzed. In the following chapters we will look at the mechanics of how these frames are frequently invoked and negotiated by witnesses, specifically, through the use of discourse strategies. But, before we get to that, the following chapter will present a general overview of multimodal phenomena in inquiry testimonies and their effects on the characterization of witnesses.

CHAPTER THREE: Testimonies as complex semiotic packages

As Scollon and Levine (2004) observe, the proliferation of communication technologies such as digital video recorders and the Internet has had a direct influence on the ways in which audiences perceive and interpret discourse. Particularly, these technological developments have made possible the display of complex configurations of movement, space, sound and image in which various semiotic modes come to be woven together like threads in a cloth (Chouliariaki, 2004; Jewitt, 2004; Matoesian & Coldren, 2002). To date, even though there is still no general agreement on the comparative influence of verbal and non-verbal signs in processing multimodal information (Pearson & White Berch, 1994), there is nonetheless a prevailing agreement on their unity, their complementary and supplementary communicative effects and the discourse analyst's need to attend to information conveyed by multiple communicative channels.

In this light, this chapter presents a first approximation to the study of the discursive construction of responsibility in inquiry testimonies as a complex semiotic practice. An underlying assumption here is that multiple communicative modes, characterized by regularities attached to them (Norris, 2004), converge in oral testimonies creating a single multilayered unit which is not easily separable. Yet, for the purpose of exposition, this document will initially focus on the contribution of three embodied communicative modes: posture, head movement and facial expression and their impact on the formation of complex configurations of movement and space. Later on, chapters six and seven will synthesize this information with that pertaining to the use of linguistic and gestural resources in order to present an account for their major contribution to persuasion.

As a first approximation to the examination of visual texts, it is important to bear in mind that “an analyst's interpretation is always mediated by his or her preconceptions of a visual culture, historical ways of viewing and cognitive schemas” (Abril, 2007, pp.17-23). In order to constrain this ethnocentric bias, indirect data sources provided by newspapers of the time will be frequently referred to in the

following discussions as a way to contextualize the analysis presented as well as to support its findings. This reference to background documents will ultimately contribute to a relevant and grounded analysis of visual texts by taking into account their micro and macro sociological contexts of production and consumption.

A final remark worth making before embarking on the analysis proper concerns the primacy of the concept of coherence for the understanding of multimodal texts. (Kendon, 2004; Lascarides & Stone, 2009; McNeill, 1992). This concept points out that most frequently audiovisual texts are characterized by the display of coherence relations or relations of congruence between the semantic and pragmatic meanings conveyed by their component parts. That is, the visual, kinetic and verbal streams of audiovisual texts are frequently sensibly, logically and solidarily related so that the meanings conveyed by these different channels or modalities support and expand each other. Particularly, high profile politicians are frequently advised on how to position their bodies, gaze and gesticulate while they speak to underscore points in their presentations as parts of the lessons they receive in how to appear convincing, forthright, firm or sympathetic. Yet, as a growing body of evidence shows (Cassell et al., 1998; Goldin- Meadow, 1997), mismatches are not completely infrequent in multimodal texts. As these studies show, some texts reveal unwittingly striking contradictions and differences in the information conveyed through the verbal and non-verbal channels. From the audiovisual text spectator's viewpoint, it is generally agreed that discourse congruence encourages the integration of information for the understanding of what is communicated by a speaker in a communicative situation while the lack of it implies that information does not engage in consistent socially ratified pairings and that the speaker is representing two distinct or conflicting sets of ideas.

3.1. Posture

While giving testimony, all witnesses utilize the layout of the physical space provided for them in the inquiry room. That is, they remain seated at a table facing the inquiry committee in what can be described as a defensive or competitive sitting

arrangement. This type of arrangement is clearly unmarked in this situation. What is interesting to note is that the co-present audience is located behind the witnesses and consequently they can not look at the witnesses' faces directly but only through the TV screens located in front of them.

This physical layout restricts and constrains the participants' postural options to: sitting tall and upright or bending forwards, backwards or sideways. In this system, each posture becomes interpretable in contrast to the others made available to the speaker. And, as Erickson (1982) remarks, exploring postural position in relation to other types of behaviour can shed some light onto a speaker's orientation. Particularly, in the context of inquiry testimonies, it may shed light on witnesses' projected attitudes towards their direct interlocutors and to the cameras.

Figures 1.1. and 2.1. show Labour former Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown sitting tall and upright.



Figure 1.1.



Figure 2.1.

Figures 6.1. and 3.1. show General McColl and former Foreign Secretary David Miliband bending forwards and slightly sideways towards their interlocutors.



Figure 6.1.



Figure 3.1.

Figures 5.1. and 5.1.1. show General Walker from different angles as he bends backwards and sideways in such a way that his back rests on the chair.



Figure 5.1.



Figure 5.1.1.

Even though these body orientations present a fleeting nature, they change continuously during the course of the sessions, there are clear group and individual tendencies which are interesting to highlight. On the one hand, political witnesses tend to remain tall and upright and to bend forward towards the cameras and their interlocutors. These actions appear to communicate a certain speaker's attitude towards their speech but also towards the speech event. Particularly, their adopted posture presents an image for politicians as self-assured and confident. This is clearly a hallmark of Tony Blair's performance.

Military witnesses, on the other hand, very frequently alternate or switch positions by bending forwards, backwards and sideways. These continuous movements seem to indicate some feeling of discomfort or awkwardness with the situation at hand. Indeed, their postural options, far from being staged or restrained, display varying attitudes which range from attentiveness and involvement to disengagement and weariness. General Walker's testimony most clearly shows these continuous shifts.

As posture is just a single constitutive element in a broader configuration of visual signs, it is necessary to examine it in relation to other relevant and co-occurring signs to provide a more accurate interpretation. In this light, we will continue with a review of complementary signs before discussing their effects in greater detail.

3.2. Head movements

The movement of the head from a neutral position includes motions which can result in sustained or oscillatory positioning of the head. That is, it can result in lowering, raising, and tilting the chin or in moving it back and forth as in shaking, nodding or swinging. These actions are worthy of attention because they do not only respond to individual idiosyncratic behaviours but also convey some recognizable social meanings.

As we all know from our experience in social encounters, head movements can be interpreted in different ways depending on their characteristics and on the context where they occur. Lowering the head, for instance, can be understood as either a defensive or submissive sign or a sign of exhaustion and tiredness particularly when the eyes are lowered too. Also, it can index power and consent particularly through a single short nod. Alternatively, raising the head may be perceived as a sign of interest specifically when it is accompanied by raised eyebrows or it may be read as a sign of query, puzzlement or boredom. Finally, tilting the head can be a sign of interest, curiosity or query particularly if the head is pushed forward. But, if the head is pulled backwards, it may indicate suspicion or uncertainty.

Oscillating movements also have some core meanings attached to them so nodding typically signals agreement and approval while shaking usually indicates disagreement or disapproval. Research on non-verbal communication confirms the lay person's impression that different degrees of agreement/ disagreement can be indicated in these ways depending on the speed and amplitude of the movement so a vigorous and expansive nod can be read as signalling strong agreement while a slow and short nod may indicate a conditional or partial agreement. Interestingly, in the same way in which nodding while listening sends approval signals and encouragement to the speaker, nodding whilst speaking can encourage agreement from an audience. Also, like a beat gesture, a nod can be used to emphasize a point at talk or to indicate a strike action to another speaker.

Head movements thus provide us with a valuable frame for the interpretation of pragmatic and social meanings in witnesses' performances. In what follows, I present emblematic head movements from the two categories of witnesses and draw inferences about what is being communicated in this way. Figures 1.2. and 1.2.1. show Tony Blair with his typical firm and unmoving head which allows him to fix a dominant gaze onto his interlocutors and locates him in a position of authority. Like actors often do, Blair employs this technique to lead audiences to attend to him.



Figure 1.2.



Figure 1.2.1.

Alternatively, figures 2.2. and 2.2.1. show Gordon Brown with his body bent down and a lowered head, enacting a more submissive, and probably conciliatory, posture which projects a more humble attitude than Blair's. As Goodwin (2007) points out, this positioning represents the typical embodied stance of the good and respectful apprentice who is engaged cooperatively in uptaking information from their master (pp. 57- 61).



Figure 2.2.



Figure 2.2.1.

This type of behaviour does not seem casual or naive. Most likely, it seems possible that this positioning has been reflectively designed for perception by enacting a contextually appropriate embodied stance towards other participants for the successful accomplishment of a certain course of action. As Abril (2007, p. 130) points out, a particular way of positioning the body maybe strategically manipulated on the basis of its associations with conventional meanings derived from existing socio-cultural conventions. Indeed, after the criticism generated by Blair's *challenging, dominant and defiant* attitude ²¹ *bordering on smug* ²² or after getting specific advice; Brown decided to present an altogether different image. And, since he

²¹ Phipps, R. (29/ 01/2010). Verdict on Tony Blair's Iraq war evidence by body language expert. Retrieved from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsvideo/7104480/Verdict-on-Tony-Blairs-Iraq-war-evidence-by-body-language-expert.html>

²² Read, B.(30/01/2010). Iraq Inquiry: The experts' verdict on Tony Blair's day of judgment. Retrieved from: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/top-stories/2010/01/30/and-for-award-for-best-actorgoes-to-115875-22005650/>

was in election mode, it is not surprising that he accommodates to public opinion by adopting more or less assertive body language in different social occasions.

Next, figures 3.2. and 3.2.1. show David Miliband lowering and scratching his head. This behaviour represents a classic image of the unskilled poker player who is having a bad hand. Also, it evidences Miliband's less crafted body language when compared to that of his senior political counterparts.



Figure 3.2.



Figure 3.2.1.

Figures 4.2. and 4.2.1. show Air Chief Marshal Stirrup tilting, raising and lowering his head.



Figure 4.2.



Figure 4.2.1.

These recurrent movements project a broad range of different meanings which render his testimony more natural-looking. Particularly, it projects the speakers' search for answers as he looks up as well as his worries and concerns when he lowers the head.

Figure 5.2. shows General Walker with lowered head and eyes while 5.2.1. shows him with a tilted head and his eyes up. All in all, military witnesses are more prone to tilt their heads and look up in the course of their testimonies. This behaviour seems to indicate that, unlike their political counterparts; military witnesses do not seem to come with a readymade answer for every question but are perceived as actively engaged in the process of formulating their answers.



Figure 5.2.



Figure 5.2.1.

Figures 6.2. and 6.2.1. below show General McColl lowering and tilting his head. These movements, which seem truly unrehearsed, in conjunction with other verbal and non-verbal behaviour, frequently frame the testimony of military witnesses and present them as being honest, frank and sincere. Research into the effects of non-verbal behaviours in court (Remland, 1993; Rose et. al., 2010) shows that, with regard to the jury's assessment of defendants and witnesses, body language is all important as they function to construct identities, communicate attitudes and feelings, create impressions and influence others. Particularly, the credibility of witnesses and the guilt or innocence of defendants seems to be partly influenced by the perception of natural versus intentional or contrived behaviours. These studies conclude that the use of

“warm” and natural looking non-verbal behaviours such as those shown in 6.2. and 6.2.1. contribute to building rapport between those in the hot chair and those watching them. These findings support the view that individuals who display a relaxed and natural posture and display non-antagonistic, not hostile, behaviours and low anxiety, such as the military subjects in this study, are likely to be judged more favourably than those who enact strong reactions and behaviours that could be read as intentional or rehearsed.



Figure 6.2.



Figure 6.2.1.

This section has illustrated the most typical head orientations in the testimonies of military and political witnesses and it has revealed some major emblematic characteristics in the testimony of former Prime Minister Tony Blair. What is evidenced here is that most witnesses frequently position their heads in a neutral position and lower them at times either for a sustained period of time or in a quick nod, most frequently, showing submission or agreement. This general pattern is expectable under the historical, social and political circumstances of the post Iraq War era and the revelation of false allegations, dirty negotiations and strategic failure in Iraq.

Tony Blair’s performance noticeably represents an exception to this general pattern. Unlike other witnesses, this emblematic politician sustains his head upright and keeps eye contact at all times exhibiting an unblinking self-belief and no hint of regret or doubt. Moreover, Blair’s display of abbreviated nods does not frequently

convey personal affiliation or submission, but they function as beat gestures do to emphasize points at talk encouraging the agreement of the audience.

Finally, military witnesses' more varied and less restrained configuration of head movements reveal a more spontaneous production of speech. Arguably, this type of behaviour is indicative of a particular focus of attention for the military which is different to that of politicians. That is, while politicians seem to be playing for the cameras, military witnesses do not seem to act in such a way. This preliminarily interpretation will be put to the test in the next section with the exploration of facial expressions.

3.3. Facial expressions

Facial expressions are widely recognized by human beings as a major type of non-verbal communication. Specifically, they consist of micro movements, voluntary or involuntary, of the muscles of the face which create visual cues that lead to the formation of impressions about the speakers' inner states. For example, actions such as staring, frowning, raising the eyebrows, smiling and pressing the lips are generally linked to emotions such as interest, contempt, surprise, happiness and fear.

Given the formal 'adversarial' nature of the social event and the horizontal (social) and vertical (power) distance that is established between participant roles in this encounter, it is to be expected that witnesses display neutral facial expressions or expressions which indicate concentration, seriousness, stress or nervousness. Yet, not all witnesses convey this range of emotions and, when they do, they vary considerably in the images they project. Thus, it is worthwhile noticing that there are different patterns of behaviour and seeing how they influence the formation of impressions.

First of all, nobody can deny that the former Prime Minister Tony Blair is particularly skilful and effective in the use of body language. Communication experts have often supported the lay person's view adding that his success lies in conveying the image of a relaxed, calmed and jokey politician. Noticeably, Blair did not come across in this way during his testimony: he hardly ever smiled and he showed no signs

of relaxation or ease. As figures 1.3. and .1.3.1. show, Blair presented a hard face conveying seriousness and determination.



Figure 1.3.



Figure 1.3.1.

Unlike Blair, Gordon Brown is not what media critics would call a natural-born performer. And, despite recent comments on his improvement ²³, there is general agreement on his poor communication skills²⁴. He was very often described as coming out as depressive and violent due to his characteristic evasive eyes, his face of steel and his stocky movements. In his testimony, some of these traits appeared: he kept his head down and continuously avoided eye contact (See figures 2.2. & 2.2.1.). Yet, on this occasion, he displayed an unusual configuration of emotions which alternated between the presentation of a sad and sorrowful individual who empathizes with

²³ Barnett, R. (13/04/2010). Election: Who Has The Best Body Language? Retrieved from: <http://news.sky.com/home/politics/article/15601146>

James, J. (5/05/2008) Confident air in Gordon Brown's TV body language. Retrieved from: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/top-stories/2008/05/05/confident-air-in-gordon-brown-s-tv-body-language-115875-20405781/>

²⁴ Editorial. (28/11/2007.) Agony written all over his face. Retrieved from: <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/article516653.ece-Agony-written-all-over-his-face>

Parkhouse, S and Leach, B. (06/03/2010). David Cameron's body language more attractive than Gordon Brown's. Retrieved from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/7385195/David-Camerons-body-language-more-attractive-than-Gordon-Browns.html>

bereaved families and a smiley and relaxed politician who has nothing to hide or worry about (See figures 2.3. and 2.3.1. below). It is likely that such an unusual performance has been carefully choreographed.



Figure 2.3.



Figure 2.3.1.

David Miliband's facial expressions frequently look unpolished. Figures 3.3. and 3.3.1. show him pressing his lips and touching his face. This behaviour gives an impression of tension and discomfort and presents the speaker as being worried.



Figure 3.3.



Figure 3.3.1.

Military witnesses' expressions frequently index uncertainty, thoughtfulness, and worry. For example, figure 4.3. shows Air Chief Marshal Stirrup gazing at his interlocutors while he speaks, as if eliciting some type of confirmation that they are

following his explanation. Figure 6.3. shows General McColl's with a serious expression conveyed by the lines in his forehead and his raised eyebrows.



Figure 4.3.



Figure 6.3.

Figures 5.3. and 5.3.1. portray General Walker's recurrent frowning which indicates some discomfort with the situation in progress and, specifically, a dissatisfaction with the way in which evidence is being put to him.



Figure 5.3.



Figure 5.3.1.

This section has explored some of the multiple meanings conveyed through facial expressions and their patterning in the testimony of military and political witnesses. All in all, this analysis reveals that, unlike military witnesses, politicians tend to manipulate emotions for a particular effect, namely, the presentation of a likeable self image.

3.4. The convergence of discourse and technology

Any communicative event consists of the interplay among a multiplicity of communicative modes. Unlike the use of steno-graphic transcripts and audio recordings, the current availability of digital videos and the Internet has enabled production and streaming of more complex records of inquiry testimonies which have inevitably led audiences and researchers to consider more aspects of communicative behaviour. In this light, this chapter has drawn attention to the intricate interplay of visual cues such as posture, head movements and facial expressions. What follows is a discussion of their effects in terms of the ways in which they influence the interpretation of witnesses' performances during a significant historical, political and social event.

As Goodwin (2007) notes, the ways in which social actors position their bodies toward each other and their physical surroundings help to constitute them as particular kinds of social and moral actors. In other words, the organization of space and movement plays a major role in characterising participants' Orientations in any communicative event. Particularly, two main types of body orientations may be displayed: one constructs a shared space between participants which indexes a high degree of engagement with the task at hand while the other one establishes a barrier between the participants in an interaction which signals disengagement.

Both of these orientations are observable in our corpus. Most frequently, politicians engage or sustain a configuration of shared attention during their testimonies. As this orientation is generally considered unmarked, desirable and appropriate in face-to-face interaction, it tends to be assessed positively by interlocutors. On the other hand, military witnesses are clearly more prone to enact marked or inappropriate divisions of space and attention. Since this is generally seen as undesirable and uncooperative, it may influence their performances negatively.

As regards individuals, former Prime Minister Tony Blair clearly represents the only witness in our corpus to exhibit a consistent arrangement of motion and space throughout his testimony. That is, Blair manages to sustain a coherent visual

organization which signals a high degree of engagement at all times. This orientation is particularly effective as it focuses attention on the witness by encouraging audiences to watch and listen to him carefully. Unlike Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Miliband present much less stable arrangements which result in fleeting periods of total body engagement.

General Walker, to the other end of the continuum, does not represent any attempt to create a shared public focus of attention. Noticeably, he tended to sit further away from their interlocutors and moves his head and his body from side to side and up and down avoiding eye contact. Also, his hands and arms were invisible most of the time, resting on the armchair, or they engaged in actions which were disconnected with speech. General McColl and ACM Stirrup also, at times, exhibit this type of disengaged body orientation but in a subtler and less noticeable way alternating it with periods of more engagement.

These more or less automatic or conscious configurations of actions on the visual plane are worthy of attention because they activate different interpretative frames which influence the perception of other aspects of discourse structure. In fact, these visual and kinetic displays project powerful social and pragmatic meanings which shape an overall understanding of social actors and their actions in interaction.

CHAPTER FOUR: Slipperiness and evasion

Through discourse practice, as well as through other practices, social actors take up different social roles, construct particular social conditions and try to solve problems in them (Wodak et al, 1999). At the public hearings of the Iraq Inquiry, both political and military witnesses used their turns at talk to transform, destroy or evade conflicting representations of reality which positioned them as responsible agents for putting their country at war and for doing so on the worst possible footing. To this end, they employed a vast repertoire of discursive strategies so that, as they fulfilled their interactional roles and answered questions, they simultaneously accomplished other actions such as avoiding responsibility, attributing blame to others and justifying their behaviour.

In the analysis of accountability, it is particularly important to consider its corollary that is noncommittal discourse which most frequently involves the intentional use of evasion and slipperiness. Here, this will be considered on the basis of existing research on evasion in different contexts such as the courts, the public inquiry, the hospital and the history textbook (Abell and Stokoe, 1999; Achugar, 2007; Atkinson, 1999; Bull, 2008; MacMillan & Edwards, 1999; Matoesian, 2005 Oteíza & Pinto, 2008; Sidnell, 2004). These studies have contributed to the understanding of evasion by portraying it as “something the answerer does to weasel out of the moral difficulties posed by a question” (Matoesian, 2005, p. 755) or to “slip the snare of accountability” (Sidnell, 2004, p. 765). Moreover, these studies have proposed that evasion can be understood in terms of the use of a set of discourse strategies (evasive strategies) which aim at getting around responsibility for possibly blameworthy actions and preventing public disapproval by obscuring any particular role that a speaker might have played in an event.

These strategies include a) overt refusal to answer, b) reformulation, c) impersonalization, d) script-formulation, e) the counterfactual account and f) the lesson-deriving frame. They appear in interaction when a speaker perceives they may be charged with a fault or wrongdoing and they respond to the perceived accusation

through well-coordinated actions on different levels of discourse organization. Thus, it is argued here that these strategies work together as part of a deliberate attempt to skirt round accountability by cutting off the grounds for an accusation.

This chapter deals with the three first discourse strategies while the other three will be treated in the next chapter. Specifically, it looks at their micro and macro functions in the context of the inquiry testimonies and how they instantiate more or less overtly evasive answers. Before embarking in this exploration, a preliminary point of departure necessarily concerns their conceptualization.

An overt refusal to answer is generally understood as a type of non-conforming action in which a speaker overtly fails to provide an answer when it is required. According to Ekström (2009, p. 685), “the announced refusal to answer is: (1) an overt rather than covert form of non-answer (...); (2) a non-answer announcing that in the actual situation the person will not do what he is asked to do (...); and (3) a dispreferred response (...)”. Examples include formulations such as “I don’t answer those types of questions” and “I’m not going to talk about it” in which speakers simply decline to answer a question. As Ekström points out, overt refusals tend to be more face-threatening than their covered counterparts. Yet, they do present an advantage. “Overt practices do have the disadvantage of being an explicit breaking of norms, but have the advantage of, for example, making justifications possible” (p. 685). Indeed, as will be shown in this chapter, announced refusals can be strategically framed by explanatory accounts to present them as no-fault actions and manipulate issues of accountability by modifying their status as illegal evasions.

