EDITING AND GENRE CONFLICT: HOW NEWSPAPER JOURNALISTS CLARIFY AND NEUTRALIZE PRESS RELEASE COPY

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Abstract

Although corporate press releases are ‘preformulated’ to fit some of the conventions of journalistic reports, their style at times seems quite different from the one favoured by journalists. That is, there appear to exist stylistic conflicts between the press release genre and the press report genre. This study investigates the nature of these conflicts by means of a corpus analysis of the reworking strategies employed by journalists that actually use press releases to compose press reports.

Roughly, two orientations can be discerned behind the journalistic transformations of release copy: Readability and neutrality. In order to improve readability, journalists create shorter and less complex sentences, use everyday words, replace numbers and symbols by words, and insert short bits of background information. In order to preserve neutrality, they remove company and product names, tone down or remove positive statements, and introduce the company as source for statements they do not want to be responsible for. Some transformations are more complex in that they are carried out in both directions: For instance, the company name may be removed as the subject in a press report sentence, but in other cases it may be introduced in the press report. These two-way operations are shown to be sensitive to different orientations at the same time. For instance, removing company names from the subject position may help preserve neutrality, while introducing it may personalize the text and hence improve readability.

In the discussion, the genre conflict between press releases and press reports is analyzed in terms of the incompatibility of the stylistic constraints both genres need to satisfy. Some of the incompatibilities derive from differences in the communicative purposes characteristic of the two genres, while others probably have to do with the specific organizational context that co-determines the style of press releases.

Keywords: Press report; Press release; Genre analysis; Genre conflict; Communicative purpose; Readability; Promotional language; Editing; Writing processes.

1. Introduction

Many organizations use press releases to provide their version of information that is deemed of interest to the general public. The genre is characterized by a peculiar participant framework in which the release writers provide information to journalists in the hope that it will be passed on to the general public. And press releases are often quite successful: Public relations researchers have found that press releases actually influence what reporters write. According to Walters & Walters (1996: 167), “given time and resource constraints, reporters find it difficult to perform solo”. Bell (1991: 58) states that press releases are “openly despised but heavily used”. Turk (1986) found that

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daily newspapers use more releases than they reject. Since they cannot cover all newsworthy events in person, journalists need the 'information subsidies' provided by releases.

Press releases and news reports constitute what Swales (2004) has called a *genre chain*, a regular succession of discourse genres that conventionally respond to each other. His examples of genre chains include a call for abstracts that can be responded to by sending an abstract, and an invitation to speak at a colloquium that may be responded to through a written acceptance. In such chains, the first genre is a necessary antecedent of the second. Although it cannot be said that press releases are necessary antecedents for press reports in general, there certainly are press reports (often brief ones) that would not have been there without the underlying release, and this is the kind of genre chain to be analyzed in this paper.

It is important to note that genres in a chain do not always explicitly acknowledge the antecedent genre. For instance, the call for abstracts or instructions given to authors for contributions to a volume both function as a first link in the chain, which is followed by the second link in the chain, the actual abstract or contribution to the volume. However, in the second link there is no explicit reaction to the first link. Likewise, press reports derived from releases avoid mentioning their main source; in terms of Fairclough (1992), the relation between the two genres is one of 'constitutive' intertextuality, not manifest intertextuality. As Clough et al. (2002: 1678) have noted, while re-using other's writings without stating one's sources is considered a cardinal sin in academic genres, it seems to be the rule in journalistic discourse. While academic discourse greatly depends on manifest intertextuality, journalistic discourse using other texts fully appropriates this input.

In order to maximize the chance of a release being journalistically appropriated and to exert the utmost control on how they are used, press release writers try to meet a number of formal requirements of news reporting (see Jacobs 1999a). For instance, organizations adopt a third person perspective on the events they are involved in themselves, and use past tenses when writing about events that have not yet taken place at the moment of writing. Jacobs (o.c.) has introduced the notion of *preformulation* as an umbrella term for these point-of-view operations. Apart from making it easier for journalists to copy release material, preformulation serves to 'objectify' the content of the release and by doing so to make it more authoritative.

At the same time, press releases still bear the marks of being designed within the organization responsible for them. For instance, they regularly contain explicit positive evaluations of the company and its activities, although journalists are often said to resent 'pushy' language. And a cursory glance at a few releases also suggests that they are not always written in a style that is suitable for the general public. For instance, company departments and positions of executives are regularly referred to by their official names, and financial or technical jargon is not always avoided when describing the financial results and products of the company.