As stated by Charaudeau & Maingueneau (2005, pp. 488-490) in their dictionary of Discourse Analysis, a reformulation entails a relationship of paraphrase established via a return to a previous linguistic expression in order to modify or alter it. More specifically, it consists in the adjustment of a previous formulation through semantic shifts operated by linguistic expressions. As these authors point out, the observation of different types of reformulation manifests a vector of the heterogeneity of discourse and allows us to track down multiple configurations of meanings in the

constitution of different topics. As regards their communicative functions, reformulations can be used to summarize, clarify or challenge previous representations. Also, they may be exploited for the purpose of leading audiences to a conclusion as shown by Fairclough (1989, p. 137) where he observes how a student interrupts a headmaster's formulation so as to provide a reformulation which presents him as innocent of all charges. As will be shown later on in this chapter, this later strategic use of reformulation in argumentation reveals interesting configurations of power in the context of inquiry testimonies.

Finally, the notion of impersonalization in Discourse Studies points to a strategy of generalization or defocalization realized by particular ways of inscribing participants in texts involving various forms of pragmatic distancing and mitigation such as personal deixis and the use of other impersonal syntactic and lexical resources that share a common denominator: generality, obscurity and vagueness (O'Connor, 1997; Blas-Arroyo, 2003). In this way, impersonalization directly affects the role of the participants in an enunciation by silencing the pronominal deictics referring to the interlocutor or reducing or minimising their own role in the actions described. As Brown and Levinson (1987) remark, this mechanism can be used by the speaker to convey politeness particularly when facing or making criticisms. Also, as Blas-Arroyo (2003) points out, the combination and concatenation of multiple impersonal forms in a text may make reference to pragmatic manipulation. In relation to our corpus, the use of this type of mechanism presents a rather irregular distribution which manifests an orientation to the concealment of direct responsibility of the interlocutor with respect to the object of criticism and the presentation of a positive image to the audience by the avoidance of direct blaming, criticism or reproach.

4.1. Overt refusal to answer

In both ordinary and institutional interaction, answers to questions display different forms and degrees of alignment. A non-answer is what Schegloff (2007b) describes as a response serving to distance the respondent from the question and from the activity of answering. Ekström (2009) specifies that the act of refusing to answer,

that is, explicitly announcing that in the actual situation a person will not do what they are asked to do represents the most dispreferred, evasive and challenging form of non-answer. Moreover, he notes that respondents may opt to mitigate a refusal by enacting self-explanatory accounts such as the inability account or the “I can’t answer” account, and the unwillingness account or the “I don’t want to/should not answer” account. These accounts present a refusal as appropriate action by describing the speaker as unable to answer or as reluctant to undertake the action requested because it is considered unacceptable or inappropriate.

At a public hearing, the risks of overtly refusing to answer are enormously high because this action may lead to foregrounding issues of accountability and characterizing a speaker as being overtly in contempt of the committee. Indeed, such non-compliant behaviour can be considered illegitimate and thus be subjected to disapproval or condemnation due to participants’ roles of accountable figures. In what follows, witnesses’ refusals will be examined in order to show how they are strategically designed to avoid an answer and to deflect issues of accountability for such evasion.

The first fragment to be discussed begins when Sir Roderic Lyne, often referred as “the toughest inquisitor on the committee”²⁵, asks former Labour Foreign Secretary David Miliband to evaluate the legitimacy of former Prime Minister Tony Blair’s argument for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. This question foregrounds a disagreement²⁶ within the Labour government over this issue, especially one between Jack Straw and Tony Blair, and thus poses a conflict for the witness who is required to take a stance.

²⁵Sieghart, M. (11/01/2010). BBC Profile: Iraq inquiry questioner Sir Roderic Lyne. Retrieved from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/8449384.stm

²⁶ Straw, J. (08/02/2010). Oral and written evidence: Rt Hon Jack Straw, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 2001 – 2006. Retrieved from: <http://www.iraquinquiry.org.uk/transcripts/oralevidence-bydate/100208.aspx>
Kirkup, J. (21/01/2010). Iraq inquiry: Jack Straw suggests Tony Blair always wanted regime change. Retrieved from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/7046119/Iraq-inquiry-Jack-Straw-suggests-Tony-Blair-always-wanted-regime-change.html>

²⁷SIR RODERIC LYNE: As Foreign Secretary, do you share your predecessor, Jack Straw's, view that regime change is an improper and unlawful objective for British foreign policy?

RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I think that, as someone said to this Committee, I'm not a lawyer and I'm certainly not an international lawyer, so **I wouldn't want to –**

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You have very good international lawyers advising you.

RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: I have very good international lawyers advising me and certainly there was no current case where we are pursuing regime change as a matter of military policy.

The witness avoids facing this conflict by overtly declining to express an opinion. This face threatening act is strategically redressed by an unwillingness account which frames the requested action as being inappropriate for the witness. As Miliband acknowledges, this account has already been used in the context of the inquiry by former Prime Minister Gordon Brown when faced with a similar question. As we see in the following turns, even when this account is questioned by the interrogator, the witness still manages to resist a compliant answer by producing a less overt form of non-answer which aligns with the initial request but departs from its agenda.

This refusal to answer is clearly marked. Remarkably, David Miliband voted in favour of this new policy when the decision was taken to Parliament in the context of a great division within the Labour Party. Also, under the Westminster System, David Miliband assumed Cabinet Collective Responsibility when the decision to invade Iraq was made in the Cabinet Office. Thus, he is accountable for his support of the invasion and consequently he should be able to explain the arguments for it.

The next case provides further evidence for Miliband's non-committal answers about the legitimacy of the Iraq war. This time the interrogator asks him to consider the topoi of danger and threat in Blair's argument for the need to undertake a military operation.

²⁷ These exchanges are copied as they appear in the original transcripts

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now, if the United States and the United Kingdom had not invaded Iraq in March 2003, do you believe that we would now be facing a situation where Iraq would be competing with Iran, both on nuclear weapons capability and in support of terrorist groups?

RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP: That's obviously a very, very important question and an **unanswerable** one

As in the previous case, Miliband meets the interrogator's request for a yes or no answer with an overtly evasive answer. But, on this occasion, he skilfully designs his refusal as appropriate conduct by acknowledging the interesting nature of the question but evaluating the question as inherently flawed at the same time.

These cases illustrate how a junior political witness works to avoid responsibility for a governmental decision based on unsustainable grounds as well as accountability for refusing to answer a question in the context of a public inquiry by employing carefully designed explanatory accounts. As Pullinger (2004) remarks, the claims made by the British Labour government during the run-up to the invasion are very hard to sustain at present. Indeed, it is difficult to argue for their legitimacy in light of what is now known about Iraq's alleged WMD capabilities and its links with Al-Qaeda.

Let us now consider a case from the testimony of a military subject. The next sequence begins when the interrogator asks the Chief of the Defence Staff Air Chief Marshal Jock Stirrup to confirm the problems experienced with vehicles in Iraq.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Now, this issue, as I understand it had something to do with the United States, that we needed the software from the United States, and given that we were working so closely with the Americans at this time, was it surprising that we were finding these difficulties with the software?

ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: Well, it was surprising. The Chinook Mark III acquisition pre-dated my time –

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I understand that.

ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: -- so **I am unable to comment on that programme**. What I was faced with was the issue of what to do about it. It was clear that we were not going to be able to fly them in the configuration we then had, so something would have to change, and, of course, that was going to cost money.

From the start, this military witness shows difficulty in producing a conforming type of answer and works to mitigate the negative effects of a forthcoming refusal by highlighting agreement with his interlocutor. The interrogator then attempts to prevent a forthcoming non-answer by interrupting the witness and encouraging him to present a view on the problems of procurement even when they preceded his appointment as Chief of Defence. Yet, the witness continues to decline an answer by invoking an inability account. This clear evasion is finally covered up by providing a related, but yet not required, type of contribution which is introduced by the use of a cleft-construction. This grammatical structure which shifts the focus of the answer from the causes to the consequences of failed procurement presents a favourable characterization of the speaker as a problem solver.

Noticeably, this refusal avoids an explanation as to why the fleet of Chinooks helicopters was not appropriately equipped with the necessary navigational software. What underlies this question are the particulars about the incompetent procurement of equipment by the military, publicly known as the “Chinook fiasco”²⁸, which led to the acquisition of navigation tools that did not fit the cockpit. This failure meant that eight Chinooks worth 259 million pounds had to remain grounded in Iraq²⁹ while troops had to rely on the United States to reach full battlefield capability or be ferried on helicopters relying on landmarks on the ground in a very dangerous context.

In inquiry testimonies, refusals to answer are clearly dispreferred as they can be interpretable as illegitimate acts. Indeed, they are noticeably absent from two out of six testimonies analyzed, specifically, the testimonies produced by two senior political witnesses: Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. A plausible explanation for this gap is that the stakes for senior political leaders in undertaking such overtly evasive actions are perceived as being particularly higher. When refusals do appear, they often concur with justification accounts designed to mitigate risks. This general tendency has been

²⁸BBC. (13/01/2010). Chinooks ready after eight-year delay. Retrieved from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/8457067.stm

²⁹ National Audit Office. (04/06/2008). Full report: Chinook Mark III helicopters. Retrieved from: http://www.nao.org.uk/whats_new/0708/0708512.aspx

thoroughly described in Pomerantz (1984) and Schegloff (2007b). Other forms of mitigation strategies often involve the use of positive politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987), particularly, statements of solidarity, agreement and compliment used to make interrogators feel good about their contributions and to encourage a more favourable interpretation of the respondent's behaviour. The fact that interrogators eventually accept witnesses' refusals or that they do not enforce their strict compliance provides a first glimpse into the special status enjoyed by elite witnesses and the permissiveness displayed by the interrogators who allow them to control the flow of information.

4.2. Reformulation

A more covert form of non-answer frequently involves the use of reformulation. Reformulating basically consists in returning to a previous discourse unit or interactional turn in order to transform it and produce a new version which is perceived as more satisfying. In the words of Fairclough, "a (re)formulation is (...) the rewording of what has been said, by oneself or others, in one turn or a series of turns or indeed a whole episode" (1989, p. 136). More often, reformulations function to monitor or check understanding and to reach an agreed characterization of what happened in the course of interaction, but they may also be used for purposes of manipulation and control as a way of leading participants into accepting a particular version of events and limiting their options for future contributions.

From an interpersonal communication viewpoint, reformulations are differentiated mainly with regard to, firstly, who is being reformulated; and, secondly, what is being reformulated (Fetzer, 2002). Specifically, Stivers and Hayashi (2010) investigated the use of reformulation in transformative answers, that is, "answers through which question recipients retroactively adjust the question posed to them" (p. 1). They identify two main types of transformations: "question-term transformations" and "question-agenda transformations". The former modifies, qualifies, specifies or replaces a speech segment embodied in a question so that a speaker responds to a

somewhat different proposition. The latter changes the agenda or focus of a question by rearranging the lists of matters to be discussed in the answer.

Like refusals to answer, transformative answers resist the constraints of a question which respondents identify as problematic. Yet, this type of behaviour presents a more covert form of evasion as respondents do fill in an answer slot with a ‘collaborative’, but not required, type of contribution. In this section, six emblematic cases of transformative answers will be discussed in order to illustrate how witnesses exploit this strategy to dodge a question by manipulating issues of relevance and appropriateness in adjacency pairs.

The first case presented below shows former Prime Minister Tony Blair modifying the terms of a yes/no question in order to avoid an incriminatory answer. This exchange begins when Sir Roderic Lyne directs him to consider the effectiveness of the policy of containment prior to 9/11. In a previous turn, the witness had already avoided referring to this period and, at the onset of this exchange, the interrogator requires him again to refer specifically to the period up to 9/11.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I will come on to that in just a minute but in the period up to September 11, effectively, would it be right to say that containment, as a broad strategy, had been effective, was still sustainable, needed reinforcing, was expensive and difficult? That's, roughly speaking, what we have heard from some earlier witnesses, including Sir John Sawers, who was working for you at the time. He said: "I think it was working, but the costs of it were quite high and there were risks to the various elements of our policy that we wanted to reduce." Would that be a fair summary?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: **I think the way I would put it is this: that the sanctions were obviously eroding**, we couldn't get support for them. This so-called smart sanctions framework, we actually, prior to September 11, couldn't get support for at that time. So we were in a bit of a difficulty there, and, of course, the fact is that Saddam -- as I say, we had taken military action in 1998. There was a very long history, of course, of the dealings with Saddam. One of the things I have done for the purpose of the Inquiry is go back through my speeches prior to September 11 and -- I mean, I have actually got one or two of them here, but it is actually quite interesting.

In response, Blair provides a relevant but non-conforming type of answer. That is, rather than directly confirming or challenging the evaluation presented by the

interrogator, Blair introduces an alternative assessment which is marked by the use of a turn-initial metapragmatic frame. What follows is a reformulation of the effectiveness of containment realized by the replacement of the gerund *working for eroding in the sanctions were obviously eroding*. This reformulation is designed to undermine potential implications of accountability for disbanding a workable policy. The underlying logic is: if a policy is eroding then it is right to move away from it.

The real reasons behind Blair's decision to abandon a policy of containment in Iraq in 2003 are still fiercely debated. The argument presented by Blair here, interestingly, has been published by a member of the inquiry committee, Sir Lawrence Freedman, in a scholarly article (Freedman, 2004). Yet, this position has not been widely supported by other political analysts who suggested that the decision to invade Iraq was a consequence not so much of a failure of containment to limit Iraq's weaponry but of its failure to produce its secret objective: the fall of Saddam's regime.

The next case begins with an extended turn in which the interrogator requires Blair to indicate his degree of confidence on the legal case for going to war in Iraq. The nature of the legal case for the 2003 invasion of Iraq was a significant political issue at that time. Peter Henry Goldsmith, in his capacity of Attorney General for England and Wales and Northern Ireland, initially advised Blair that the UN Resolution 1441 did not sanction the use of force. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441 was adopted on November 8, 2002 and it presented Saddam Hussein with a final opportunity to comply. Another piece of advice presented by Christopher Greenwood, in his capacity as law professor and barrister stated that the legality of a possible invasion was to be dependent on one of three conditions being satisfied. These conditions were (1) if the UN Security Council adopts a fresh resolution authorizing military action against Iraq, (2) if under existing Security Council resolutions the Security Council considered that (a) Iraq is in material breach of those resolutions and (b) that breach constitutes a threat to international peace and security in the Gulf area or (3) if an armed attack by Iraq against the United Kingdom or one of its allies was reasonably believed to be imminent. Despite the fact that none of these conditions have been clearly met, on the eve of the invasion after many

private conversations with the Prime Minister, Lord Goldsmith's final advice presented a plausible case for the legality of the invasion on the basis of Greenwood's conditions number two and three.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I would just like to ask one final question to wrap up this legal chapter, and this is really -- you were in the position, ultimately, where you had to give this determination. You had to go through with the action, Lord Goldsmith was preparing with the assistance of Christopher Greenwood for the possibility of legal challenge. He knew that he had taken a decision that some others, many others, perhaps, were arguing with and were going to argue with, and he had put something to you that was described as a reasonable case, but, nevertheless, not one that he would have confidently put before a court. You then you had to decide whether you were convinced that this was a strong enough legal basis to take a very serious action of participating in a full-scale invasion of another country. How convinced were you, at this point, that you had a strong legal case for doing what you did?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: **I would put it in this way. What I needed to know from him was, in the end, was he going to say this was lawful? He had to come to conclusion in the end, and I was a lawyer myself, I wrote many, many opinions for clients, and they tend to be, on the one hand on the other hand, but you come to a conclusion in the end and he had to come to that conclusion.** Incidentally, I think he wasn't alone in international law in coming to that conclusion, for very obvious reasons, because, as I say, if you read the words in 1441 it is pretty clear this was Saddam's last chance. So that was what he had to do. He did it. As I say, anybody who knows Peter knows **he would not have done it unless he believed in it and thought it was the correct thing to do,** and that was -- for us and for our armed forces, that was sufficient.

In his answer turn, Blair reformulates the focus of the question so that it is no longer about his assessment of the legality of the war but Lord Goldsmith's. In this way, the witness shifts responsibility to the former General Attorney by representing him as the source of legal basis for the war and ultimately responsible for it. This case also illustrates an emblematic feature of Blair's transformative answers, namely, the use of metapragmatic frames, such as *I would put it in this way*. This mechanism which may sound explanatory functions to restrict information. Their cumulative effect is the projection of an almost arrogant and paternalist attitude bordering on smugness.

The role of Lord Goldsmith has been particularly controversial. A year ahead of the invasion, he sent a memo to Tony Blair warning him that the use of force in Iraq

was illegal. Three months later, he produced a second memo suggesting that a reasonable case could be made. Then, on the eve of war, his formal and unequivocal advice was that the use of force in Iraq was indeed lawful. Undoubtedly, these inconsistencies foreground circulating rumours that Peter Goldsmith did not really believe in the legality of the intervention but that he succumbed to Blair's pressure. Such concerns have been already heightened by former Deputy Legal Adviser Elizabeth Wilmshurst who, in her letter of resignation, stated that she did not agree with Goldsmith's official opinion and that she believed he had been manipulated by political masters. As Bellamy (2004) remarks, legal matters are always controversial in issues of war and peace. Yet, the case presented by the Labour government clearly shows some significant black holes.

The following case comes from the testimony of Tony Blair's successor, Gordon Brown. This sequence begins when the Chairman asks him to confirm a conflicting account about the limits that the Treasury, under his direction, put on the military budget for funding the military operation in Iraq.

THE CHAIRMAN: (...) just looking at the need for urgent operational requirements, which arise out of the actual military enterprise, the Treasury set limits on how much the MoD could spend on preparation and UORs, and from time to time, when a request was made, you raised those limits, incrementally?

RT HON GORDON BROWN MP: **Can I put it the other way round?**--

THE CHAIRMAN: Of course.

RT HON GORDON BROWN MP: -- Sir John, if I may. **We didn't set limits on the expenditure on UORs or on equipment. We made estimates** about what they would need and said, "If you need more, you come back to us". **So there was no limit set. There were allocations made** to show that money could be spent immediately, but I think -- you know, I have got the different urgent operational requirements that were agreed to and they were all paid, they were all paid. **So it wasn't a question of there being a limit** beyond which you couldn't go. At all times we said, "Here is money that is available now for the equipment needs you need to address. Once you have spent that, then we are prepared" -- and always were ready to and actually did deliver more.

Through the use of a metapragmatic frame, Brown requests permission to reformulate the account presented by the Chairman. What follows is a correction of the previous statement by means of an overt denial followed by a reformulation

codified lexically in the substitution of *estimates* and *allocations* for *limits*. In this way, rather than simply accepting or denying a previous version, Brown works to replace it with a more satisfactory one. This account presents the witness's perspective on the funding of the military operation. Indeed, it enacts a positive characterization of the witness who is represented as giving the Ministry of Defence the money it needed, increasing their spending and accepting all their requests while simultaneously trying to ensure that money was efficiently spent. This account also shifts accountability to the military chiefs by problematizing their spending and indirectly blaming them for not providing the necessary military kit for the troops in Iraq. In this sequence, we see for the second time that evasion strategies can be only fully deployed by a speaker if the interlocutor takes the steps that make it possible.

Previous witnesses to the inquiry have clearly painted a rather different picture of events from the one presented here. Particularly, former Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon³⁰ has accused Brown of putting great constraints on the defence budget at the time in which government was committing UK forces to Iraq. Hoon remarked that the Treasury under Brown's direction considerably failed to give the military the funds they needed to fulfil their demands. Hoon's testimony became a headline for the British newspaper the Times which published: "Gordon Brown starved the armed forces of cash in the build-up to the Iraq war".³¹

Before moving into the examination of other cases, let's revisit the use of framing devices by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. In both testimonies, their presence reveals the witnesses' metalinguistic awareness. Yet, these witnesses differ in their selection of frames. While Brown opts for frames which instantiate a request for

³⁰ Hoon, G. (19/01/2010). Oral and written evidence: Rt Hon Geoff Hoon, Secretary of State for Defence, 2001 – 2005. Retrieved from:

<http://www.iraquinquiry.org.uk/transcripts/oralevidence-bydate/100119.aspx>

³¹ Brown, D. (20/10/2010). Geoff Hoon says Gordon Brown starved the MoD. Retrieved from:

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/public/sitesearch.do?querystring=gordon+brown+starved&x=0&y=0&p=tto&pf=all&bl=on>

permission to introduce a reformulation, Tony Blair uses frames which bluntly introduce a reformulation. These micro-linguistic choices are clearly emblematic of their overall rhetorical styles.

The next case, unlike the previous ones, is not initiated by the use of a metapragmatic frame. The interrogator asks Tony Blair to confirm a conflicting proposition, namely, that he has overcommitted the UK to war in Iraq. It is worth noting that the assessment presented by the interrogator in this exchange appeared in an important letter disclosed to the inquiry³². This letter produced by the then Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon was addressed to former Prime Minister Tony Blair and it warned him that Britain's level of commitment in Iraq really stretched UK capability³³. Despite this early warning, by 2006, Britain had troops not only deployed in Iraq but also in Afghanistan. According to military chiefs, being involved in two enduring war-fighting missions frequently meant the armed forces did not get a proper lifestyle in terms of decompressing periods or retraining between deployment periods. This exhaustion clearly compromised their security while performing in theatre.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were you concerned at any point that we had actually overcommitted ourselves?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: **I was very concerned to make sure we didn't**, and obviously a constant interaction between myself and the military was to make sure that we didn't.

Aware of the accountability issues posed by the question, the witness skilfully avoids a direct yes/no answer which would preserve a damaging presupposition. He, instead, makes a rather different move, frequently known as presupposition-cancelling negation, which explicitly denies the presupposition that Britain under his leadership had actually overcommitted their forces in Iraq. Through this movement, consisting in recycling the main clause of the initial question and subsequently modifying the

³² MOD-to-N10.(2/10/2010<http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/transcripts/declassified-documents.aspx>

³³ Norton-Taylor, R. (02/07/2010). Retrieved from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/jul/02/tony-blair-chilcot-inquiry>

polarity of the following subordinate clause, Blair corrects a previous discourse segment and presents a positive image for himself.

Also, notice how the witness mirrors or echoes the utterance presented by the interrogator while he introduces some key semantic adjustments realized by the modification of lexical resources. One clear strategic modification concerns the substitution of the expression *to be concerned to* for *to be concerned that*. In this way, rather than acknowledging an inner state of worry or anxiety over the particularly state or condition of the military forces at that time, the witness states that he was actively engaged and busy securing that the army was not stretched beyond sustainability. This micro lexical phenomenon in conjunction with syntactic modification described before clearly works in the direction of counteracting the negative representation of the speaker and his behaviour presented by his interlocutor.

Let us now proceed to consider the use of reformulation in the testimony of military subjects. In the following exchange, the interrogator asks Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), Air Chief Marshal (ACM), Sir Jock Stirrup to confirm British dependency on American equipment capability.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So in effect, we became quite dependent upon the Americans, at corps level, to provide some of these things in Iraq?
ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: We certainly **utilised** American assets. I don't know that we became completely **dependent** upon them.

At first sight, Stirrup seems to confirm Freedman's conclusion that the UK's lack of equipment made them quite dependent on their major coalition partner. Yet, a closer look at his initial utterance reveals that what he actually confirms is a rather different proposition which downgrades the degree of dependency of the British military. That is, the witness acknowledges that the British military *utilised* rather than *became dependent upon* American assets. As he continues, Stirrup denies a complete dependency by swapping the adverb *quite* for *completely* in *I don't know that we became completely dependent upon them*. These changes conveniently mitigate a damaging proposition by modifying its terms.

Nevertheless, what is generally accepted about current British war-fighting capability is contrary to Stirrup's claims. According to various informed sources, the "doomed" state of the military meant that they had been denied the necessary equipment to undertake successful counterinsurgency operations³⁴. This view has also been put forward by senior academics in War Studies. Particularly, Betz and Cormack (2009) remarked "the British Army has struggled in Iraq for reasons largely having to do with insufficient resources which prevented them from applying their own principles of counterinsurgency" (p. 321).

The last exchange presented here begins when the interrogator asks the military witness Jock Stirrup to accept strategic failure in Iraq.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Is it not fair to say that we had to abandon a winning strategy for an exit strategy?

ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: **I think it is fair to say that we actually constructed what turned out to be a winning strategy.**

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Perhaps a winning exit strategy ((laughter)).

ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: If I could just say that any successful strategy ends with an exit.

Despite all the evidence pointing to Britain's misadventure in Iraq, CDS Stirrup is not ready to accept defeat. Instead, he produces a transformative answer which replaces the verb *abandon* with *construct* before the noun phrase *a winning strategy*. This move counteracts a negative characterization and reveals an unattractive tendency towards smugness. When the interrogator challenges this positive view, the witness still works to support it by claiming that exiting does not represent failure but rather the culmination of a winning strategy.

Arguably, accepting defeat could be costly for the army's morale. Yet, displaying such a misleading tendency to superiority is not likely to help the army perform better next time. As Betz and Cormack (2009) remark, Britain's involvement in recent counterinsurgency campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan represent mounting

³⁴ Harding, T. (04/03/2010). Army denied vital equipment in Iraq. Retrieved from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/7371543/Army-denied-vital-equipment-in-Iraq-and-Afghanistan-claims-former-SAS-head.html>

strategic defeats. In sharp contrast to previous involvements that stressed their high aptitude, the British had recently shown little or no long-standing success. They conclude that “solutions must come from within via professional self-criticism and the facing up to uncomfortable truth” (p. 336). Unfortunately, Stirrup’s behaviour does not point in this direction.

Asking a question places significant constraints not only on the action that the recipient is expected to produce next, but also on the design that the action can take. Yet, there are also several mechanisms through which a question recipient can resist the direction and relevance constraints of a question. One particularly effective mechanism is that of reformulation. This evasive device allows witnesses to twist the conditions imposed by the previous turn and exert control over the development of their own turn at talk and, through it, over how reality is represented and understood.

Questioners can, in principle, hold question recipients accountable for providing equivocal answers. This is, indeed, the hallmark of institutional contexts (Drew & Heritage, 1992). Yet, in practice, interrogators frequently do not do so and consequently they allow witnesses to provide alternative descriptions. Such descriptions conveniently qualify and replace versions of the past which are perceived as unfavourable. This interactional flexibility ultimately allows witnesses to manipulate the interactional negotiation and manage to put forward ‘less problematic’ readings of the past.

4.3. Impersonalization

In the previous sections, we saw how rather than straightforwardly committing themselves to a particular perspective, witnesses may choose to be circumspect and avoid taking risks through refusals to answer and reformulations. This section looks at another way in which expressive caution is practised in interaction by hiding or blurring participation and agency through different methods of abstraction and generalization such as nominalization (Billing, 2008a, 2008b; Martin, 2008), passivization (Blas-Arroyo, 2003), the use of existential clauses, personal reference and other mechanisms of impersonalization (Fairclough 1992; O’Connor, 1997; Van

Leeuwen, 1996). Specifically, this section explores how the combination and accumulation of impersonalization resources in strategic discourse segments code significant alternations between impersonal and personal structures in the organization of discourse directed at hiding or minimising the role a participant has played in what has been described as some act of wrongdoing. Moreover, it presents a discussion of the culturally-bounded ways in which speakers work to avoid damages to their positive face through impersonalization while performing inherently face-threatening acts such as accusing, blaming and criticising others as strategic defensive moves when facing an accusation. At a more abstract level, this section concludes with a discussion on how responsibility is indirectly negotiated and contested in an adversative context through the manipulation of semantic and propositional meanings via the combined use of several multi-faceted representation resources.

The first exchange to be examined begins when the interrogator asks former Prime Minister Tony Blair about the ways in which he managed the discussion of the policy options paper with the members of his Cabinet and the decision-making process through which he reached the actual decision for an invasion. The March options paper, produced in 2002 by the Defence and Overseas Secretariat, is a key document which presents two options available for dealing with Iraq: tougher containment or regime change.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Having got that paper, what did you do in order to have it discussed and reviewed and looked at? What kind of meetings did you hold about it? Whom did you consult?

RT HON TONY BLAIR MP: Obviously **we were talking** -- I was speaking very closely with Jack Straw, **with those who were advising me at the time, we were talking obviously to the Ministry of Defence people** and the Defence Secretary as well, and **we were trying to get an assessment** -- that's why, as I say, **there was a lot of discussion inside government**: is this new sanctions framework really going to do it or not, is it going to be effective? As I say, I think **the conclusion was, in the end, you certainly couldn't rely on it.**

In his answer, Blair strategically exploits representational choices so as to conceal information about who did actually participate in the discussion of the options paper and in the decision to opt for regime change. That is, he fails to meet the

requirement of exhaustiveness that is expected in the context of an inquiry testimony. As a result, his answer appears vague and ambiguous. Particularly, notice that only two of the represented participants are unequivocally identified by name, *Jack Straw*, or by title, *the Defence Secretary*. Conversely, note that the identity and roles of the other represented participants is continuously blurred by the use of impersonal lexical and syntactic resources. These include: the use of an existential clause, *there was a lot of discussion*, a nominalization co-occurring with the figurative use of the second personal pronoun, *the conclusion was, in the end, you certainly couldn't rely on it*, and the peculiar use of vague expressions such as *those who were advising me*. The combined use of all these impersonal linguistic resources here work to convey the impression that participation was massive and widespread, that is, that everybody participated.

Yet, the issue of who Blair discussed this paper with is quite controversial since several members of the Cabinet at that time complained that it was withheld from them and accused Blair of purposeful hiding information in order to restrict debate. In this exchange, Blair works to counteract these accusations by generalizing and universalizing participation. Finally, note how the two instances of personalization, which stand in contrast to the more abundant use of imprecise and incongruent choices, foreground the role of key participants: Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, who actually produced the paper, and Ministry of Defence Geoff Hoon, who advised Blair on military planning. This contrast undoubtedly points to a bias towards a discussion limited to a few participants.

As Fairclough (2006, 2008) points out, the use of impersonality inherently involves the loss of certain semantic elements related to the representation of social actors. Nonetheless, this exclusion of information may be at times inconsequential, irrelevant or insignificant particularly when the issues about agency are not contested. This is clearly not the case for the use of impersonality highlighted above. In this particular case, there is room for arguing that Blair's systematic exclusion of naming devices realized by the use of impersonal resources positions him as being purposefully vague. Indeed, this systematic hiding of the identity of the actors who

allegedly discussed with him the courses of action available in Iraq may lend support to accusations that Blair took an almost unilateral decision to favour regime change over other options on the basis of his own beliefs over the political, economic or social benefits of this decision.

In the next exchange, the interrogator requires the political witness Gordon Brown to state whether former Prime Minister Tony Blair had informed him about the content of his conversations with his American counterpart George W. Bush.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Did he tell you the gist of the conversations he was having, the private conversations he had with him?

RT HON GORDON BROWN MP: I would be discussing with him, on a private basis, all the other issues we were dealing with and he would keep me up-to-date with the progress of the diplomatic route, but at the same time -- I'm making it clear to you, from June 2002 -- we in the Treasury had to start making preparations in case **there was a possibility of war**. In June, we looked with the Defence Secretary at a number of options. We said finance was no barrier to **discussing and concluding on the best options**. In September, we wrote a paper about the reconstruction of Iraq, and we were amongst the first to look at **the problems that had to be dealt with if there was to be reconstruction had we ended up in a war that we had not sought but the diplomatic avenues had failed**.

In his answer, the witness indirectly denies his familiarity with the content of Blair's private conversations with Bush by declaring that what he actually discussed with Blair were *other issues*, specifically, *the progress of the diplomatic route*. Yet, he acknowledges that the diplomatic avenue was backed up by military preparations. Noticeably, as Brown moves into a discussion of the less preferable option of going to war, he also starts to omit the marking of agency in relation to taking this decision and the responsibilities involved in this. For example, the selection of the existential clause *there was a possibility of war* functions to conceal the agency of political masters behind the undertaking of a military operation by presenting war as something that may happen independently from the will of human actors.

Likewise, in *we said finance was no barrier to discussing and concluding on the best options*, it is important to notice how having claimed that financial endorsement was not a problem the speaker produces a pause prior to realizing the

predictable continuation of this utterance based on the immediate context. At this point, this pause can be arguably interpreted as an indicator that this witness is carefully monitoring his speech and selecting what to say. Indeed, in this segment we can see how Brown selectively removes agency in relation to the nominalised actions of *discussing* and *concluding* on a decision while he alternatively claims agency for providing financial support *in the case there was a possibility of war*. In this way, Brown establishes a pragmatic distance between himself and the decision for an invasion while he counteracts accusations that he failed to offer the military the economic resources needed for undertaking such a difficult operation. Finally, at the end of this answer turn, we observe another segment in which Brown selectively removes the representation of agency at times. Specifically, in *we wrote a paper about the reconstruction of Iraq and we were amongst the first to look at the problems that had to be dealt with had we ended up in a war that we had not sought but the diplomatic avenues had failed*, we notice that the speaker represents his agency, through the use of an exclusive *we*, for writing papers anticipating the problems of aftermath but that he significantly excludes this marking of agency when referring to failing to reach a diplomatic agreement and to actually dealing with the problems of reconstruction.

These significant omissions possibly reveal a lack of responsibility for accepting diplomatic failure or a lack of commitment to avoiding a military resolution of the conflict. Moreover, it manifests how the British government failed to undertake the full legal responsibilities that under the Geneva and Hague Conventions a joint occupying power should bear in the political, economic and social reconstruction of a broken country. As many historians have pointed out, it seems that British politicians at that time accepted to participate in the invasion hoping that the United Nation would eventually join in and support them with the reconstruction of the state. This would probably explain why they systematically failed to produce a plan for dealing with reconstruction.

Now, let us consider the use of opaque representations of agency in the testimony of military subjects. The following exchange begins when the interrogator

inquiries into the reasons as to why military chiefs failed to assess the readiness of the forces prior to deployment in Iraq.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So that the problem this indicates -- and to look at maybe -- is how to be sure that, when the force says that it is ready, it really is?

ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I was clear in my own mind that the urgent operational requirement process was only complete when the particular item of equipment was in the hands of those in theatre who needed it and they were satisfied with it. I actually tried to get some of my senior staff deployed into theatre to check those specific issues, **but it was decided that we shouldn't do that** and that we should rely on the chain of command. That, I think, turned out to be the wrong decision and now we routinely have people deployed for those purposes.

In his response, Stirrup establishes a contrast between his viewpoint on how to proceed with the assessment of the readiness of the forces, *I actually tried to get some of my senior staff deployed into theatre to check those specific issues*, and a decision taken by some unspecified third party, *but it was decided that we shouldn't do that*. Here, the use of passivization functions as a resource for distancing the speaker from *the wrong decision* and for the depersonalization of criticism. That is, in this particular case, the use of the passive voice allows the speaker to incorporate another social actor in his representation of the event whose identity is not revealed. In this way, by omitting information that can be inferred from general knowledge about the military chain of command, the witness leads his interlocutors to make the necessary inferences so that they, not the speaker, indentify who is to be blamed.

In relation to the whole corpus for this study comprising the oral testimony of six witnesses to a public inquiry, it is necessary to point out that very frequently impersonalization through the use of agentless passives and a series of other associated syntactic and lexical resources share a common denominator: the generalization of criticism and disagreement between 'adversaries'. In this way, reproaches become formally linked to a strategy of generalization involving various forms of distancing which are arguably used to convey politeness. This perception suggests that the use of these kinds of strategies of defocalization help to reduce or minimize potential damages to the positive face of a social actor particularly by

distancing the speaker from the speech act of criticising or accusing somebody and by backgrounding the representation of social actors in relation to the object of criticism.

The issue of who is responsible for the reckless deployment of troops is undoubtedly a pressing question that this inquiry needs to answer. According to several sources on the ground, most British casualties, like Sergeant Steven Roberts, could have been prevented had the military received sufficient quantities of the necessary equipment. Sergeant Robert was shot dead on the dawn of the operations after giving away his body armour to a junior colleague when he was told that there was not enough life-saving body armour for everybody on theatre ³⁵. Had he been provided with a life-saving vest, his story would not have been the same.

The last case to be discussed in this section begins when the interrogator asks General Walker to explain why the coalition had neglected the problems of the aftermath that many specialists were anticipating.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: But the coalition also had not anticipated: (a) that liberators would quickly turn into occupiers in the eyes of the Iraqis, although a number of people had warned of this; and (b) that sectarian strife would break out in a country that again some people saw as ripe for it. Why had these perceptions not fed their way into the planning of the process?

GENERAL THE LORD WALKER: Well, I mean, we looked at a number of scenarios, including that one, but **the judgment was made at the time that** they would be so delighted to get out from under the yoke of Saddam Hussein, that having the nice coalition army there to help them deliver things would be something that they looked forward to and benefited from.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: This was a British judgment as well as an American judgment?

GENERAL THE LORD WALKER: I think so.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: That's what you were being fed from the political machine?

GENERAL THE LORD WALKER: It was before we went there. Clearly -- it was clearly found to be wrong afterwards.

³⁵ BBC news.(12/02/2009). British military deaths in Iraq. Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-10637526>

As in the previous sequence, the answers produced here exhibit continuous shifts from personalization to impersonalization as a way of implicitly shifting responsibility away from the military. Indeed, in Walker's first answer turn, we can observe how he establishes a pragmatic contrast between the views of the military, represented by the use of the exclusive *we* in *we looked at a number of scenarios including that one*, and the decisions that had been taken later on by politicians, represented through the use of the agentless passive *the judgement was made at the time that they would be so delighted to get out from under the yoke of Saddam Hussein, that having the nice coalition army there to help them deliver things would be something that they looked forward to and benefited from*. Even though the use of impersonalization in this answer functions to hide the agency of political actors behind *the judgment*, this information is unveiled in the following context when the interrogator inquires: *That's what you were being fed from the political machine?* This contrast functions to vindicate the military staff by denying their responsibility for the heedless approach to the aftermath. Like in the previous case, the use of impersonalization in the context of an accusation avoids a direct criticism and leaves interlocutors to infer who is responsible for deciding on a *wrong* course of action.

In the following turns, we see how the interrogator works to obtain more precise information from a very elusive witness and how he fails. Indeed, notice how the interrogator produces two consecutive yes-no questions eliciting an on-the-record representation of the social agents responsible for making a flawed and deceptive judgement and how the witness continuously avoids giving a direct response. Finally, it is worthwhile to look attentively to the witnesses' final answer in this sequence: *It was before we went there (...) it was clearly found to be wrong afterwards*. On the one hand, this highly elusive answer brings to mind the chorus of a famous Mexican children's game called "El Gran Bonetón" (The Big Bonnet). In this game, to get out of a dispute or a conflict children chant "It was not me, it was the great Bonnet". Like in the children's game, we see in this answer how the speaker resorts to reification and vagueness in order to find a way out of a difficult situation. On the other hand, this answer reveals how the witness presents a bold and audacious evaluation in *it was clearly found to be wrong* and how he immediately after cancels it by inserting the

time adjunct *afterwards*. What these findings across the corpus suggest is that, while witnesses often recognize that the Iraqi conflict was not appropriately managed, they are always very cautious not to make direct attributions of blame and responsibility.

As has been already pointed out, the construction of witnesses' testimonies relies on the selection and presentation of evidence. In this process, witnesses decide what to silence, what to include and how to include it. The preceding cases have illustrated how witnesses manage responsibility in their testimonies through strategic contrasts between the selection of linguistic features which include or exclude, highlight or background and specify or generalize markings of agency. As a more covert and pervasive form of evasion, these moves contribute to deception as they opaque relationships between social agents and their actions. In other words, these practices consistently cover up zones of personal and institutional responsibility and dilute accountability by hiding agency specifically for especially negative actions.

All in all, the examination of marked representational choices in inquiry testimonies reveals their strategic nature and their service to presentation of the self. Also, as Van Dijk (2008) remarks, a nuanced and contextually sensitive appreciation of this phenomenon is particular relevant in public discourse since it manifests the ways in which the powerful or the elites systematically mystify or background their own accountability as a way of constructing knowledge, sharing values and organizing discourse. Finally, as Fairclough (2008) argues, such a critical analysis of the systematic and pervasive ways of hiding agency in the act of telling about a controversial event is particularly revealing since it exposes the mechanisms through which public speakers convey a distorted view of social events by obfuscating their problematic roles in a society.

4.4. Power and influence in the development of inquiry testimony: the interaction of status and situated roles in committee hearings

The issue of control represents a central theme in the study of institutional discourse. Studies of trial talk and political hearings define control as the power to shape the content, form and information flow of discourse. In this regard, Matoesian (2005) points out that there are several strategies which attorneys as well as interrogators can use in order to control witnesses' testimonies, for example, the use of recasts or the emphatic rejection of non-compliant answer types. Yet, he remarks that controlling an evasive witness may be more complex than it appears, particularly, when complex social identities are implicated.

Using the video-recordings and transcripts of six inquiry testimonies produced in the course of a high-profile public inquiry in the UK, the analysis presented in this chapter has focused on an exploration of the conversational dynamics of six witnesses belonging to the highest ranks of the nation's political and military elites and, by implication, those of their interlocutors, the members of the inquiry committee. This study has revealed that very frequently witnesses deployed a range of evasive strategies realized by the use of overt-refusals to answer, transformative answers or question-term and question-agenda transformations and the manipulation of representational resources for the selective coding of agency in texts. These strategies which appeared combined in the testimonies analyzed have been presented separately in this chapter just for the sake of clarity in the exposition. Yet, at this point, it is necessary to remark that they are intricately related to each other as they all contribute to the same effect: the construction of a consistent text which supports the legitimacy of social institutions by avoiding overt criticism of governmental officials and military personnel. For this reason, these strategies should ultimately be considered as a whole, that is, as different sides of the same coin.

This chapter concludes by pointing out that in the context of this public inquiry in the UK, as well as in the Anglo-American and Argentinean courts examined by Stygall (2001) and Serra & Carranza (2009), it seems that high-status witnesses are

not frequently subject to ordinary witnesses' rules. Indeed, like the documented use and abuse of evasive strategies by an elite witnesses in Sidnell (2004), the documented recurrent use of these strategies by six elite witnesses in this study is revealing of the discursive licences or 'extraordinary rights' which these high-status witnesses appear to enjoy. It is possible to conclude hence that elite witnesses in public inquiries, like experts in the courtroom, frequently benefit from some special licences which allow them to manipulate, to a limited yet significant extent, the responsibilities and obligations defined by their situational roles. More interestingly, as Matoesian (2005) concludes, the findings of this study also reveal a systematic failure on the part of the interrogators to gain, exert and maintain control over witnesses' testimonies as well as to enforce more straightforward answers. Arguably, given the socio-political circumstances surrounding this event, this failure may be indicative of some sort of collusion, complot or group work among participants in this investigation. In other words, it is plausible to suggest that if witnesses are able to produce more or less elusive and evasive answers without having their contributions being openly criticised, challenged outright or deemed inappropriate, it is because of some sort of tacit agreement with the committee.

Finally, as Gephart & Robert (2011) highlight, it is important to remark that these controversial conversational dynamics in inquiry testimonies ultimately affect the representation of history which results from it. Indeed, the finding that elite witnesses are very frequently allowed to disregard the coercive nature of inquiry testimonies without serious risks of having their evasions discredited and their credibility consequently damage may result in the production, distribution and potential naturalization of a partial or biased representation of a historically significant crisis. Since accounts establish what is accountable in a setting, since omissions shape interpretations, the outcome of such partial presentations may help to consolidate mythical accounts of the past designed to help society enact fantasies of control while they create, sustain and restore a sense of social order to a community.