There may be several reasons for this. Research on the writing processes of Dutch public officials, who are often criticized for their incomprehensible writing, suggests that the problem does not lie with their writing abilities (Janssen 2001). In fact, many officials are perfectly capable of writing plain language. However, a number of contextual factors disfavor the use of plain language in their documents. For instance, writers of policy papers think that their primary audience of specialists has no problems in understanding their texts. Other government officials feel that a formal, bureaucratic

writing style ('officialese') is required to uphold the authority of the state. Another cause of complex text may be that many internal stakeholders need to commit themselves to the text, so that it becomes 'public property', so to speak. We did not investigate the writing process underlying our releases, but the ethnographic work of Sleurs and associates (2003, 2005) certainly suggests two things. First, release writers envisage journalists as their primary audience, not the general public; their main purpose is to secure the uptake of their work by media professionals. And these professionals are much more knowledgeable in the topic domain of the release than lay readers are. Second, in their texts they have to accommodate the possibly diverging perspectives of several internal participants, such as the departments of press relations, marketing and product development. Another complicating factor is the diversity of the press media that are possibly interested in the release. Since both general and specialist media need to be serviced, releases tend to be quite long, much longer than any report based on them.

We are therefore faced with a paradoxical situation. While the objective of a press release is to create press coverage, there may be conflicts between the release genre and the genre of the press report using the release. In his writings on genre theory, Bhatia (2000, 2002, 2004) proposes to use concepts such as genre mixing, genre colonies and generic conflict to analyze the way different discourse genres exploit or borrow discourse strategies originating from other genres. Applying such concepts to our situation, we might say that at first sight the relation between releases and press reports seems to be one of *genre mixing*; the idea of preformulation proposed by Jacobs (1999a, 1999b) certainly implies that release writers seek a situation of genre mixing between releases and press reports. However, on closer examination, certain aspects of the relation between the two genres suggest the possibility of a *genre conflict*.

In order to define this notion, we will draw on the analytical framework proposed by Lentz & Pander Maat 2004. They analyze the complexity of the functional context for a document in terms of the *(in)compatibility of the constraints* that are imposed on the document by a certain context. A functional conflict is a situation in which two or more design constraints are mutually incompatible, i.e. cannot be met within a single document. A special case of functional conflict is the genre conflict. Such a conflict may arise when one considers using the same piece of discourse in different functional contexts or genres. A genre conflict arises when the constraints characterizing the two genres are incompatible to such an extent that one and the same text cannot felicitously be used.

The aim of this study is to examine empirically how the different genre constraints affect both the design of press releases and their use by journalists. The fact that press reports are often wholly derived from releases presents us with an excellent opportunity to observe how the two genres are actually related: Their compatibilities and incompatibilities should be observable in the process that leads from one to the other.

In earlier work on this issue, we concentrated on a set of promotional devices in the releases and the way they were dealt with by journalists (Pander Maat 2007). The earlier study compared two types of media: Special interest media on airline travel using releases from airlines and airports, and economy sections in daily papers using releases from a larger set of international companies. The specialized airline magazines and travel sections in newspapers tend to copy verbatim much of the release material into

their columns. However, short reports in the economy sections of newspapers turn out to deal much more critically with release copy.

Here, our aim is broader, and our methodology is more open. We intend to examine the full range of transformations through which a press release sentence goes before reappearing as a newspaper sentence. We will ignore structural changes for the moment, concentrating entirely on editing within sentence boundaries. Since we are interested in potential genre conflicts between press reports and releases, we will use the second kind of material mentioned above for this study: Economic reports in newspapers. By means of textual analysis of the transformations, we hope to identify other orientations (besides the possible concerns about promotional language) guiding the reworking of releases into press reports.

We did not interview journalists about their editing motives in this study. Instead, we concentrated on corpus analysis in order to uncover what editors actually do on a routine basis. The strength of corpus analysis is that a substantial number of comparable transformations can be collected and analyzed. As a result, we may use both the textual details of these operations and their frequency distributions as indications for the possible motives behind them. Moreover, we do not have to start from scratch here; some quite plausible assumptions regarding motives for journalistic editing can be found in earlier analytical work in this area. Bell (1984: 82-90, 1991: 70-74) has distinguished three classes of editing operations performed by copy editors reworking input from journalistic colleagues: Information deletions, lexical substitutions and syntactic reordering. According to him, deletion is the most frequent operation, and it is preferably carried out in such a way that the surrounding text can be left intact, or at least does not have to be re-ordered. As orientations behind the editing operations Bell (1991: 75-83) examines four motives: Reducing the size of the story, clarifying it by providing the reader with background information, maximizing its news value by re-structuring and 'tightening up' the story, and standardizing its language to comply with general linguistic standards or in-house stylebooks.