CHAPTER FIVE: Argumentation and sensemaking

This chapter provides an insight into the central role that argumentation and sensemaking processes play in the context of a public inquiry into a socio-political crisis. It looks into how witnesses manipulate explanations and accounts thereby legitimizing their actions and the institutions they represent as a way of restoring a sense of social order. Specifically, three frequently used interpretative practices are taken into consideration. They are based on the use of the script-formulation, the counterfactual account and the lesson-deriving frame. These mechanisms enact favourable interpretive frames for the understanding of the past by constructing a sensible world.

Chapter four presented an account of the ways in which inquiry witnesses managed to dodge a question and avoid accountability issues for such an evasion through the use of three main evasive strategies: refusal to answer, reformulation and impersonalization. On the basis of the data, this chapter critically examined the recurrent and combined use of these strategies in inquiry testimonies and exposed their effects in the development of the interaction. In particular, it focused on how these strategies allowed witnesses to exert interactional control over the course of the interrogatory and how the members of the inquiry committee systematically failed to compel or constrain them to produce straightforward or unequivocal answers. This chapter concluded with a discussion of how the issue of control represents a central theme in the study of institutional discourse particularly in contexts such as a trial or a public inquiry where there are tangible outcomes such as impeachment.

In turn, this chapter will look into the specific ways in which witnesses construct representations or features of the social world oriented to producing particular interpretations for events. Specifically, it will focus on how argumentative tools such as script-formulations, counterfactual accounts and the lesson-deriving frame are interwoven in inquiry testimonies and how they work systematically to persuade an audience that witnesses conducted their duties diligently or that they did not incur in any fault or wrongdoing in management of the Iraq war. This chapter will

conclude by exposing how witnesses repeatedly construct non-fault accounts oriented to avoiding potential accusations for mismanagement.

5.1. Script-formulations

From a socio-constructivist perspective, different narratives can be built for an argumentative effect. Several studies have demonstrated the dialectical process whereby one way of representing social reality helped to legitimate one way of understanding it. In particular, Buttny & Ellis (2007) discussed how pro-Palestine and pro-Israel panellists presented alternative versions of a violent event from the Second Intifada in the American news-panel program *Nightline* as a way of supporting their own political stances. In addition, Guillem (2009) investigated the argumentative tools employed by politicians during a plenary session at the European Parliament. This study remarked on the usefulness of drawing parallels between past experiences as a way to strengthening one's own argument.

Many other studies have focused specifically on the processes by which politicians and governments worked to put forward coherent positions in relation to the 2003 occupation of Iraq. Chang & Mehan (2007) and Ferrari (2007) exposed the argumentation systems employed by the G.W. Bush to build a case for an invasion. The former study highlighted the role of character-description and event-sequencing as strategies for putting forward an accusation. The latter focused on the role of the conceptual metaphor as a fundamental argumentative feature in Bush's persuasion strategy to promote the preventive war. Ringmar (2006) investigated the specific characteristics of the various stories told about Iraq and about the nature of world politics and their effects. He found that these stories were organized on the basis of one or the other of the four classical narrative types (romance, tragedy, comedy and satire), and that they functioned to support conflicting interpretations of the conflict. Gelpi (2010) examined the influence of informational cues present in newspaper articles on the formation of American public opinion about the Iraq War. He argued that descriptions about the unlikelihood of reaching a peaceful resolution, the nature of the military conflict and the number of casualties proved most influential in shaping

the public support for an ongoing war. Finally, Erjavec & Volcic (2007) discussed the Serbian re- contextualization of Bush's 'war on terrorism'. They showed how by drawing analogies between the 9/11 attacks and the former Yugoslav wars Serbian nationalists worked retroactively to legitimize Serbian violence against Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo during the 1990. They concluded that several global actors have exploited the use of analogies in this way extending the concept of terrorism to all violent acts carried out by Muslims regardless of the specificities of different contexts.

Edwards (1994) pointed out events in the world and our perception of them are independent of how we talk about them and, very frequently, descriptions of events are "potentially arbitrary, variable, rhetorically designed, or interactionally occasioned" (p. 214). He argued that representational choices are important because they allow us to examine how events may be constructed as individual occurrences (breach-formulations) or predictable and generalized routines (script-formulations).

Specifically, the action of scripting refers to describing events as predictable, generalized and typical. Thus, script formulations are ways of presenting an event by establishing a generalization from specific actions so as to construct regularities. That is, they function to make actions and events appear as perfectly normal, "what everybody or anybody would do, as a routine, not needing any special account" (Edwards, 1994, p. 217). Some linguistic resources frequently associated with action of scripting are: a) extreme adverbs and pronouns such as never, always, nobody, and everybody (Sacks, 1995; Pomerantz, 1986); b) verbs with iterative or durative aspect; c) deictic shift (Lavandera, 1984; O'Connor, 1997); d) high epistemic and deontic modality; e) pluralisation (Edwards, 1994) and f) factual conditional clauses.

In what follows, we will see how both military and political witnesses manipulate scripting devices when taking an adversarial or defensive stance. Particularly, the discussion centres on how witnesses work to hide or eliminate irregularities or abnormalities so as to make events appear normal.

The following exchange comes from the testimony of the former Prime Minister Tony Blair. Here, the interrogator asks him to account for the decisions he

made with former U.S. President George W. Bush during their private discussions at Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas, in April 2002.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: Can we then come to Crawford? Because you had one-to-one discussions with President Bush without any advisers present. Can you tell us what was decided at these discussions?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: There was nothing actually decided, but let me just make one thing clear about this: one thing that is really important, I think, **when you are dealing with other leaders, is you establish -- and this is particularly important, I think, for the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the President of the United States -- you establish a close and strong relationship.** You know, I had it with President Clinton and I had it again with President Bush, and that's important. **So some of it you will do in a formal meeting, but it is also important to be able to discuss in a very frank way what the issues were.**

Blair responds by categorically and emphatically denying the damaging proposition that a secret decision was made at the meeting. Then, through one of his emblematic evasive moves, he introduces new standards of relevance and reformulates the nature of the event. That is, the following description represents his controversial conduct of international affairs as standard practice through the combined use of a factual conditional clause (*when you are dealing with other leaders -- and this is particularly important, I think, for the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the President of the United States --you establish a close and strong relationship*) which establishes a natural and logical relationship between a condition and an action and a movement away from the deictic centre realized by the switch from the first-person pronoun (*I*) to the generic second-person pronoun (*you*). Finally, the insertion of the discourse marker *you know* in this section frames this characterization as given or shared making it more likely to be interpreted as such.

Undoubtedly by generalizing personal experience in this way, Blair works to represent his actions as unremarkable, that is, what any head of government would do; and to counteract alternative representations, such as former British ambassador to Washington Sir Christopher Meyer's, which problematize Blair's policy of closed-door negotiations. As similarities of experience are typically used as indicators of

existing social conditions, the presentation of experience as generalized effectively functions to hide irregularities and to make a case for the legitimacy of those actions.

As regards those joint decisions, exploring different representations of experience is paramount for reconstructing the past since material evidence is scarce. In fact, there are no records of, or witnesses to, the discussions between Blair and Bush and their correspondence has not been found. Yet, the fact that, on the day after the Texas meeting, Blair spoke publicly in favour of regime change for the first time seems to point to some change of heart in the former British Premier.

The next sequence shows how Tony Blair invokes another script to present a justification for his decision to go war. This sequence begins when the interrogator questions him on the validity of the premise of the threat posed by Iraq in 2003 on the basis of weapons of mass destruction.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So in April -- this is my final point before I hand over -
- of 2002, you were not taking the view that the need to change the regime in Iraq should be the main driver of your strategy because the situation on WMD essentially hadn't changed very much over the previous three or more years?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Sorry, the position on WMD had changed dramatically as a result of September 11.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: The facts on WMD had not changed; the perception of the risk had changed, but not the risk itself.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes. Look, **one of the things that you always have to do in this situation** -- you are absolutely right to draw attention to it -- **is you have to, when you are charged with the responsibility of trying to protect your country -- and that should be the job of the Prime Minister -- you have to take an assessment of risk.** Now, my assessment of risk prior to September 11 was that Saddam was a menace, that he was a threat, he was a monster, but we would have to try and make best. If you had asked me prior to September 11, did I have any real belief in his good faith. No, I didn't. Did I really think that a new sanctions framework was going to do the trick? No, I didn't. On the other hand, precisely because the consequence of military action is so great, for me the calculus of risk was, "Look, we are just going to have to do the best we can". After September, that changed.

At first, Blair challenges the interrogator's representation of a stable situation in relation to Iraq's possession of WMD. Yet, the interrogator defends his position by claiming that there was no concrete evidence that Iraq represented more of an

existential threat in 2003. This representation is problematic for Blair who, in order to make a valid case for the use of extraordinary means, needs to convince his audience about the existence of a security risk. Thus, in his next turn, he works to justify his decision to go to war by describing the role of Prime Minister as routinely involving making a subjective assessment of risk. This script is realized by the use of a factual conditional clause (*when you are charged with the responsibility of trying to protect your country -- and that should be the job of the Prime Minister -- you have to take an assessment of risk*), the generic use of the second-person pronoun (*you*) which stands for the speaker as well as anybody else in the same position, high deontic modality, and the maximizing adverb *always*.

What this script conceals is that, according to international treaties, issues of national and international security are not to be decided individually but intersubjectively (Roe, 2008). Interestingly, Blair's worst-case assessment of the risks posed by Iraq in 2003 was opposite to the prevailing feeling of scepticism among his advisors. Note that, immediately after the September 11 attacks (2001) when George W. Bush started to sell an open policy of regime change by linking Al-Qaeda, Iraq and WMD; the British Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) issued an official statement denying that Iraq had played a part in the attacks. Also, they warned Blair that there was no material evidence for claiming that Iraq represented a current threat in terms of their weapons capability (Ralph, 2005; Roe, 2008).

A particularly interesting rhetorical contrast in Tony Blair's testimony is how he enacts different types of scripts which conveniently enhance or diminish the scope of his decision-making powers as Prime Minister. Unlike the previous cases where he highlights his power and responsibility, the next case shows how he, on occasions, chooses to frame his ability to influence decisions as being very limited.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: This morning you said that your decision to contribute to a full division was driven by your sense of what the proper UK contribution should be to policy. At that stage, did you weigh up the implications of that decision; for example, the time that would be required to acquire equipment and such like?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, of course. Part of the purpose of asking for papers that describe the different levels of military commitment that you might give is precisely in order to be able to learn what it is that you will be required to do. But **in these situations, you know, you are very, very dependent, rightly, on the advice that you are given from the Ministry of Defence and from the military.**

This exchange begins when the interrogator asks Tony Blair to account for his decision to make a full-scale military commitment to Iraq. In his reply, Blair works to downplay his accountability for having overcommitted the British Armed forces in Iraq by attributing responsibility for that decision to the military chiefs. That is, he enacts a script which frames his decision-making powers as being constrained to the advice that is given to him by his ministers and advisors. Indeed, he describes the role of a Prime Minister as being *very, very* dependent on their advice. This script is realized by the impersonal use of the second-person pronoun (*you*), pluralisation (*in these situations*) and categorical modality realized by the simple present verb tense.

Yet, it is important to note how this representation does not coincide with the evidence presented by former Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon ³⁶ who testified that he warned Blair about the risks of making a full scale commitment to Iraq while troops were committed to Afghanistan. Moreover, he claimed that he advised Blair to offer a more limited military package but that his advice was disregarded ³⁷. Remarkably, these inconsistencies point to the opaque nature of decision-making practices under Blair's administration and the structures by which he took some important decisions.

The following extended case comes from the testimony of Blair's successor, Gordon Brown. This sequence begins when the interrogator remarks on his surprising lack of participation in the pre-war discussions and elicits a confirmation for the awkwardness of this situation.

³⁶ Hoon, G. (19/10/2010). Oral evidence to the Iraq Inquiry. Retrieved from: <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/transcripts/oralevidence-bydate/100119.aspx>

³⁷ The Telegraph. (19/10/10). Geoff Hoon feared the Army could not cope with Iraq. Retrieved from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/7027425/Iraq-inquiry-Geoff-Hoon-feared-Army-could-not-cope-with-Iraq-war.html>

SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let's come back to the Cabinet meeting that, as you have emphasised, took the actual decision, the meeting of 17 March 2003. That was the moment when you and other members the Cabinet, except, of course, for the late Robin Cook, who resigned, accepted shared responsibility for the decision to going go to war with Iraq, and if you look back from that point, do you feel that there should have been a Cabinet Committee set up before the conflict happened -- one was set up immediately afterwards to deal with it -- that people like you should have been represented on? I think, if I'm right in interpreting your answer to Baroness Prashar, you hadn't actually been at Mr Blair's ad hoc meetings on the subject that he told us about. You weren't at his meeting at Chequers in April 2002, which was an important one. You weren't at his meeting on 23 July 2002, which was an important one. There wasn't a Cabinet Committee, and yet the Cabinet now had to take this very big decision over whether or not to go to war. Shouldn't you have been cut in earlier?

RT HON GORDON BROWN MP: I have to say that **traditionally the Chancellor has never been on these committees** and I don't think it happened previously.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: On War Cabinets in the past?

RT HON GORDON BROWN MP: **When it came to the War Cabinet being constituted, the Chancellor was a member of that. As I understand it, previously, in other instances, the Chancellor, under previous governments, had not been a member of the War Cabinet.**

SIR RODERIC LYNE: You were widely seen as one of the most influential members of the Cabinet, as the most likely successor, accurately, to the then Prime Minister.

RT HON GORDON BROWN MP: It is very kind of you to say all this, but the fact of the matter is I did not feel at any point that I lacked the information that was necessary, that I was denied information that was required. **But my role in this was not to second guess military decisions or options. My role in this was not to interfere in what were very important diplomatic negotiations - that was what the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary were involved in. My role in this was first of all, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, to make sure that the funding was there for what we had to do, and we did make sure that that happened; and, secondly, to play my full part as a Cabinet member in the discussions that took place,** and that is indeed what I did. And when the Cabinet met on the Monday before the Tuesday vote in the House of Commons, I spoke at the Cabinet and made my position clear.

In his first answer turn, Brown simply invokes a script based on tradition in order to justify his lack of participation (*traditionally the Chancellor has never been on these committees*). This short explanation is quickly challenged by the interrogator who reminds the witness that he was not just any minister but *one of the most influential members of the Cabinet*. After this, Brown deploys a more detailed scripted

description of his job responsibilities as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Member of Cabinet which characterizes his lack of involvement in the pre-war discussions as normal by presenting the realm of foreign affairs as being essentially outside his zone of responsibility (*my role in this was not to second guess military decision ... my role in this was not to interfere in what were important diplomatic relations*). In this way, the witness works to hide the anomalies surrounding his absence from discussions.

Noteworthy, an alternative event description was produced before by the former International Development Secretary Clare Short³⁸ in her testimony to the inquiry. In her testimony, Brown's lack of participation in government discussions is represented as a breach with tradition. Specifically, she claimed that Gordon Brown had been noticeably excluded from Blair's inner group discussions as their relationship from 2002 was at its lowest point. She also remarked that she got the impression that he did not quite agree with Blair's decision but that he decided not speak out.

Let us verify the presence of script formulations in the testimony of military witnesses. The next exchange comes from the testimony of the former Chief of Defence Michael Walker. It begins when the interrogator requests him to confirm a statement made by former Prime Minister Tony Blair which suggested that the military Chiefs were particularly interested in making a full-scale military commitment in Iraq.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It has been suggested to us that the army were very keen to be involved in the operation, there were options that didn't involve the army to that sort of degree. Is that an accurate sort of comment?
GENERAL THE LORD WALKER: I think **the army's always keen to be involved**. I don't recall at any stage having said, Hey, look, you can't leave us out of this, certainly, and indeed, **whatever operations -- whichever option had been undertaken, we would have been involved in some form or other**, but I think the more important thing was to make sure that what came out of the plan, and you may have had it referred to before, was what we called a

³⁸ Short, C. (02/02/2010). Oral evidence at the Iraq Inquiry. Retrieved from. <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/transcripts/oralevidence-bydate/100202.aspx>

winning concept. We needed to make sure that there was going to be a winning concept in which we could play a sensible role.

In his response, Walker works to deflect issues of accountability by naturalizing the army's readiness to participate in military operations (*the army's always keen*) by virtue of the nature of their job (*whatever operations whichever option had been undertaken, we would have been involved in some form or other*). This characterization functions to represent the role of the military as being dependent on and obedient to political decisions. Ultimately, this move shifts responsibility to the former Prime Minister Tony Blair for taking the decision to go to war and it acquits the military from responsibility by typifying their response to a governmental request.

As it can be seen so often, the analysis of the testimony of both categories of subjects reveals that Tony Blair and the military mirror one another yielding the highest weight in the decision-making to the other. The last exchange to be discussed here begins when the interrogator asks former Deputy Chief of Defence Jock Stirrup whether he was satisfied with the circumstances under which British troops have been deployed in Iraq.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Were you comfortable with the balance that the forces faced as they moved towards Telic?

ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I think the -- where we got the balance wrong, probably, was in the proportion of equipments that are fitted for a capability but not with a capability. **In other words, you can procure platforms with all the hooks and eyes to be able to put things in them at very short notice, but you only buy a limited number of the equipments that go in them, and then, should the requirement expand, should you be faced with an operation, then, of course, you can buy many more and fit them at very short notice.** Nevertheless, it takes time to manufacture those things. Our experience on Telic certainly was that we couldn't get enough of them into service as quickly as we should. So it was a key lesson from 2003 that we needed to look again at the balance between fitted with and fitted for. More widely, I think, if one looks at the list of urgent operational requirements that we generated for Operation Telic -- and I think there were something like, if I remember correctly, 197 -- the majority of them were not big, new items. They were modifications, they were applique armour, for example. They were improvements to defensive aids. They were bits of equipment that enabled us to operate, or interoperate, more effectively with the United States, and, of course, there were some items of equipment that were specific for the

environment; dust filters for Challenger 2 tanks and AS90 guns, for example. Bear in mind that the original plan had been for UK forces to operate from the north, where they would have faced a different environment. **So it is not possible to equip your forces with everything they need to face every environment.** That has to be done at relatively short notice. So I think that, on balance, with the exception of fitted for and fitted with, we didn't do too badly. The problem, of course, was that we simply did not have enough time, as it turned out, to do everything that we needed to before the operation started.

In his long reply, Stirrup tentatively acknowledges some wrongdoing but, immediately after it, he proceeds to neutralize blame by generalizing contingencies in a war context. The scripting nature of this segment is marked off by a movement from the personal to the impersonal and from a narrative past into a timeless present tense. These scripting mechanisms frame the narrated events as being ordinary, rather than discrete, constituting some sort of generalized routine. Finally, the use of an extreme-case formulation (*it is not possible to equip your forces with everything they need to face every environment*) supports this characterization and deflects blame. Yet, contrary to the case presented by Stirrup, multiple sources have documented an unusually long chain of critical strategic and implementation failings surrounding military preparations which cost the lives of so many British soldiers³⁹.

Other interesting instances of scripting in the testimony of General Jock Stirrup include: *We **all** make mistakes. No human endeavour is **ever** free from failure;* and, *It is a sad fact that on military operations **one** sustains casualties. That's the nature of the business.* These formulations mystify responsibility behind the problems identified in the conduct of the Iraq war by generalizing the imperfect nature of humankind. Such formulations also naturalize casualties in a war context by ignoring that some deaths could have been prevented.

³⁹ The Sun (10/11/2009). I can't believe I've been brought down to the level of having an argument with the Prime Minister of my own country' Retrieved from: http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/campaigns/our_boys/2722106/Mum-at-war-Jacqui-Janes-the-full-transcript.html

As Chirrey (2011) remarks, the use of script-formulations frequently encourages audiences to interpret and understand events and actions as having generalized and recognizable formats. The examination of script-formulations in inquiry testimonies shows that witnesses frequently rely on the strategic use of scripts to make descriptions of events fit into generalized meta-narratives. This strategic move thus seems to play an important role in constructing a consistent text and presenting a persuasive case for the blamelessness of the speaker.

From a discourse perspective, scripts are always discursive productions, that is, ways in which speakers project, reconstruct and simplify actions and events so that they become intelligible or clear enough to be understood as typical occurrences. The explanatory power of script formulations lies on how they allow speakers to create a coherent representation of experience while managing to hide controversial details. In other words, the functionality of scripts resides on their power to make accounts appear common-sense and hence to prevent further inquiry into them by discouraging the presentation of explanatory accounts.

5.2. Counterfactuality

In narrative theory, accounts of counterfactual or hypothetical events are generally considered non-prototypical stories, that is, low-narrativity narratives (Carranza, 1998) because they represent virtual, rather than actual, sequences of events. Very frequently, these accounts appear embedded in other texts and their effect is mainly argumentative: “they serve the purpose of convincing the audience of certain interpretations of the story events” (Carranza, 1998, p. 291). Specifically, “Narrative sequences of counterfactual or hypothetical events position the virtual as opposed to or in comparison with the actual, and in doing so they convey the narrator’s commentary and perspective” (1998, p. 287). That is, these powerful argumentative resources establish relations of analogy and contrast between series of imaginary and positive events which allow narrators to represent actions and events in a positive or negative light by placing them against the background of other possible options.

The fragments discussed below illustrate how counterfactual narratives are frequently inserted within inquiry testimonies for a rhetorical effect. More specifically, they show how short imaginary narrative sequences are often produced within responses to explicit or implicit accusations and how they perform a series of rhetorically oriented actions designed to encouraging a particular reading of events while discouraging others.

The first sequence to be discussed here begins when the interrogator requires former Prime Minister Tony Blair to explain the reasons behind his secrecy about military preparation for the occupation of Iraq.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But can I ask another question? Because, if the view was that you are going through the United Nations route and there was a military threat, why were you reluctant to have any visible preparation?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Well, we changed and we did have the visible preparation.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: But that came late, that's my point.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Exactly, but there was always a concern, if you like, in the middle part of 2002, because people were constantly saying, "They have made up their minds, nothing is going to alter it. We are now set on a military course". So we were anxious to make sure people did not think there was an inevitability about this, because one of the things I would emphasise to you is there really wasn't. **If the UN route had worked successfully, however many doubts you could have on the past behaviour of Saddam, if it had worked successfully, the whole thing would have been -- would not have happened. We would have taken the UN path and made it work.**

In his first response turn, Blair qualifies the proposition presented by the interrogator in a bid to mitigate blame. After this, he works to justify his initial secrecy about military preparations by representing the voice of an unspecified and collective source misinterpreting his intentions. In this context, his hiding of military preparations is described as an effort to avoid further misunderstandings. At this point, a counterfactual narrative sequence is introduced. It presents a counterfactual scenario in which the diplomatic negotiations at the United Nations are successful and hence war is avoided. This account functions to strengthen Blair's thesis that the invasion was only a matter of a last resource and that there was nothing mandated about it. In

this way, the use of counterfactuality serves as an important means whereby a witness can represent his actions in a favourable light and support a particular viewpoint.

Irrealis modality presents a proposition as non-factual or non-actual. That is, it indicates the absence or suspension of reality (*realis*) as the speaker is talking. As Chilton (2004, p. 150) points out, the *irrealis* modality implied by the syntax of the conditional clause is well-known to involve the concept of causality. Indeed, as it has been already demonstrated, inquiry witnesses frequently manipulated the use of counterfactual conditional clauses to deny personal agency or to distance themselves from an event by representing the realization of an event as being dependent upon other external conditions, opening up new alternatives for the explanation of an event.

The next exchange shows another instance in which the political witness Tony Blair manipulates counterfactuality to persuade his audience that there was not a fixed political agenda behind the decision to invade Iraq. This strategy arguably constitutes the basis of Blair's defence strategy for the accusation of having plotted the overthrow of an unfavourable government.

BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: One thing I want to put to you -- because Sir David Omand, whom we saw last week, he emphasised the importance of structuring decision-making so that you are simply not swept along with the pace of events, particularly like military preparations. Do you think we had the ability and the will to pause and look at our strategy? For example, in early 2003, UNMOVIC inspectors had returned to Iraq and were expecting either Saddam would grossly obstruct them or he would quickly find evidence of WMD. In the event this didn't happen. Did we actually think -- did we stop and re-evaluate our strategy at that stage?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: **We would have entirely re-evaluated our strategy had, as I say -- and I'm just using this as a shorthand -- -- Saddam Hussein done a Gaddafi, had he said, "I'm finished with all this, I want to join the international community on proper terms."** But he didn't.

In this case, counterfactuality functions to shift responsibility away from the speaker towards a third party. In other words, its functionality consists in attributing responsibility to Saddam Hussein for having instigated a war by looking into what he could have done to avoid a military conflict but did not. Specifically, the counterfactual account presented above establishes a contrast between Saddam

Hussein's behaviour and Colonel Gaddafi's. In this way, Blair blames Saddam for the escalation of the conflict and conveniently frames his behaviour as responsive rather than aggressive presenting a more beneficial characterization of the events.

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica⁴⁰, Gaddafi's program for the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction as well as the United Nations sanctions to block them date back from 1972. Yet, six days after the capture of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein in 2003, Gaddafi announced that he would at last renounce and dismantle his program and welcomed international inspections in Libya to verify that he would follow through on this commitment. The American President G.W. Bush, the British Premier Tony Blair and many supporters of the Iraq War portrayed Gaddafi's announcement as a direct consequence of the Iraq War. However, many foreign policy experts contended that Gaddafi's announcement was merely a continuation of his prior attempts at normalizing relations with the West and getting the sanctions removed. They pointed to the fact that Libya had already made similar offers starting four years before one was finally accepted.

The next extended exchange begins with the interrogator's representation of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) perspective on the funding of the military campaign. This representation portrays the former Chancellor of the Exchequer as blameworthy for a series of cuts which forced the military chiefs to suddenly rein back their expenditure at the time troops were being prepared for deployment in Iraq. In turn, Gordon Brown challenges this representation of events and presents an alternative one in which the military chiefs are to blame for their inefficient use of resources and their dubious accounting practices.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Let me, without being an advocate, just try to put what I understand the Ministry of Defence view on this was. I think it will go something like this: that the 2002 settlement seemed to them to be a good one precisely because they were to turn non-cash into cash and this would enable them to address what they considered limitations on their funding prior

⁴⁰Encyclopaedia Britannica : Muammar al-Qaddafi. Retrieved from:
<http://www.britannica.com/bps/search?query=Muammar+al-Qaddafi&blacklist=485369>

to this point. So they saw it as an important opportunity and they believed that they had been encouraged to do this by the terms of resource accounting budgeting. It was a good thing to do and they clearly took to it rather enthusiastically. At some point, a concern then developed from the Treasury that this was getting out of hand, that the movement from non-cash to cash was going too far. So I think the first point is that, although in cash terms this concluded with extra money going into the Ministry of Defence, to start with, if you are looking at resources as a whole, that was not how the Ministry of Defence saw it, they saw they were just moving from one part of their resource to another and spending it in a more efficient way. Then into this process the guillotine came down. So that, as I understand it, would be the Ministry of Defence's presentation of what happened.

RT HON GORDON BROWN MP: The purpose of resource accounting was to make sure that the assets of different departments were used more efficiently. So there had to be proof that the assets were being used more efficiently for that to be able to release cash. What happened was that at the beginning of the year, the Ministry of Defence had an increase in its budget of 3.6 per cent. That was the basis of the spending review and that was the basis on which everybody was planning for the Ministry of Defence to move forward. Then they decided that they thought that they had non-cash resources. At one point it was £800 million, then it was £400 million, then it became £1.3 billion that they wanted to transfer into spending money. We said that it was very unlikely that during the course of a few months the efficiencies gained by the use of assets had come to £1.3 billion. The Ministry of Defence were planning to spend 9 per cent additional cash that year. We had allocated 3.6 per cent. **If we had allowed every department to do what the Ministry of Defence were doing, then we would have an extra cost of £12 billion, which would be the equivalent to raising income tax by something like 3 pence in the pound.** So we couldn't allow a situation to develop where, without a noticeable increase in the efficiency of the use of assets, suddenly £1.3 billion was being spent by the Ministry of Defence that really was money it hadn't had allocated to it in the first place. So what happened then was there was a discussion between the Ministry of Defence and the Treasury. I wrote to the Prime Minister about this because it was obviously an issue about the cash expenditure of the Government. We eventually resolved this position with the Ministry of Defence receiving, as it had, £500 million extra for 2002/2003 before, then it received an ability to vire £400 million in 2003/2004, and then an ability to vire from non-cash to cash, £400 million in 2004/2005. The net result of that was that the Ministry of Defence had more spending available to it the years 2002/2003, 2003/2004 and 2004/2005 than originally in the spending review. That is what actually happened and the Ministry of Defence ended up with more money than they would otherwise have been allocated. And on top of that, of course, we had an additional £1.3 billion or more in 2003/2004 and a £billion in 2004/2005 which was for the military operations themselves. So this has really not much to do with Iraq, because Iraq was being funded completely separately. The Ministry of Defence had a 3.6 per cent rise in their cash allocation. But as a result of the changes we made with the

Ministry of Defence, because we knew we had issues about how the Ministry of Defence would move forward in relation to both Iraq and Afghanistan, we provided that extra money to them. So the Ministry of Defence ended up with more money than had been expected originally in the spending round.

Particularly, the use of counterfactuality in Brown's answer functions to sustain a favourable image for the witness by justifying his 'austerity' measures as being guided by his interest in avoiding higher taxes for regular British citizens at a time of economic crisis. That is, in his recount of past events, Brown strategically suspends the main story line to introduce a sequence of hypothetical events (*If we had allowed every department to do what the Ministry of Defence were doing, then we would have an extra cost of £12 billion, which would be the equivalent to raising income tax by something like 3 pence in the pound*). This imaginary scenario foregrounds the potential negative effects of allowing the MoD to go ahead with their spending and consequently frames Brown's behaviour as being beneficial for a sustainable domestic economy. Generally speaking, the use of counterfactuality here functions to reinforce a polarized characterization of discourse participants by emphasizing the speaker's good deeds.

The next exchange illustrates another occasion in which the political witness Gordon Brown takes an advantageous look into a potentially worse scenario in order to sustain a positive image for himself. The interrogator asks the witness to confirm his unfamiliarity with the formal legal advice given by the then Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, on the decision to invade Iraq.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So you, at that time, had not seen the formal written advice that he had presented to the Prime Minister on 7 March?

RT HON GORDON BROWN MP: No, and I think that -- look, I'm not a lawyer, I'm not an international lawyer. As I understand it, the constitutional position is very clear, that before a decision of such magnitude is made, the Attorney General has to say whether he thinks it is lawful or not. That was the straightforward question he had to answer. **If he had answered equivocally in his statement to us, then of course there would have been questions, but he was very straightforward in his recommendation.**

Aware of the accountability issues involved in admitting that he took a decision without seeing the legal advice, Brown works to mitigate his oversight by

framing it as a non-fault action. One key argumentative mechanism employed to this effect is the counterfactual account strategically located at the end of his response turn. This account establishes a contrast between two alternative scenarios: the presentation of equivocal and non-equivocal advice and frames Brown's omission as irrelevant by placing it in the latter scenario. Specifically, notice the repetition of the adjective *straightforward* in Brown's representation of the question posed to the Attorney General (*That was the straightforward question he had to answer*) and his answer to it (*he was very straightforward in his recommendation*). This astute repetition contributes to characterizing the Attorney's response as being unproblematic. In this way, Brown is able to convey the idea that in the particular situation he stood, reading the formal advice was irrelevant.

What the witness strategically avoids mentioning here is that there were various drafts to this document and that the final one clearly differed from the first draft. In fact, these 'corrections' to the paper arose great controversies among many ministers who resigned in protest. In this context, Brown's lack of acquaintance with this important document is particularly remarkable since one of the most important caveats surrounding the invasion was that it could be considered illegal. Arguably, as a senior member of Cabinet bearing the responsibility to commit his country to war, Brown should have been seen or requested to see this paper.

Let us now consider one interesting case of counterfactuality in the testimony of a military witness to show that, like politicians, they also frequently resort to this argumentative tool as a defence strategy. The following exchange deals with the post-invasion insurgency in Iraq. It begins when the interrogator asks the former Chief of Defence, General Walker, to assess the impact of drawdown after the initial occupation.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: How was that affected by the rather rapid start of the drawdown of our troops?

GENERAL THE LORD WALKER: I don't think it was. It became very clear that the CPA down in Basra had not been entirely satisfactory in its early days. The money that was flowing from the British Government was pretty small and the money that was coming down from the Americans in Baghdad was quite

large but beset with bureaucracy. So what it probably meant was that **some of the activities that would have allowed a military commander to carry out purely military operations in Basra, had to give way to providing force protection for civil authorities having to do things for the local population which otherwise they wouldn't have done.** Not that they minded doing it, I don't think, but **they would have been able to handle some of the security issues rather better if all their troops had been focused on some of the security issues.**

Instead of directly addressing the question posed to him, Walker orients his response to challenging the prejudicial presupposition that rapid military drawdown had a negative influence in Iraq leading to the rising of insurgencies. Specifically, the use of narrative sequences of hypothetical events allows him to limit the liability of the military for not providing Iraqis and the British civilians in Iraq with the necessary standards of security. That is, by looking into what the military could have done in a different political situation, this witness works to shift blame away from the military into the political sector for the dangerous situation that arose in the post-invasion period. In this way, Walker is able to mitigate responsibility for the military by claiming that, as the conditions stood, they could not have done any better.

As it has been shown in the previous cases, the insertion of counterfactual narrative sequences in inquiry testimonies functions to create textual representations designed to support a thesis beyond refutation. Specifically, they function as rhetorical tools designed to persuade audiences of the rightfulness of certain actions which have been undertaken by the speaker in the past or by the groups they represent. Most frequently, their effects consist in indirectly shifting responsibility to others by virtue what they could have done but did not do. Similarly, on other occasions, they enact positive interpretative frames for the speaker's past behaviour by placing it against a background of other worse possible options, thus making a reasonable case for the legitimacy of their decisions and actions and their alleged benefits over other possible ones.

Yet, the ubiquity of counterfactual narrative sequences in inquiry testimony, unlike in everyday interaction, does not seem to go unnoticed. Very frequently, interrogators question the witnesses' recourse to counterfactuality to justify their

behaviour. For example, at one point in the interrogation to former Prime Minister Tony Blair, the interrogator questions the validity of all the hypothetical situations presented by this witness.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: It is these "ifs", isn't it? When Sir Martin Gilbert asked you about threat to the United Kingdom, you said that if Saddam, freed from sanctions, were to have been able to pursue WMD programmes, you were pretty sure that the United Kingdom would have been involved, in which obviously you are right. But hadn't, at the time we are talking about, Saddam -- he hadn't been freed from sanctions or from a pretty effective arms embargo or from all the other apparatus of deterrence, and other countries, which were just as opposed to the idea of Saddam having WMD as us, and many of which were much closer to Iraq, clearly didn't agree that military action was needed or justified by the level of threat at that time. So they didn't accept the "Why Iraq? Why now?" questions, or at least they didn't give two yes's to that. I'm trying to work out why you did and they didn't.

Thus, as the above turn illustrates, despite their powerful argumentative effects, to the critical eye, the persuasiveness of counterfactuality in the context of a public inquiry is clearly limited and constrained. That is, by virtue of its focus on evidence and facts rather than on speculation, the insertion of counterfactual narrative sequences in inquiry testimony is clearly dispreferred. Despite this obvious caveat, witnesses nonetheless frequently make a strategic use of this argumentative tool within larger interactional turns where their presence is glossed over and thus more likely to be overlooked. Finally, it is important to remark that while interrogators frequently expressed dislike or opposition to the use of counterfactuality in witnesses' testimonies, they did not rule out their speculative behaviour and allowed them to dwell on "what if" questions.

5.3. The lesson-deriving frame

The concept of lesson drawing, frequently used in the field of project management, has currently become an influential way of understanding governmental policy especially in the UK (James & Lodge, 2003). In what follows, the use of this resource is examined in the context of inquiry testimonies as a way of offering a favourable revisionist perspective of a troublesome past by reframing it into a 'useful' present. The underlying assumption here is that, since reality can be represented in

various ways to different effects, it is important to examine how it is discursively constructed by particular social agents and which mental models result from it. As Wodak remarks (2006), being able to set the relevant frames in a debate may hold the key to successfully channelling the nature of a discussion.

Specifically, the following fragments illustrate how political and military witnesses alike manipulate one of the mandates of the inquiry, *to identify lessons that can be learnt*, in an attempt to avoid liability and blame and how they do so in three interrelated ways: by implying a blameless mental disposition on the part of social agents, by representing mistakes as teaching experiences and, finally, by orienting audiences to focusing on the present rather than on the past.

The next excerpt comes from the testimony of former Prime Minister Gordon Brown. It appears at the outset of his testimony as part of a long answer to the Chairman's initial question into whether he really believes the decision to occupy Iraq was indeed right.

RT HON GORDON BROWN MP: (...) I do think, Sir John, **we have lessons to learn**. I think in three areas I would like to discuss with you and I hope that you will take on board the questions and the answers that come from these issues. The first is we have been fighting two wars and it is essential that we have the proper structures of decision-making. And, of course, as time has gone on, both Tony Blair and I have changed the structures of decision-making in government. I think the second thing is we won the battle within almost seven days, but it has taken seven years to win the peace in Iraq. And I think we are developing the concepts of a just peace and how we can actually manage conflicts like this in a way that we get reconstruction and a stake in the future by, in this case, the Iraqi people. I think the third thing **we have learned**, and I would like to discuss it with you, but it is for you to ask me questions, is that there will be interventions in the future and international cooperation has got to be far greater than it was. Global problems require better global institutions. And I would particularly draw attention to the importance in all this of the strongest possible relationship between Europe and America, something that I'm determined to build up and continue to make stronger in the future.

This excerpt manifests the ease with which Gordon Brown exerts control over the content of his testimony and the mechanisms employed to that effect. In particular, notice the usefulness of expressions such as *I would like to discuss with you and I hope*

that you will take on board the questions and the answers and I would like to discuss it with you, but it is for you to ask me questions for bringing up a new list of topics for consideration regardless of the specifics of the interrogator's agenda. Also, mind the meticulous organization of this turn realized by cohesive links (three *areas, the first, the second thing* and *the third thing*) typically used in writing. These features undoubtedly point to the pre-planned nature of his speech.

This turn specifically illustrates the use of the lesson-deriving frame in Brown's testimony. First, notice how the witness introduces this frame (*I do think, Sir John, we have lessons to learn*) in the context of the answer to the question of whether he thought that the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 was indeed right. Throughout this turn, this frame functions to present a positive image for the witness as a politician capable of recognizing areas of poor achievement as well as taking the necessary actions to improve them. Indeed, mind the use of parallel moves consisting in the identification of three problems (*it is essential that we have the proper structures of decision-making, it has taken seven years to win the peace in Iraq and cooperation has got to be far greater*) and the presentation of three solutions to these problems (*Tony Blair and I have changed the structures of decision-making in government; we are developing the concepts of a just peace and how we can actually manage conflicts like this in a way that we get reconstruction and a stake in the future by, in this case, the Iraqi people and I would particularly draw attention to the importance in all this of the strongest possible relationship between Europe and America, something that I'm determined to build up and continue to make stronger in the future*). Moreover, it is interesting to notice the patterned deictic shifts realized in these parallel moves. They systematically involve the hiding of individual agency in relation to the problems identified through the use of the first-person plural pronoun (*we*) while they foreground the role of the speaker as the agent behind the proposed solutions through the use of the first-person singular pronoun (*I*). These strategic moves are compatible with the enactment of a promotional type of discourse designed to persuade voters during election time.

The next interactional sequence comes from the testimony of former Prime Minister Tony Blair. It begins when the interrogator asks him about the wisdom of expressing certainty over a tentative claim.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: This is important -- we get to the foreword. You said in the foreword that: The assessed intelligence has established beyond doubt that Iraq has continued to produce chemical and biological weapons. Now, you have already mentioned the JIC reports about "patchy", "sporadic", "limited", et cetera. Given that, was it wise to say that intelligence is ever beyond doubt? Wasn't this setting yourself up for a higher standard of proof than it might be possible to sustain?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I think what I said in the foreword was that I believed it was beyond doubt. What: What I believe the assessed intelligence has established beyond doubt is that Saddam has continued to produce chemical and biological weapons. I did believe it. I think that was the -- and I did believe it, frankly, beyond doubt.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Beyond your doubt, but beyond anybody's doubt?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: If you -- if I had taken, for example, the words out of -- even the 9 March 2002 or the March 2002 JIC assessment, it said, It was clear that .Now, if I said, It was clear that in the foreword, rather than I believe, beyond doubt, it would have had the same impact. I actually think now -- and **this is, incidentally, I think, a lesson that came out of the Butler Inquiry but I think it is relevant to this as well, and I said this at the time, now, I would take government right out of this altogether. I would simply** have published, if the intelligence services had been willing, the JIC assessment, because they were absolutely strong enough on their own, and if you look at the dossier itself -- and, of course, the dossier itself, if you just take the executive summary -- I mean, I won't go through and read it, but this executive summary wasn't drawn up by me. It was drawn up by the Joint Intelligence Committee and they did it perfectly justifiably on the information they had before them. It is hard to come to any other conclusion than that this person has a continuing WMD programme, and I mean, we will come at a later point in this to the issue of what the truth was about Saddam, because the Iraq Survey Group, which is, in my view, an extremely important document, has actually resolved the conundrum and the riddle of what Saddam was up to, and we therefore can see what happened. But if you go back to that time, if you read the executive summary and the information that follows, I can't see how anyone could come to a different conclusion.

In turn, Blair undertakes series of strategic moves in order to deny the existence of an intention to deceive behind his publication of a foreword to the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) statement. First, he enacts a personal or private epistemological stance which frames his claim as being a true reflection of his

personal belief. Specifically, he inserts and highlights the clause *I believe* in *what I said in the foreword was that I believed it was beyond doubt. What: What I believe the assessed intelligence has established beyond doubt is that Saddam has continued to produce chemical and biological weapons. I did believe it. I think that was the -- and I did believe it, frankly, beyond doubt.* Notice that this clause was absent from the interrogator's more factual representation of Blair's words (*we get to the foreword. You said in the foreword that: The assessed intelligence has established beyond doubt...*). Then, he presents two counterfactual accounts which establish an analogy between his foreword and the JIC assessment which ultimately functions to make a claim for the consistency of both texts. The first one looks at what would have happened had he copied the words from the JIC assessment (*if I had taken, for example, the words out of -- even the 9 March 2002 or the March 2002 JIC assessment, it said, It was clear that .Now, if I said, It was clear that in the foreword, rather than I believe, beyond doubt, it would have had the same impact*), the second speculates on what would have happened had he dropped his foreword to the JIC assessment (*I would simply have published, if the intelligence services had been willing, the JIC assessment, because they were absolutely strong enough on their own, and if you look at the dossier itself ... It is hard to come to any other conclusion...*). Finally, Blair makes use of the lesson-deriving frame to support the view that, at the time of the publication of his foreword, he was completely unaware or unable to foresee the significant impact it would have. These combined rhetorical moves manage to present a particular blameless interpretative frame for the witness's publication by presenting it as being unintentionally unfortunate. Moreover, they work to counteract other circulating representations which negatively portray Tony Blair as purposefully exaggerating the risks posed by Saddam in order to generate consensus for the war by instilling fear in the population.

In the next case, Tony Blair again manipulates the lesson frame in order to avoid accountability for overlooking the risks posed by removing Saddam. The interrogator asks him to confirm a possible explanation for this failing to consider what several political analysts at the time were anticipating.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Was it then a weakness in the pre-March 2003 discussions that somehow voices weren't raised, and experts and knowledge weren't put on the table that there could be this massive deterioration?

RT HON TONY BLAIR: There was very much discussion of the Shia/Sunni issue, and we were very well aware of that. **What there wasn't -- and this, again, is of vital importance and this certainly is a lesson in any situation similar to this -- people did not believe that you would have Al-Qaeda coming in from outside and people did not believe that you would end up in a situation where Iran, once, as it were, the threat of Saddam was removed from them, would then try to deliberately destabilise the country, but that's what they did, and there are some very important lessons in that,** because what is important also to understand throughout this process, the Iraqi people, as a people, were not in favour of the violence, they were not in favour of sectarianism. As a people, they supported and have supported throughout the political process. Indeed today in Iraq you have now got, for the elections that are coming up, groups who are overtly non-sectarian standing for election, which is a huge thing for the whole of the Middle East and a great thing incidentally. So I think what I think in future you have to be aware of is that if you are dealing with a country where you are likely to get this -- as I say, this perversion of the proper faith of Islam as a major element in the equation, you are going to have to prepare for that very carefully. Your troop configuration has got to be prepared for it and you are going to have to be prepared for quite a fight over it.

In his answer, Blair immediately denies the blameworthy account presented in the previous turn and, conversely, he argues for the impossibility of having being able to foresee some of the problems which actuality developed in Iraq after the initial occupation. In this context, the use of the lesson frame contributes to presenting the reactions of Iran and Al-Qaeda as being surprising and astonishing. That is, something to be learnt only from experience. Interestingly, this frame not only attributes responsibility to external forces for the insurgency in Iraq but also it makes a claim for the future disrupting power or influence of these entities. All in all, this representation supports Blair's positive characterization of *the Iraqi people* who get portrayed as being in favour of the coalition forces and political change. In this way, through an intricate interplay of discourse strategies, Blair works to deflect accountability for initiating a long-lasting, unpopular and extremely devastating war and for doing so in the worst possible footing without the necessary preparation and planning.

Let us now consider the use of the lesson-deriving frame in the testimonies of military witnesses. In the following exchange, the interrogator requires former Chief

of Defence Jock Stirrup to identify the main difficulties experienced with vehicles in Iraq.

SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: With strategic mobility, what were the major items there that you thought were in trouble?

ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: We were short on strategic airlift and, **certainly, when we did the first lessons learned exercise after Operation Telic, that was one of the clear lessons to emerge from it**, in part because of the continuing delay in the A400M programme, although the A400M would not have been in service on the original plan by the time of Operation Telic, but, nevertheless, it was slipping to the right and we didn't have anything really to fill the gap.

In his response, Stirrup reckons a lack of air mobility and gives an explanation for this. This explanation admits the existence of continuous delays in the procurement and delivery of vehicles which detrimentally constrained their capacity to provide for the troops in theatre. This face-threatening recognition of a tactical failing is then mitigated by the use of the lesson deriving frame. This frame allows the witness to represent a favourable image for the military as willing to critically evaluate their performance and benefit from experience. Moreover, it projects a blameless interpretative frame for problems undergone by implying that they could not have been anticipated. Finally, it conveys the idea that this experience may be enlightening as it can help the military to perform better in this area in the future.

The use of the lesson-deriving frame manifests a clear tendency in inquiry testimonies. It consists in the systematic manipulation of this frame for favouring a positive interpretation of governmental policy and military strategy. As it has been suggested before, it specifically involves taking a strategic revisionist perspective which functions to reframe negative past events into useful, enlightening and instructive experiences. This strategy clearly contributes to deflecting implications of responsibility and blame by making a claim for the inescapable, unavoidable or inevitable nature of human failings.

Indeed, the use this frame becomes particularly powerful in the context of inquiry testimonies due to its legitimacy. That is, because of its relevance to the mandate of a lesson-learning inquiry, interrogators tend to welcome the identification

of ‘new lessons’ by witnesses. This allowance, in turn, paves the way for witnesses to pervasively take advantage of this framing mechanism and manipulate it to hide responsibility and blame rather than to really represent valuable insights gained out of their experience of the conflict. This representational choice thus provides a unique opportunity for witnesses to avoid reproach for their actions as well as to make a sensible case for the value of their experience. As Wodak (2006) remarks, frames which have historical roots are generally taken as logical, common sense and thus they are very difficult to change.

5.4. The manufacturing of non-fault accounts

The examination of recurrent and emblematic discourse practices in inquiry testimonies shows that, very frequently, military and political witnesses draw on similar strategies as they communicate and interpret experience. These strategies, most frequently, appear in situations in which witnesses perceive they may be charged with a fault and, consequently, they respond to this real or perceived threat by undermining conflictive accounts and constituting other more favourable ones. Indeed, as Martinez Guillem states, “the main goal of speakers when constructing their own accounts is to implicitly or explicitly discredit the versions of other accounts” (2009, p.730). In other words, the use of different types of accounts in interaction is interpretable as being oriented to preventing public disapproval by emphasizing the speaker’s perspective while backgrounding other conflicting ones.

Like comparable studies (Harris, Grainger & Mullany, 2006; Hastie, 2009; Jaworski & Galansinski, 2002), this examination of discourse practices in inquiry testimonies has unveiled different ways through which military and political accountable figures work meticulously to avoid accountability for very serious issues such as mentoring an illegitimate, if not illegal war; putting millions of innocent lives at risk as well as lying to and deceiving the general public during the conduct of war. Given the magnitude of these offenses, exposing the argumentative moves through which witnesses work to get away with responsibility for them is of utmost importance

as it represents the basis for challenging their behaviour and the mental models their discourse produce for understanding a significant socio-political event.

Indeed, from a socio-cognitive approach to discourse, several authors have made a claim for the necessity to examine the ways in which knowledge, discourse and society relate to each other (Van Dijk 2006). It seems relevant therefore to conclude this section by remarking on the necessary link between discourse and cognition and the contexts to which they relate. From this perspective, the use of argumentative resources is always interpretable as a strategic process through which speakers seek to organize systems of knowledge for a society from a particular point of view. Arguably, highlighting this cognitive and social aspect of discourse in the testimony of powerful speakers is a way to contributing to resisting their manipulation.

CHAPTER SIX: The role of speech-accompanying gestures

This chapter focuses on witnesses' use of speech-accompanying gestures in oral testimonies and their contribution to overall performance. Particularly, it looks at the centrality of gesture in constituting particular rhetorical styles (Fairclough, 2000), that is, distinctive repertoires of total bodily performance including a mixture of different ways of speaking, looking, shifting expressions and gesturing. An underlying assumption here is that differences in bodily performance are highly influential in the public assessment of the relative success or failure of a public speaker and hence a comprehensive analysis of public discourse cannot overlook this aspect. This chapter ends with a discussion of how particular socially recognizable identities can be reflexively constructed in interaction through semiotic layering and their effects in projecting a coherent and credible image for a speaker.

The study of gesture has long fascinated scholars and lay people alike. Indeed, the origins of this interest can be traceable back to classical rhetoric (Kendon, 2004). In this tradition, rhetoricians focused on training public speakers such as politicians and teachers into displaying a set of pre-planned and rehearsed gestures which responded to prescribed norms and were oriented to motivating or persuading an audience. Throughout time, this line of inquiry has attracted the interest of several anthropologists and discourse analysts who shed light on how gesture and speech combine to form a rich basis for human conversational interaction in both professional and everyday settings (Erickson, 1982, 1995; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1995, 1997; Quek, et. al., 2002; Mondada, 2007, Montes, 2007; Rampton, 2009; Sauer, 1999). These studies supported the view that linguistic information alone does not provide a complete view of the intricate meanings of a text. Erickson (1995), for instance, questioned the adversarial opposition that had been frequently established between Continental and Anglo-American approaches in terms of their broad and narrow conceptions of discourse and argued that "the dichotomies that are often drawn between text and context, between the macro and micro approaches, are misleading"(p. 13). This argument, which was by no means new at the time, manifests the empirical and theoretical work of this group of researchers. Their work also

included the adaptation and implementation of various frameworks for the identification, coding and interpretation of gesture as an integral part of discourse.

Two of the best well-known and most drawn upon theoretical and analytical frameworks to date are those proposed by McNeill (1992) and Kendon (2004). These authors recognize gesture as a separable expressive system not merely helping the speaker but because they are meaningful in their own right. They consider the movements of the arms, elbows, hands, wrists, fingers and knuckles from some position of rest or relaxation (home position) to a region of space and, eventually, their movement back to a position of rest. They argue that the resulting gesture can be coded and interpreted in relation to its accompanying speech.

Table 3:McNeill’s (1992) Gesture Classification Scheme

Gestures of the concrete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Iconics - Deictics (with concrete or local referents)
Gestures of the abstract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Metaphorics - Beats - Deictics (with abstract or removed referents)

In *Hand and mind: what gestures reveal about thought*, McNeill (1992) proposes a classification in terms of “asking what meanings and functions a gesture possesses” (p. 76). This scheme (See table 3) includes a distinction between concrete and abstract gestures which stems from the difference in the way a gesture is used to represent or point to concrete entities, objects, actions and events or to abstract concepts and relationships in discourse. More specifically, he identifies four discrete categories of gestures *iconics*, *metaphorics*, *deictics* and *beats*. *Iconics* are gestures which typically represent images of the concrete, that is, they enact concrete entities such as objects, entities and actions referred to in speech as well as a particular point of view for a narrator as a character or an observer in the narrated world. These images are said to bear a close formal relationship with the propositional content of accompanying speech. *Metaphorics*, like *iconics*, are imagistic gestures but, unlike them, metaphoric gestures represent abstract content such as concepts and

relationships. In other words, they give abstract content the form of visual-kinetic images. *Deictics* includes gestures which point to either concrete or abstract referents in time or space. Consequently, they fulfil different types of indexical reference. Finally, *beats*, also known as batons, are short, quick and rhythmic motions of the hand which add emphasis to some segment of speech.

Unlike McNeill, Kendon (2004) recognizes the inherent difficulty of tying certain forms to particular functions and, consequently, he argues for the benefits of recognizing “a series of dimensions in terms of which gestures can be compared” (p. 104). So, he presents a classification scheme based on two separate criteria: form and function.

Table 4: Kendon’s (2004) Formal Typology of Gestures

Open-Hand (OH) gestures	The Hand Prone (OHP) family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open Hand Prone gestures with vertical palms (VP) - Open Hand Prone with horizontal palms (ZP)
	The Hand Supine (OHS) family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Palm presentation (PP) gestures - Palm addressed (PA) gestures - Open Hand Supine gestures with palm lateral movement (PL)
Closed-Hand (CH) gestures	The Grappolo (G) family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Closure-to grappolo gestures - The grappolo hold gestures - Grappolo-to-open gestures
	The Ring (R) family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ring- to-open gestures - Ring-display gestures - Ring-vertical gestures

The former typology (See table 4), based on hand shapes, characteristics and movements, presents two main categories, *Open-Hand gestures* (OH) and *Closed-Hand gestures* (CH). As the name implies, Open-hand gestures are performed by opening up the hand(s) and showing the palm(s); conversely, closed-hand gestures are displayed by bringing some or all of the fingers closed together or into contact and holding them tightly. More specifically, he presents four sub- categories or ‘gesture families’: the *Open-Hand Prone family* (OHP), the *Open-Hand Supine family* (OHS),

the *Grappolo (G) family* and the *Ring (R) family*. The OHP family includes gestures with the palms down whereas the OHS family consists of gestures with the palms up. The G-family includes the finger bunch or closed fist while the R-family consists of gestures in which the tip of the index finger is brought into contact with that of the thumb outlining a circular space. Kendon also suggests these families may share some core semantic themes. Thus, gestures of OHP family are associated with halting and interrupting; gestures of the OHS family with presenting and offering, gestures of the G-family with topicalizing and seizing attention, and the gestures of the R-family with specifying or ‘making precise’.

The latter functional classification distinguishes (See table 5) three macrofunctions of gestures: a referential function (RF), a pragmatic function (PF) and an interpersonal or interactive function (IF). Unlike McNeill, Kendon states that this classification “does not try to set up gesture types as mutually exclusive categories but recognizes, instead, a series of dimensions” (p. 104)

Table 5: Kendon’s (2004) Functional Classification of Gestures

Gestures with referential function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Representational function - Deictic (pointing) function
Gestures with pragmatic function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Modal function - Performative function - Parsing function
Gestures with interactive or interpersonal function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deictic (pointing) function

Gestures are said to contribute to the *referential meanings* of an utterance by representation and pointing, that is, by visually presenting its content through various representational mechanisms such as, modelling, depicting and enacting or by drawing attention to concrete or virtual entities referred to speech by signalling them. Also, gestures are thought to contribute to the *pragmatic meanings* of an utterance by indicating something about the speaker’s attitude towards their speech through the establishment of an interpretative frame for how an utterance should be treated particularly in terms of ‘modality’, ‘performativity’ and ‘parsing’. This terminology

typically used in linguistics is transferred here to gesture by virtue of analogy. Thus, gestures can express various degrees of certainty and obligation, they can indicate the kind of speech act being performed and they can punctuate oral discourse or highlight its organization by emphasising key components and establishing connections among them. Thirdly, gestures can also contribute to the expression of *interactive or interpersonal meanings*. Particularly, gestures may be used to regulate turns at talk by holding the floor, nominating a next speaker or seizing somebody's attention.

Although both schemes have their own special usefulness, they are not unproblematic for the discourse analyst. First of all, as Kendon recognizes, McNeill's fine and exclusive distinctions are clearly inadequate since they convey the false idea that it is possible to think about a one-to-one relationship between form and function. However, in spite of Kendon's theoretical reflection on the multi-functionality of gestures and his attempt to present a more flexible scheme, his analysis and discussion of gestures in terms of the functions they fulfil actually fall back on making the same thing he seeks to avoid: tackling single layers of meaning. That is, Kendon frequently simplifies the matter by simply foregrounding one function over others, for example the referential over the interpersonal, avoiding a comprehensive discussion of the multiple roles a gesture fulfils simultaneously. As Carranza (2006) points out this approach "does not fit in a social constructivist view of language because the interpersonal function of language is at play in all verbal interactions, including those in which a defining transactional goal exists, a practical goal is pursued, or the ideational function is foregrounded" (p. 188). In this light, it is more appropriate for the discourse analysts to think about gestures and interpret them as acting simultaneously on various planes. In addition, the presentation of short lists of forms and functions clearly constrains analysts from trying to account for the certainly more heterogenous nature and contribution of gestures to meaning. Indeed, it is likely to suggest that there are still a large number of functions to be identified, described and discussed. Finally, the terminology used in these schemes is at times unfortunate or unhappy if not ambiguous or confusing. Particularly, notice Kendon's choice of the label *interactive or interpersonal function* to describe gestures which help speakers regulate turns at talk. Clearly, these coordinated adjectives do not refer to the same

phenomena and thus they cannot be used interchangeably. Besides, as Mondada (2007) suggests, what Kendon identifies as interactive or interpersonal mechanisms can be better accounted for by considering them as gestural resources for turn-taking.

Having reviewed some of the better known and recognized literature on language and gesture, I decided to take an eclectic but complementary approach in the following analysis of gesture in oral testimonies. This decision was based on my intention to investigate gestures in the light of current findings but beyond the neat grids provided by Kendon (2004) and McNeill (1992). In what follows, I discuss of the use of speech-accompanying gestures in the oral testimony of military and political witnesses in the context of a public inquiry. This discussion centres on the role of gesture as visibly bodily action in delivering a coherent and solid performance and in constituting of identifiable rhetorical styles.

6.1. Delivering a solid performance

Out of the six inquiry testimonies examined, the testimony of former Prime Minister Tony Blair undoubtedly stands out. A salient feature which makes his performance remarkable is his seamless articulation of gesture and speech. This performance thus provides an interesting site for beginning an inquiry into what can be described as an effective combination of discourse strategies. Initially, an important observation to be made about Blair's oral testimony is that it consists of a complex configuration of a multiplicity of (inter)actions characterized by high modal density. Introducing a multimodal framework for discourse analysis, Norris (2006) "demonstrates that social actors are often engaged in various *(inter)actions* simultaneously at different levels of awareness and/or attention" (p.102). She draws a distinction between *higher-level actions* such as having a conversation or delivering a lecture and their constitutive *lower-level actions* pertaining to various communicative modes such as utterances, gestures, head movements, gaze and posture. She suggests that the amount of attention that a social actor pays to certain higher-level action influences the level of awareness in the performance of lower-level actions and the degree of *modal density*, that is, the complexity and intricacy of the communicative

modes involved. In this light, Blair's oral testimony (high-level action) can be certainly characterized by a systematic organization of several carefully chained actions (lower-level actions). Moreover, its persuasive tone can be specifically explained by noting the congruence and synchrony exhibited in the strategic deployment of verbal and gestural resources.

Let me illustrate this remarkable coordination of lower-level actions in Blair's testimony. The first short excerpt below shows how he skilfully manages the attribution of blame through a coherent combination of verbal and non-verbal resources.

RT HON TONY BLAIR:

Had Saddam, after 1441, in a sense **done a Colonel Gaddafi**, (Figure 1.4) if he had come forward and said **Right. I accept it**.

We are going to full and unconditional compliance (sic). (Figure 1.4.1.)

Here is the declaration (Figure 1.4.2.).

He didn't (Figure 1.4.3).



Figure 1.4. Introducing an imaginary scenario:
Had Saddam done a Colonel Gaddafi



Figure 1.4.1. Enacting the act of surrendering:
Right I accept it



Figure 1.4.2. Enacting the action of handing in a paper:

Here is the declaration



Figure 1.4.3. 'Showing' something:

(but) He didn't

This excerpt shows how Tony Blair blames Saddam Hussein for the resolution of the 2003 crisis and how this is enacted by a complex interplay of semiotic layers. As it has been described in chapter five, in this segment, Blair resorts to a counterfactual account which introduces an alternative scenario in which war could have been thwarted had Saddam acted in a different way. In this imaginary scenario, Saddam accepts the terms of the United Nation Resolution 1441 which offered him “a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations”⁴¹ and allows foreign inspectors into Iraq. Saddam is presented as the main culprit for the actual and deplorable development of events. The persuasive force of this argumentative tool is clearly enhanced by the use of gesture.

Particularly, the use of representational gestures visually enact the disnarrated, that is, what Saddam should or could have done but did not: the act of peaceful surrendering (1.4.1.), which is realized by an open-hand gesture featuring vertical hands and palms facing outwards, and the handing in of a declaration disclosing information about his allegedly unaccounted for WMD (1.4.2.), realized by a closed hand gesture moving outwards and downwards as if grabbing a document and putting

⁴¹UN Security Council Resolution 1441 (2002). Retrieved from: <http://worldpress.org/specials/iraq/unscr1441.htm>

it on the table. Blair's use of gesture also conveys clear pragmatic meanings. In particular, note his initial use of superimposed rhythmic beats realized by hitting the right-hand in a closed fist onto the left-hand in an open-hand palm-up position (1.4.). This complex gesture clearly functions to highlight key points in the speaker's argument but also conveys a strong commitment to what he is saying. Unlike open-hand gestures, closed-hand gestures like the one in 1.4. are frequently interpreted in this way as a sign of reasserting or assuming authority. Finally, Blair's use of a conventional open-hand palm-up gesture at the end of this segment (1.4.3) visually contributes to offering a conclusion. At the same time, Blair seems to point to the left hand as focusing his interlocutor's attention to this conclusion.

This short fragment from Blair's testimonies demonstrates his strategically deployed timely and expansive hand movements. These lower-level actions manifest how confidently he makes use of the space immediately around him and how he creates a persuasive text by skilfully interweaving two or more communicative modes.

Like the previous excerpt, the next one manifests the mastery and ease with which an experienced public speaker is able to combine different types of mechanisms in the delivery of a strategic presentation. Particularly, this excerpt illustrates how Blair draws on a combination of verbal and gestural resources to exert control over the course of the interrogation by taking a turn at speaking and shifting the focus of the discussion.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: Yes, but **the critical thing** (Figure 1.4.4.) -

Sir Roderic, forgive me for interrupting -

but it is **absolutely** essential to realise this:

if September 11 hadn't happened,

our assessment of the risk of allowing Saddam

any possibility of him reconstituting his programmes

would not have been the same (Figure 1.4.5.).

And if **you would like me** to now, (Figure 1.4.6.)

I will explain what a difference that made to the thinking (Figure 1.4.7.)



Figure 1.4.4. Pointing with index finger extended:
the critical thing



Figure 1.4.5. Making a specific point:
If September 11 hadn't happened



Figure 1.4.6. Self-reference:
me



Figure 1.4.7. 'Offering' something:
I will explain

This excerpt begins when Tony Blair interrupts his interlocutor to introduce a new aspect of an already established topic. Here, notice how this witness exerts interactional control by deciding on the content of his turn at talk and on the character of his speech, an explanation. In addition, notice how Blair gives instructions to his interlocutors about what they should *realize* and how he tells them that a failure to do so would prevent them from grasping the *essence* of the story. Blair's interactional dominance is exercised through a skilful combination of verbal and gestural strategies.

At the beginning of his turn, Blair puts forth a counterfactual account designed to cancel the argument that a renewed policy of containment could have been

sustainable and could have prevented a long-lasting and extremely damaging war. Simultaneously, he displays dominant closed-hand gestures such as the index finger extended gesture (1.4.4.) and a precision grip gesture featuring the tip of the thumb touching the tip of the forefinger (1.4.5). This combination of lower-level verbal and non-verbal actions (Norris, 2006) halts a discussion of the effectiveness of containment and reorients the course of the interaction into a consideration of the dangers posed by Saddam in light of what happened in September 11. The use of gestures in this segment highlights the categorical modality of its accompanying speech representing it as a conviction. Specifically, the index finger extended gesture shown in 1.4.4. serves as pointing gesture but also it is a sign of dominance. That is, it functions to single out 'an object' (*the critical thing*) and to draw attention to it, as if the speaker were saying "watch this". Moreover, by pointing upward, this gesture enacts the action of warning somebody about something. In fact, this is the sign parents make towards their children to make them realize a possible danger or problem. The other closed-hand gesture is realized by the tip of the thumb touching the tip of the forefinger (1.4.5.) and it visually represents the ideas of exactness, preciseness, and prominence also conveyed by its accompanying speech (*it is absolutely essential to realize this: if September 11 hadn't happened...*). Besides, as Kendon (2004) points out, "This (gesture) we see when a speaker is making a specific point, giving a specific piece of information on which he is insistent and which, once again, is counterposed to what has been presupposed"(p.245). In this way, this gesture also contributes to assert a position over some other opposite one.

Then, having argued for the effects of the 2001 terrorist attacks on spurring the decision to pursue tougher measures against Iraq, Blair moves on to present an explanation of the ways in which it did so. Unlike its immediately preceding context, his speech here cooccurs with open-hand gestures. Note how Blair asks for permission to present an explanation (*And, if you would like me to now...*) and how this is accompanied by a two-hand gesture featuring open-hands with the fingers extended realizing an inward movement towards the chest. As Montes (2007) points out this use of a self-referential gesture timed with a first-person deictic pronoun *me* is considered canonical or literal as there is overt agreement between what is indexed by the gesture

(the speaker) and its accompanying speech (*me*). As Turk (2007) demonstrates, self-referential gestures frequently achieve interactional work beyond simple reference such as *relational disaggregation*, the speaker distinguishes themselves from another person, and *self-referential extraction*, the speaker distinguishes themselves from a collectivity. In this line, the self-referential gesture in 1.4.6. maybe also interpreted as indicating some sort of *disaggregation* by which the speaker highlights a distinction between his explanation and the explanation proposed by his interlocutor in a previous turn. At the end of this segment, Blair performs a double open-hand palms-away gesture (1.4.7.) which visually represents the act of offering an explanation (*I will explain*) and contributes to building a positive image for the speaker by presenting him as willing to contribute with new insights to the inquiry. Specifically, note the amplitude of Blair's outward hand movement here and the large amount of space covered by it. Certainly, this type of broad and wide movements, very frequent in Blair's testimony, attests to his confidence in performing on stage. The strategic combination of gestures shown in this segment is typical in the speech of experienced politicians but particular to Tony Blair. Ultimately, it manages to seize the attention of an audience by adding a persuasive layer to its accompanying speech.

These two excerpts only provide a glimpse into Blair's strategic use of speech-accompanying gestures. In order to complement this presentation, two instances of emblematic gestures in Blair's testimony will be briefly discussed below. McNeill (1992) defines emblems as "a widely known type of gesture that shows cultural specificity" (p.54). Clearly, emblems have various degrees of conventionality and codification. Yet, they all represent particular configurations of arm and hand shapes and movements and which are easily recognizable by members of a community. One readily recognizable type of gesture in Blair's testimony is the stop gesture.



Figure 1.4.8.
Stop gestures

The gesture shown above clearly indicates “stop”. Yet, it does not display exactly the same configuration of the conventional stop gesture in which the fingers and palm of the right hand are vertical enacting a barrier or a metaphoric wall between the speaker and their interlocutor. Instead, Blair’s gesture is performed by tilting the left hand forward and pushing it down featuring the fingers separated from each other. These different characteristics clearly point to certain nuances in meaning. Unlike the conventional gesture which indexes a defensive stance as if the speaker were saying “stay away”, the gesture shown in 1.4.8. signals authoritarian control as if the speaker were saying “stop and calm down”. Particularly, the forward tilted fingers pushing down indicate that the person for whom the gesture is intended should sit down or calm down. In addition, the tilting of the hand indicates that the gesticulator feels confident and in control of the situation.

Let us now see how this gesture interacts with its accompanying speech. The following turn is produced after the interrogator, Sir Roderic Lyne, remarks that the Attorney General’s final advice (that a reasonable case could be made for invading Iraq) on which Blair had confessed basing his decision on his prior turn was contrary to the advice provided by all other international lawyers in the government’s employ.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: I seem to remember **but** –

I may be wrong on this; if I am, forgive me –

but I think that he had also sought the advice of Christopher Greenwood QC.

Blair rejects this complaint by tentatively affirming that the Attorney General consulted Christopher Greenwood, one of Queen's Counsellors on legal matters. In this segment, notice how the use of stop gesture cooccurs with the presentation of this exception to the general statement made by the interlocutor. Specifically, it is interesting to note how this gesture accompanies the repeated use of the conjunction *but* and how it complements and supplements the idea of contrast expressed by it. The use of these conjoined verbal and gestural resources undoubtedly evidences Blair's confidence and determination and his ability to control the situation at hand.

Another emblematic gesture in Blair's testimony consists in the use of the ring gesture. In describing the group of gestures using the ring hand shape, McNeill (1992) is careful to show that as there are many different types of configurations in terms of features such as movement, orientation and the exact shape of the space surrounded by the two digits, there are also clearly very different meanings which can be expressed by means of this gesture. For example, one such specific semantic field consists in the expression of ideas of justice, perfection and correctness. Yet, as McNeill suggests a common theme conveyed by these gestures is that of exactness.

when these R-gestures are used there is always the implication of 'making precise' or specifying something is being done against the background of an incomplete or inadequate understanding on the part of the speaker's interlocutor. It is as if the R-gestures are brought into play whenever, for the speaker, 'making precise' or clarification seems necessary or important in gaining agreement, the conviction or the understanding of the interlocutor (p.214)

Let us now turn to examine one particular instance of the ring hand shape in the testimony of Tony Blair.



Figure 1.4.9.
The ring gesture

This closed hand gesture shown in 1.4.9. is realized by touching the tip of the index finger with that of the thumb outlining a circular space. As direction matters, it is also important to notice that in this arrangement the fingers are turned upwards. As McNeill (1992) points out, this gesture is frequently used by experienced or trained public speakers to visually highlight the essence, core or heart of their presentations. In Blair's testimony, this gesture frequently appears in the context of a reformulation as in the following turn.

RT HON TONY BLAIR: No, the **absolutely key issue was the WMD issue**, but I think it is just worth at this point -- and then I will come specifically to the text of this speech and deal with this notion that somehow in Crawford I shifted our position.

In this turn, Blair denies (*No*) his interlocutor's prior suggestion that his decision to change the UK policy towards Iraq in 2003 was driven by the objective of removing Saddam's regime. After this, he reformulates the nature of the objective pursued. Specifically, the speaker states that the *key issue was the WMD issue* rather than regime change as his interlocutor put it. The use of the ring gesture accompanying this reformulation clearly functions as a visual correction device designed to 'making precise' or specifying the essence of the WMD issue over regime change in Blair's justification for his decision to undertake a military operation in Iraq.

As it has been already demonstrated in various fragments from Blair's testimony, this turn also evidences how this witness seeks to exercise interactional

control. Specifically, by the end of this turn we see how he decides on the agenda for his subsequent contributions: *but I think it is just worth at this point -- and then I will come specifically to the text of this speech and deal with this notion that somehow in Crawford I shifted our position.* In this way, the witness tries to avoid a discussion of his controversial philosophy of regime change in the context of an interdependent world. Even though he has frequently talked in favour of regime change in his public speeches, on this occasion he clearly refuses to address this topic.

As has been briefly shown in this section, Blair's strategic use of a wide array of recognizable gestures allows him to reinforce the semantic, pragmatic and interactional effects of his utterances. Specifically, his predominant use of dominant, authoritarian and admonitory gestures allows him to exert control over the course of the interrogatory and, on occasions, to avoid controversial themes or possible areas of conflict and to introduce new aspects to a discussion. Also, they allow him to save face on this high-profile social occasion (Brown and Levinson, 1987) by presenting a solid image of himself as a public speaker by delivering a confident and seamless performance characterised by overall coherence in his behaviour.

6.2. Different tendencies

As McNeill highlights, "there seems to be about as much variation among linguistic choices (...) as among gestures" (1992, p.108). That is, even though some gestures are conventionalized and culture-specific, there is nothing compulsory about them. Therefore, speakers select, with greater or lesser awareness, what they are going to represent through the visual channel as well as when and how they do so. This implies that, by looking at gestures, we can discover which elements of speech are highlighted by a speaker and what aspects of discourse are perceived as relevant by them as well as their attitude towards speech. Having said that, McNeill acknowledges that there are some recurrent patterns or tendencies that become identifiable among particular groups of speakers. An example consists in the long-identified tendency among politicians to accompany their public speeches with superimposed rhythmic beats realized by staccato movements on top of different hand shapes.

In what follows, some major differing characteristic features in the use of gestures between military and political witnesses are presented and discussed. It is important to note here that, despite clear similar tendencies between classes of witnesses, there is also significant variation among individual subjects belonging to a category. That is, there are individuals who are better representatives of an entire group and there are also those who somehow deviate from the general pattern.

6.2.1. Gestures of the concrete in the testimonies of military witnesses

At a glance, the first characteristic that becomes noticeable when looking at the testimonies of military witnesses is their scarce use of speech-accompanying gestures. That is, in contrast to their political counterparts, their use of speech-related gestures in the presentation of oral evidence is remarkably much less abundant. Indeed, very often, the movements of their hands and arms are disconnected with speech as in scratching the head, fidgeting with pen, and touching the face (auto-adaptors). Even though these actions are interpretable by an audience, they function mainly as overall expressive displays and do not add to the propositional content of an utterance. A more detailed scrutiny of the existent speech-accompanying gesture in these testimonies interestingly reveals that military witnesses, most often than not, choose to realize ‘gestures of the concrete’ (McNeill, 1992).

This group of gestures which share a typical referential function contribute to the meanings of their accompanying utterances by depicting or pointing to entities in the actual communicative situation or in the narrated world, such as, objects, people, actions and location. In particular, representational gestures also allow speakers to articulate different viewpoints during a narrative. Unlike the gestures performed by politicians, these gestures do not seem to be reflexively designed for a persuasive effect. Yet, they become visible and thus they are inevitably interpreted as meaningful by those who observe them. In this line, it is possible to suggest that these gestures expose relevant dimensions of the speaker’s thoughts. For example, it is interesting to notice how military chiefs frequently accompany their telling of impersonal accounts of past events with representational gestures which visually enact the point of view of

a protagonist. This finding suggests that whereas they work to hide their role of agents in speech, it is revealed in their use of gestures which accomplishes the opposite, namely, the personalization of the represented actions.

The following fragment from the testimony of former Chief of Defence Air Chief Marshal Jock Stirrup illustrates the tendencies identified above in the testimonies of military witnesses.

ACM SIR JOCK STIRRUP: I think the –
where we got the balance wrong, probably, (Figure 4.4.)
was in **the proportion of equipments**
that are fitted for a capability (Figure 4.4.1.)
but not with a capability (Figure 4.4.2.).
In other words,
you can procure platforms
with all the hooks and eyes (Figure 4.4.3.)
to be able **to put things in them** (Figure 4.4.4.)
at very short notice but
you only buy **a limited number of the equipments** (Figure: 4.4.5.)
that go in them
and then,
should the requirement expand (Figure 4.4.6.),
should you be faced with an operation,
then, of course,
you can buy many more
and fit them at very short notice.
Nevertheless,
it takes time to manufacture those things (Figure 4.4.7.).



Figure 4.4. Interlocking fingers



Figure 4.4.1. Pointing
*the proportion of equipments that are
fitted for a capability*



Figure 4.4.2. Pointing
but not with a capability



Figure 4.4.3. Representing
the hooks and eyes



Figure 4.4.4.
put things in them



Figure 4.4.5.
a limited number



Figure 4.4.6.
should the requirement expand



Figure 4.4.7. Interlocking fingers

This fragment shows how Stirrup accompanies a scripted account of the failed procurement of military vehicles with referential gestures which visually illustrate the propositional content of its accompanying speech. These gestures point to objects being referred to in speech, such as the *proportions* of the different sets of equipment procured (Figures 4.4.1. and 4.4.2.); they represent the narrated actions, such as *putting in* (Figure 4.4.4.); they model objects, such as the *eyes* of a vehicle (Figure 4.4.3.) and they represent quantities and breadth as in *a limited number* (Figures 4.4.5.; 4.4.6) and *should the requirements expand* (Figures 4.4.6.).

Arguably, the recurrent use of gestures which mainly fulfil a referential role in the testimonies of military witnesses is probably related to their more narrative nature compared those of their political counterparts which are clearly characterized by their more argumentative and persuasive properties. Yet, a closer inspection at the particular workings of gestures in this fragment reveals that they serve other roles too. Consider the use of pointing gestures in 4.4.1. and 4.4.2. As Kendon (2004) states, “It often happens that a gesture occurs that certainly appears to point at something, but which, at the same time also incorporates other functions” (p.201). He concludes that “the form of pointing adopted by a speaker is systematically related to the way the object being referred to is presented in the speaker’s discourse” (p.201). In this light, let us examine the specific characteristic features of these pointing gestures employed by General Stirrup and their role in the organization his testimony.

Stirrup refers to *the proportions of equipments that are fitted for a capability but not with a capability* in his speech and he simultaneously extends his forearms, angled first in one direction, and then, in another. In both cases, the hands are in an Open Hand Neutral position, shaped so that all fingers are extended and the thumbs are up. As Kendon (2004) points out,

In all cases when the Open Hand (of any variety) is being used, in contrast to the use of the Index Finger Extended, the object being indicated is not itself the primary focus or topic of the discourse but is something that is linked to the topic, either as an exemplar of a class (...) or it is something that should be inspected or regarded in certain way because it leads to the main topic. (p.208).

With these Open Hand gestures, the witness visually locates the objects he has named on opposite directions while he draws his audience’s attention to them. Clearly, by doing so, the speaker does seek to illustrate a concept but rather to establish a relationship of contrast which ultimately works to support the thesis underlying his account. In other words, through the use of gesture, the speaker establishes specifically how his utterance is to be understood as establishing a sharp contrast between the procurement of vehicles already fitted with add-on equipment and the acquisition of

vehicles which are still to be equipped. In this way, the witness highlights a contrast between an ideal situation (having the vehicles already fitted with the necessary appliqué) and the actual situation (having the vehicles ready to be fitted but lacking the add-on gadgets to put in them). Thus, in addition to pointing to particular entities in speech, these gestures also call attention to a clear mismatch between an optimal situation and a situation that was considered to be acceptable but which eventually turned out to be very problematic.

Another interesting contrast to notice in this context is how the use of enacting gestures represents a different point of view from that encoded in the verbal representation of the recounted events. That is, while Stirrup's verbal account of the events is characterized by impersonality and the use of the second personal pronoun which hides the role of the speaker as the agent of the actions described, its gestural representation conversely presents the speaker as actually doing, performing or carrying out these actions. For instance, whereas he resorts to impersonalization in *you can procure platforms with all the hooks and yes to be able to put things in the at a very short notice*, his use of gestures highlights the witness's protagonist role by showing him performing the recounted actions. By personalizing the events, the use of enacting gestures probably works in detriment to the presentation of an impersonal account which ultimately has implications for responsibilities attached to the speaker.

This fragment also shows how, at times, the witness realizes movements of the hands and arms which are not particularly attuned with the co-occurring speech such as tightly interlocking the fingers of the hands (Figures 4.4. and 4.4.7.) and holding that position while he speaks. As it has been suggested before, these actions seem to work as affect displays and point to particular states of mind, specifically, representing some tension, nervousness or discomfort on the part of the speaker. Indeed, communicator advisors frequently recommend that if a person is worried about fidgeting while speaking in public they can slightly interlock their fingers so as to stop themselves from moving their hands too much. This could possibly be one way of explaining why most military witnesses, who are not very used to speaking in front of

the cameras like their political counterparts, frequently resort to these mechanisms as a technique to avoid too much fidgeting.

Finally, it is important to restate at the end of this section that not all the observed military witnesses behaved equally alike. That is, in spite of the significant consistencies and trends identified, described and discussed in this section, it is not possible to claim categorically that all military witnesses used gestures in the same fashion throughout the course of their testimonies. Indeed, it is impossible to disregard that clear differences were evidenced among witnesses in this category which were not only a matter of degree but also a question of different personal backgrounds and idiosyncrasy. For example, General McColl's gestural behaviour, at times, appeared closed to that of politicians due to his tendency to accompany speech with rhythmic beats or batons. A probable explanation for this is that, unlike other military witnesses in our corpus, McColl's role in constituting the Provisional Coalition Authority (PCA) in Iraq involved establishing diplomatic relationships with other countries' representatives which may point to some background experience or familiarity with political discourse and public speaking. At the other point of the continuum, General Walker's testimony is characterized by the total absence of the choreographed gestures which abound in the speech of experienced public speakers such as politicians. Conversely, his testimony is characterized by the frequent use of affect display such as fidgeting, jerking, touching the face and hiding the hands beneath the table. Arguably, this unusual presence of clearly dispreferred features in public speaking bears some sort of connection with the speaker's personality, beliefs and background. Since these idiosyncratic aspects are not a focus of interest for this study, they will not be further explored here.

6.2.2. Gestures of the abstract in the testimonies of political witnesses

The first point to be made about the use of speech-accompanying gesture in the testimonies of political witnesses is one about its abundance and variety. That is, in contrast to military witnesses who exhibit a restricted use of speech-accompanying gestures in their testimonies, politicians display a wide array of gestural resources

which are oriented to achieving calculated effects. A more detailed observation of this phenomenon reveals that an emblematic feature in the testimonies of political witnesses consists in their recurrent choice of speech-accompanying gestures associated to the representation of abstract concepts and relations. In other words, the gestures most frequently employed by politicians share, as a common denominator, an orientation to visually representing abstract concepts and logico-semantic relationships established in discourse through processes of analogy or homology. For example, they help to establish cohesive links between points in an argument through visual-kinetic images like metaphoric gestures, rhythmic beats and abstract pointing. This set of gestures, which has been frequently identified as noticeably ubiquitous in expository and argumentative genres such as lectures (Corts, 2006) and political speeches (Fairclough, 2000; Mendoza-Denton & Jannedy, 2011), contributes significantly to heightening the persuasive quality of an oral text.

The next short excerpt taken from the testimony of former Prime Minister Gordon Brown is used to illustrate the particular workings of gestures of the abstract in the testimony of political witnesses. These are realized in this context particularly by the use of gestures of the precision grip family and superimposed rhythmic beats.

RT HON GORDON BROWN MP: Can I just perhaps

add to the point and clarify that? (Figure 2.4.)

There was a counterterrorism budget

that after September 2001

was doubled in size. (Figure 2.4.1.)

So we now had twice as many staff in our security services (Figure 2.4.2.)

as a result of the threat that was posed on September 11,

and also the terrorist incidents that took place in our country. (Figure 2.4.3.)



Figure 2.4. Ring gesture
Can I just perhaps add to the point and clarify that?



Figure 2.4.1. Finger bunch or grappolo
There was a counterterrorism budget that... was doubled in size



Figure 2.4.2. Ring gesture featuring a clear circular space
So we had twice as many staff in our security services



Figure 2.4.3. Closed fist

In this fragment, Brown displays a set of gestures, broadly referred to as gestures of the abstract (McNeill, 1992), which are very frequently found in the testimonies of the political witnesses examined. They can be more specifically grouped together, first, in terms of their formal properties as gestures of the precision grip (Kendon, 2004) and, secondly, in terms of their specific meaningful contributions at least in three different planes: discourse structure, content and social meaning (Mendoza-Denton & Jannedy, 2011).

As the beginning of his turn at talk, we can observe how Brown brings the fingers of his left hand together so that only the thumb and index finger are put into

contact at their tips (Figure 2.4.2.). This ring gesture represents a circular shape which the speaker holds while he introduces a request for ‘clarification’: *Can I just perhaps add to the point and clarify that?* This symbol contributes to constituting the aforementioned move or speech act by visually representing “concepts of correctness or exactness” or by “recalling the idea of justness, rightness or correctness in general” (Kendon, 2004, p. 239). This gesture thus visually frames the speaker’s forthcoming reformulation as being accurate, precise and reliable and directs the audience’s undivided attention to it. Together with its co-speech, it also leads to the implication that former representations of penny-pinching are inaccurate and illegitimate.

After this opening move, the witness slightly changes this hand configuration by, first, bringing all the fingertips together into a finger bunch or grappolo gesture (Figure 2.4.1.) and, then, returning to the previous more rigid ring-gesture featuring a circular space between the thumb and the index finger (Figure 2.4.2.). In the context of an ongoing reformulation, these gestures of the precision grip family highlight the more of specific nature of the speaker’s contribution in contrast to what has been said or presupposed before. In 1.4.1., the finger bunch gesture serves to highlight the speaker’s specification that he not only increased the defence budget but that he *doubled* its size. Then, in 1.4.2., the use of the ring gesture works in a similar way by ‘making precise’ the claim that the security services had *twice* as many staff as it used to in previous reviews. The use of precision-grip gestures conjoined to an ongoing reformulation here draws attention to a specific point in an argument and simultaneously works to challenge accusations that Brown made excessive cuts into the defence budget.

As Brown concludes this reformulation of his management of the military budget, he noticeably closes his hand into a clenched fist (Figure 2.4.3.). The clenched fist typically indicates that the speaker is set in a position and determined to remain that way, projecting social meanings such as conviction and resolution. Indeed, this symbol has been often drawn upon in numerous political graphic genres, including the French and Soviet revolutions, the United States Communist Party and the Black Panther Party, to represent these ideas. Yet, notice that, unlike the images

projected in the aforementioned propaganda, the image shown in figure 2.4.3. shows the knuckles of the hand in a neutral rather than in a raised position. This particular configuration manifested here, representing a mitigated clenched fist, conveniently conveys a degree of authority to its associated speech while it avoids the negative meanings of imposition and absolutism implied by positioning the hand in a fighting position.

Undoubtedly, the gestures of the precision grip deployed here strategically contribute to enhancing the persuasive nature of a witness' testimony. Indeed, the exclusive use of this type of gestures by a group of experienced public speakers, such as politicians, points to their strategic employment as well as their equally calculated effects. As regards their positive effects, we observed that these gestures work at least in a three-fold fashion by framing speech as being accurate and precise, by directing the audience's attention to particular points made in speech and by projecting a positive image of the speaker as goal-oriented, focused and authoritative but not aggressive.

Another feature of persuasive speech extensively observable here (notice that they are underlined in the transcript) includes the role of beat gestures superimposed on the previously discussed precision-grip gestures. A beat or batonic gesture is used primarily for rhythmic emphasis. As Mendoza-Denton & Jannedy (2011) suggest, it is useful to think of a speaker producing beat gestures as a conductor with a baton keeping his orchestra in time. In other words, these quick, small and sharp movements involving the fingers, hands, arms, torso, head or any other part of the body in rhythm with its co-speech rank information visually and call the audience's attention to particular segments of speech. Indeed, throughout the above fragment, we can notice a recurring combination of the gesture, prosody and speech realizing what McNeill (1992) describes as "catchments", that is, recurring combinations of features which serve to offer clues into discourse cohesion and organization, for instance, by highlighting and connecting points in an argument. One clear example of this includes Brown's combination and repetition of specialized hand configurations with superimposed rhythmic beats in conjunction with lexical units such as *doubled* and

twice which provide evidence to support his claim that, unlike what has been frequently stated, he did not underfund the Ministry of Defence.

In addition, this smallest gestural unit which can be superimposed onto other gestures clearly goes beyond the accomplishment of a merely structuring role in this fragment. Indeed, it also functions to persuade, cajole, provide evidence and convince the audience to adopt the speaker's point of view. That is, this fine-grained structural alignment between intonation and gesture found here transmits positional stances in terms of how the speaker recounts and relates to the world surrounding him. It displays confidence in the arguments presented and it contributes to the enactment of an impassioned plea for a particular representation of the events.

The combined effect of this complex and intricate conflation of gesture, intonation and speech consists in visually reinforcing a critical concept by highlighting a specific point in an argument, making a claim for its legitimacy and directing audience attention to it. The particular conflation of gestures shown here is not unique to the testimony of Gordon Brown but it rather forms part of the basic arsenal or toolkit of discourse strategies displayed by all political witnesses in the corpus for this study. Interestingly, several researchers have shown that participants tend to selectively store and recall information which is accompanied by gesture more often than information which is not. This finding clearly supports the claim made here in terms of the role of speech-accompanying gestures in maximising and thus enhancing the presentation and receipt of information on different channels and the constitution of a dramatically delivered and highly persuasive speech style.

A final remark to be made before closing this section is that not all political witnesses realized exactly the same set of gestures or conveyed the same range of meanings. In fact, neither Gordon Brown nor David Miliband realized the admonitory index-finger-extended gestures which had been described as emblematic of Tony Blair's style. More often, the gestural repertoires of these two other political witnesses, exhibited the use of softer gestures belonging to the open hand families. Otherwise, as it had been shown in the discussion of Brown's fragment, when these

political witnesses resorted to gestures of the precise grip family, they realized mitigated configurations of shape, orientation and dynamics neutralizing their associated meanings of imposition and authoritarianism. Arguably, this difference is indicative of Blair's overall more authoritative, self-confident and challenging personality and leadership style which contrasts with the more conciliatory styles of Brown's and Miliband's styles.

6.3. Gesture and discourse

Traditionally, there has been a systematic bias towards the scrutiny of verbal mechanisms in critical discourse studies and, consequently, not so much has been said about the nature and function of gestures in particular social contexts. Yet, as experienced speakers, we know that every time we take part in interaction we are constantly, consciously or not, producing and interpreting verbal and non-verbal cues as part of an overall text. Therefore, we can confidently say that the comprehension of discourse does not solely depend on our interpretation of linguistic expressions, but also on the perception of several other semiotic layers which form part of an intricate meaningful whole.

Throughout time, several researchers, such as McNeill (1992) and Kendon (2004), have worked to redress this bias by noting the interactive nature of gesture and speech. Yet, as Mendonza-Denton and Jannedy (2011) remark, "most of the studies on cospeech gesturing analyzed in the literature were conducted using experimental elicitation or staged conversations, which give rise to gestures that are narrative and/ or descriptive in nature" (p. 266). In light with current work in multimodal discourse analysis (Goodwin, 2007; Mondada, 2007; Montes, 2007; Norris, 2006; Turk, 2007), the analysis presented in this chapter has examined short excerpts from a larger video-recorded corpus of more than twenty hours of spontaneous naturally occurring data gathered at a public inquiry in the United Kingdom.

Along that line, this analysis showed how the deployment of different types of gesture contributes to the production and interpretation of overall performances, particularly, in the context of inquiry testimonies. It demonstrated how the

synchronous and coherent use of speech-accompanying gestures functions to enhance expressiveness and enrich an audience's experience of oral texts by maximizing the simultaneous presentation of information through different channels. It showed that the use of choreographed and more or less conventional speech-accompanying gestures forms part of a rhetorical tool-kit of experienced public speakers. In addition, it discussed how the use of strategic gesturing adds to the persuasive nature of politician's oral discourse and how it contributes to positive self-presentation.

Finally, this exploration highlighted differences among categories of witness and showed how some of them are better prepared to perform before a committee as well as in front of the cameras. In light of current findings, this category of witness who enjoys special rights and licences can be singled out as constituting a special type of witness (Serra & Carranza, 2009; Stygall, 2001; Winiecki, 2008). Indeed, this exploration of gestural strategies in inquiry testimonies demonstrated how the particular use of an arsenal of abstract gestures, conjoined with the deployment of some associated verbal strategies, represents an experienced politician's art which singles members of this category out as having some clear advantages over their military counterparts.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Public discourse in an age of deception

By taking an approach to the study of discourse which acknowledges its micro and macro situatedness, I have been able to reveal some of the most characteristically constitutive features of six inquiry testimonies produced at the Iraq Public Inquiry in the United Kingdom and the interested discursive construction of responsibility that results from them. The examination of the data showed the concurrence of several oral performance features at a variety of levels which have been discussed separately in this document for the sake of clarity of organization. Chapter 3 presented an initial approximation to multimodal discourse phenomena by looking at posture, head movement and facial expressions. Chapter 4 tapped into the recurrent use of three evasive strategies: refusal to answer, reformulation, and impersonalization. Chapter 5 dealt with argumentative moves involving the use of script-formulations, counter-factual accounts and the lesson-deriving frame. Finally, chapter 6 complemented the exploration of non-verbal strategies by focusing on speech-accompanying gestures and their contribution to an overall performance.

Departing from the premise that automatic and strategic choices combine and concur and thus not all discourse choices are equally revealing, I have centred my analysis primarily on those behaviours which can be confidently called strategic, that is, “part of an overall plan that underlies multiple linguistic realizations at a variety of levels in a text and is meant to forward the speaker’s communicative and interactional ends” (Carranza, 2008, p. 33). That is, I have selected a limited set of recurrent discourse resources oriented to achieving calculated effects such as the representation of a blameless account of past and the covering up of inconsistencies and malpractices. Finally, I have drawn some conclusions in terms of how the use of discourse strategies serve to constitute carefully elaborated texts which selectively foreground some aspects of reality while they hide others.

In previous chapters, I have presented an account of the multiple ways discourse strategies are deployed to manage issues of responsibility in discourse at a historically, politically and socially significant event, namely, the first televised public

hearings on the Iraq War in the United Kingdom. As Carranza (2008) remarks, “ The texts produced by the elites have more significant material consequences than other texts on the domains to which they belong, and receive greater attention because they have privileged access to public forums and a wide distribution. ” (p. 27). Therefore, they become particularly worth of attention because the viewpoints expressed in them can have a strong impact on the resulting dominant construction of reality. This is clearly the case with the oral testimonies produced by military and political leaders.

At this point, it is important to acknowledge that due to the restrictions of the constructed corpus, comprising only 6 testimonies out of more than 100 produced in this public inquiry, and the selective focus for the treatment of the data, only a few verbal and gestural strategies have been selected for analysis; the analysis presented does not claim to be comprehensive nor conclusive. Yet, the type of detailed discourse analysis which had been applied to the testimonies of six emblematic elite witnesses, belonging to the top-ranks or hierarchies in their respective professions, had been meticulously intensive and had produced several instances of the phenomena discussed in the present work. From this large amount of data, I have only decided to present here a few selected cases by way of illustration. The findings, nonetheless, are derived from a larger bulk of supporting evidence which attests their reliability.

This chapter concludes this presentation by reflection on the dialectical relationship of discourse and society revealing the particular ways in which strategic public discourse represents an instrument of social manipulation and hegemonic control. This socio-politically oriented discussion is theoretically grounded on the studies of Bostdorff (1994), Fairclough (1992), Fraser (1990), Giddens (1998, 2000), Goddard et. al. (2008) and Lewandowsky *et al.* (2005). The pioneer work of Habermas (1973, 1979, and 1989) on the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* is another indispensable resource, particularly, to a critique of the apparatuses of the state and the limits of democracy in late capitalist societies.

7.1. The public inquiry as apparent action and media spectacle

A generally held belief in ‘open’ democratic societies is that publicly elected governments are deemed accountable for their deeds in office (Voeten & Brewer, 2006). As Zyglidopoulos & Fleming (2011) remark, accountability in this general sense appears “a practical condition and outcome of responsibility ” (pp. 693) which means that members of government are expected to give an account for their behaviour when called upon. Particularly, in times of war, citizens expect their political and military leaders to give evidence of the humanitarian, economic or political ‘benefit’ of waging a war or its inevitability, as well as, evidence that they ‘did a good job’ in handling the overall campaign (Baker & Rubin, 2011; Kellner, 2007; Zehfuss, 2009). And, public inquiries have traditionally played an important role in this process of post-crisis sensemaking and accountability management in Western societies, specifically, by providing an official site for constructing a sense of shared meanings for a disrupted society and for legitimizing its key institutions (Gephart & Robert 2011).

At the launch of the Iraq War Public Inquiry in the UK, divergent voices had been raised about the particular validity of this investigatory process. While some welcomed a public investigation into the events surrounding this long-lasting and extremely controversial military conflict, others quickly voiced their fears that the inquiry would represent another ‘establishment cover up’⁴² at the convenient time of a General Election. In hindsight, the testimonies analyzed in this study show that the benefits gained by holding a public inquiry had been relatively few. The reasons for this failure to represent the type of public forum considered to be the cornerstone of participatory democracy are to be found in the particular ways in which the inquiry was conducted.

⁴²Head, J. (25/11/2009). Iraq inquiry - another whitewash? Retrieved from <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/europe/2009/11/20091124184939439955.html>

First, rather than giving equal weight to a broad spectrum of views from a wide range of people and organizations, the public hearings have only exposed the voice of official representatives who saw this opportunity as a propitious one to consolidate an establishment view of the war (Brown & Jones, 2000). Indeed, the testimonies of unofficial voices, including dissenting and opposition groups, such as, non-governmental organizations have been conveniently held behind closed doors. As a consequence, these public hearings have only represented a carefully restricted and planned account of the past as a form of information management oriented to the presentation of a credible ‘official story’ to be distributed to an overwhelmed, devastated and grieving public.

Secondly, the specific structuring of the inquiry contributed to jeopardizing a truly free and unbiased investigation. Particularly, the hiring of governmentally appointed and governmentally paid functionaries to run it undoubtedly produced an inherent conflict of interests. Moreover, the laxity of the protocols for gathering evidence also allowed inquisitors great flexibility in how to proceed in terms of the disclosure of critical information. The final product hence was the staging of a dramaturgical composition (Carranza, 2010) reflexively designed and implemented for a rhetorical effect. Not surprisingly, no new information has been revealed during these hearings.

In this way, the public hearings of the Iraq Inquiry, far from generating public dialogue, worked to manufacture a false sense of debate as well as an equally false sense of consensus or resolution. Interestingly, this case does not represent a unique and disconnected governmental cover-up. In fact, while today we keep on hearing a great deal about the triumph of liberal democracy and governmental accountability in the West, the failed cases of ad-hoc committees very frequently point out that there is still a great deal to object to our own actually existing forms of political democracy.

7.2. The public hearing as an opportunity to work on a favourable image

Generally speaking, presenting a positive image of the self involves two key aspects: avoiding making yourself look bad and making yourself look good. That is, it basically consists in minimizing your negative deeds while emphasizing your positive ones. Several studies on political discourse, such as Chilton & Schäffner (2002) and Duranti (2006), have shown that positive self-presentation is an essential part of the rhetorical tool-kit of politicians whose political survival clearly depends on gaining public approval. Consequently, it came as no surprise to find out that the political witnesses in our corpus managed self-presentation better than their military counterparts. This section looks into the issue of what is it that makes political witnesses appear particularly appealing to an audience.

Fairclough (2000) defines rhetorical styles as whole sets of identifiable features related to particular ways of speaking, standing, moving, and gesturing. And, more specifically, he describes the rhetorical styles of contemporary politicians, such as Tony Blair's, as essentially comprising a distinguishable set of crafted features based upon calculations of what will work. This observation is totally supported by the data in this corpus. That is, the rhetorical styles of political witnesses are clearly characterized by the presence of reflexively designed and carefully rehearsed verbal and visual manoeuvres which typically include: the display of visual and verbal synchrony and congruence, the skilful combination of repetition, intonation and movement to add theatricality to speech and the use of metapragmatic statements which provide audiences with convenient glasses to read their texts. Having said this, it is important to remark that not all political witnesses have the same degree of success in the application of these strategies. In this respect, Tony Blair particularly excels. He delivers a seamless performance which projects a positive image of himself as a highly competent public speaker and a professional political leader beaming of confidence, frankness and honesty. This solid and coherent performance gives the impression that he really believes in what he is saying.

The oral testimonies of military witnesses clearly differ from their political counterparts' in terms of their persuasive quality and the image of the speaker they present. In other words, military witnesses do not emote or strike audiences in the same way that politicians do. Probably, the main reason for this is that, unlike politicians, military witnesses do not deliberately attend to their overall performances and thus they end up being not as remarkably memorable. Some unfavourable features in their testimonies include: the use of minimal answers and hesitation which present military witnesses as being either uncooperative or uncertain, and their constant jerking and fidgeting which also display negative characteristics such as nervousness, tension and discomfort. Arguably, these recurrent features contribute to making their testimonies less appealing and present a negative image of military witnesses as being overtly uncooperative or unable to contribute efficiently to the inquiry.

The televised public hearings of the Iraq Inquiry presented institutional representatives with a unique opportunity and a great challenge to work extensively on their public images as accountable figures. Particularly, it gave them a unique chance to save face by presenting a positive and credible image for themselves as being able to provide perceivably adequate answers to general queries. This public inquiry also presented a propitious site for them to solve inconsistencies and thus to relegitimate political and military institutions and support or preserve governmental legitimacy. Yet, not all witnesses equally managed to get away with this public exposition. As it has been argued here, these differing outcomes may be, at least, partly explainable in terms of the different levels of investment in delivering a carefully choreographed performance.

With regard to the concept of authorship, "it is not convenient to think of the 'speaker' as the downright 'author' of a text, but as the one who produces the oral delivery of a certain text". (Carranza, 2008, p.32). Therefore, it is likely to believe that the testimonies delivered by both political and military leaders in this high-profile event do not merely represent the voice of individual subjects but rather that they articulate a more general official plot or basic script carefully designed to explain a crisis according to prevailing political logics and expectation including strategies of

impersonalizing, normalizing and demonizing. Is possible to believe that all these witnesses think and speak alike? Or, is it more likely to think that they all conveniently 'agreed' to voice a similar narrative designed to protect governmental institutions of criticism or even impeachment? In my view, these testimonies are no less than "contrived rhetorical artefacts" (Robert & Gephart, 2011) created to persuade an audience to accept a contestable interpretation of events. In that, they represent also an exercise in hegemonic power used to support the legitimacy of political and military institutions as well as their prevailing ideologies.

7.3. The clash between rhetoric and reality

Even when the inquiry's verdict is still unknown at the moment of closing this present research project, it seems very unlikely that its findings will lead to hard conclusions. Conversely, it seems that, rather than exposing the crimes and offences committed during a war period, the committee's conclusions will protect former government officials from embarrassment and indictment. Given what we know from leaked documents and private investigations, this panorama looks absurd and scandalous. For example, evidence provided by the deceased British nuclear scientist David Kelly prior to his suicide has pointed out how the famous dossier on Iraq's WMD had been manipulated at the behest of political masters to provide a justification for a highly unpopular war (Brants & Bardoel, 2008). Also, leaked Downing Street memos have exposed that Tony Blair had pledged his support to George W. Bush for an invasion two years before that decision was actually reached by his Cabinet. Finally, disclosed private correspondence between Ministry of Defence and Downing Street has exposed how military chiefs have warned their political masters that the Army was committed to Iraq without any careful preparation or planning and with clearly insufficient resources, and how these warnings have been ignored.

While these are very serious issues which may lead to legal processes such as indictment and prosecution, it is not difficult to foresee that the inquiry's report will not lead to charges. It is important to highlight that what this case unveils is just the tip of the iceberg. Indeed, what the Iraq Inquiry points out is the limits of official

investigations into governmental affairs in view of contemporary institutionalized forms of covering-up practices. On the other hand, it is interesting to observe how, unlike the official investigation, public opinion did condemn these social actors for their wrongdoings. Indeed, judging from the incredulous public reaction to the witnesses' appearances at the inquiry and the historical defeat of the Labour party in the 2010 General Elections, ending 13 years of Labour government in Britain, it seems that most British citizens did manage to see significant gaps between Labour's rhetoric and practice. In hindsight, this dichotomy seems pretty obvious. But, in fact, it has taken more than six years, millions of casualties and the publication of several documents for the British people to come to terms with it.

By being historically and socio-politically situated, discourse analysis goes beyond the realities discursively constructed in texts and take into account observable phenomena. As Carranza (2008) points out “ Our interest in realities constructed in discourse does not lead to losing sight of material dimensions of reality which affect the social, spiritual, and physical existence of concrete people. ” (p. 48). Thus, the use of evasive strategies such as refusal to answer, reformulation, impersonalization and strategic argumentative moves such as scrip-formulation, counterfactuality and the recourse to the lesson-deriving frame does not override the material dimension of reality. It includes thousands of innocent war casualties, the unnecessary death of young British military officers due to a shortage of life-saving equipment and armoured vehicles, the scarce funding provided by Gordon Brown to the Ministry of Defence, the reckless approach to the reconstruction of a broken country, the unusual behaviour governmental officials such as the General Attorney Peter Goldsmith who said that war against Iraq would be considered illegal and then changed his mind after several closed-door meetings with Tony Blair and his allies, and the unilateral decision of two political leaders which overrode the United Nations decision to pursue peaceful diplomatic negotiations in Iraq. These actual circumstances clearly stand in stark contrast with the world created by these testimonies. Therefore, they remind us that reality is only partly constituted in discourse.

7.4. The ideology of transparency and governmental accountability

A great deal of research, particularly Fraser (1990), has linked developments in late modernity with greater accountability. These studies pointed out that current social practices associated to the availability of huge amounts of information, the ubiquity of social reflexivity and the importance of risk assessment have made institutional practices more visible and thus institutions more accountable. This study has examined this idea in relation to the practices surrounding the Iraq Inquiry in the UK and its findings point to the contrary. These findings highlight that major developments in contemporary democracies have in fact contributed to making key institutions less accountable by developing ubiquitous covering-up practices such as the one exposed by this study, namely, governmental whitewashing.

First of all, the currently held assumption that the mass media function as a constraint to socially irresponsible behaviour is false. As organizations are now more exposed, the most prevalent rationale behind modern institutions is that it pays to invest in legitimization procedures designed to maintain the perception of positive performance. An example of this is the recent ‘season of inquiries’ the British public has undergone. These ‘inquiries’ ran by governmentally friendly ad-hoc committees and funded completely by tax-payers represent nothing but strategically designed media mechanisms which systematically pursue a politics of deception by covering up governmental scandals. Thus, while it cannot be denied that public exposure of governmental practices has increased; current perfunctory investigations have often staged up displays of accountability in order to manipulate a confused audience.

Also, the belief that social reflexivity has increased public debate and contestation is another overstatement. In fact, the conflation of the state apparatus with the public sphere is not less than the product of the calculated work of expert systems designed for an effect. That is, knowledge about social practices has often been used by powerful institutions as a means to improve and refine techniques of social control. Consequently, while reflexivity has foregrounded research into the practices of institutions, it has also provided insights into how legitimization works best.

Finally, the expectation that better mechanisms of risk assessment, particularly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, would lead to increased international security is also illusory. Very frequently, intelligence on the threat posed by foreign nations and the topoi of risk have been strategically linked by governments apropos unethical policymaking (Hamilton et.al., 2007). Indeed, even in post-crises sensemaking inquiries, governments still resort to the familiar rhetoric of risk and the presentation of worst-case scenarios in order to justify extraordinary exertions and licences in the name of the public good and the safety of the nation. This finding suggests that, instead of fostering a more critical examination of evidence, current risk assessments have been manipulated to legitimize illegitimate actions.

All in all, what has surfaced here is an interesting paradox. On the one hand, contemporary democracies are perceived as being more open, reflexively oriented and critical. Yet, on the other hand, they are characterized by the use of more sophisticated mechanisms of centralized covering-up practices. In this clash, the catchy rhetoric of governmental transparency and openness in late modernity can only be interpreted as ideological since visibility seats uneasily beside the reality of secrecy, bureaucracy, public deception, and inaccessibility to real institutional agendas.

Two fruitful directions for further inquiry have emerged in the making of the present investigation but, due to its scope, could not be extensively pursued here. One area is that of the intricate interplay between semiotic layering in mediated public discourse. Because comprehension and production of discourse do not solely depend on linguistic expression, I find it pressing to address the complementary and supplementary interplay among various communicative modes, particularly, the close workings of language and gesture as two sides of a same coin. Another potentially fecund area of inquiry for socially oriented discourse research consists in the limits of democracy exposed by the discursive practices in so called advanced democratic societies. I have in mind the critical examination of governmental whitewashing practices such as public perfunctory investigations manifesting a dichotomy between their rhetoric of openness, transparency, visibility and accountability and their reality of closed door negotiations, opaqueness, and legal immunity for those in power.

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