Although Bell's work has been very influential, it needs to be said that it is restricted to a qualitative analysis of examples. In contrast, Walters et al. (1994) and Walters & Walters (1996) present quantitative studies of editing of press release inputs by journalists. They compare the readability statistics of releases and the corresponding reports, finding that reports contain fewer sentences than releases, use shorter words and use the passive form to a lesser degree. Since their studies only provide rough statistics, we know next to nothing about the actual transformations involved. For instance, do the journalists chop up existing sentences, or do they write completely new (and shorter) sentences?

But taken together, these studies on journalistic editing suggest that brevity and clarity are important concerns besides neutrality. In this study, we will present an account of these and other orientations and the ways they interact in the work of editors. Methodologically, we combine textual analysis with quantitative corpus work. This approach will enable us to actually test Bell's suggestions. It will not only show us what kind of operations may occur, but also how important they are in actual practice, and what this tells us about the strength of the orientations underlying the operations. Moreover, unlike the explorations of Bell and the rough statistics of Walters et al. our study is designed in such a way that it does not only identify trends, but also provides counter-examples. This is because we will code operations in both directions: For instance, we will both identify deletions of details and additions of details. When

operations turn out to be regularly performed in both directions, this requires additional analysis in terms of the underlying motivations. More specific hypotheses about the interactions of these motivations will be tested again on the corpus data.

To sum up, our research questions are the following:

- What kind of sentence-internal transformations can be identified in a corpus of journalistic reworkings of press releases, how frequent are they, and in what direction do they primarily occur?
- What kind of motives or orientations may be behind these transformations and how do they interact?
- What does the transformation analysis tell us about the different and possibly conflicting constraints that are characteristic of both genres?

2. Materials and method

2.1. *The corpus of releases and reports*

The present study uses a corpus of 50 press releases issued by major industrial companies and newspaper reports (often more than one) written about them by economic journalists in daily papers. The releases were issued by companies in different branches of industry:

- The telecom sector: KPN, Vodafone, Orange, Siemens
- The financial sector: Interpay, KPN, Aegon
- The information technology sector: Microsoft, Apple
- The food sector: Unilever, Campina (dairy products)
- The supermarket sector: Schuitema, Ahold, Laurus
- The home appliances sector: HEMA, Blokker

Given the size of the companies involved, we may assume that the releases were written by communication professionals.

Most releases (88%) dealt with one of the following topics:

- new products or services
- personnel changes in the board of directors
- reorganizations, acquisitions or mergers
- financial results

On average, our 50 releases contained 19.5 sentences (SD 14.0) and 400 words (SD 284). The mean sentence length (taking the mean of the means for the 50 releases) was 22.2 words (SD 6.0).

The releases have been selected on the basis of press reports that were written about the main event reported in the release. 24 releases were used in more than one press report; a total of 95 reports was analyzed. All reports centered on the main event announced in the release; 12 reports (13%) added one or more paragraphs of background information to the release information, while the other ones stuck to the release information.

When several reports were based on a single release, these reports may have drawn on an earlier journalistic source, most often the Dutch press agency ANP (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau). Sometimes, 'ANP-sentences' reappeared identically in several press reports; these sentences were included only once in the data

set. When we found differences between two ‘corresponding’ sentences, we took this as an indication they had been reworked to some degree, so that the decision to leave the rest of the original unchanged was a genuine one. In those cases both corresponding sentences were retained in the data set.

2.2. The analytical procedure

The transformation analysis was prepared by aligning pairs of sentences from releases and reports that contained more or less the same information. Table 1 presents a translated example (all examples in this paper are translations; the original Dutch texts can be obtained from the author). The information in the underlined text in the left column reappears (in whatever form) in the press report; the italicized text in the right column is new text added by the journalist. Sentence numbers indicate the place of the particular sentence in either the release or the report.

Table 1. Example of corpus data: sentences from a release aligned with their rephrasing in the press report

Press release	Press report
(1) <u>HP extends its Planet Partners program for returning and recycling inkjet cartridges.</u> (2) As of May the 17th, consumers in <u>the Netherlands</u> , Belgium, Luxemburg, France, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Ireland and the UK may simply send back their used inkjet-print cartridges to HP, without additional costs.	(1) Hewlett-Packard (HP), <i>the world's greatest supplier of printers</i> , has extended its recycling program for <i>empty</i> inkjet cartridges to the Netherlands.
(6) The program makes it as easy as possible for customers: a <u>stamped self-addressed envelope will be added to the two most popular HP inkjet-print cartridges</u> (HP Nr. 56 black en HP Nr. 57 three colors).	(3) A stamped envelope will be added to the most popular types of cartridges, <i>in which the users can send in the empty cartridges</i> .
(7) <u>For other cartridges these envelopes can be freely obtained at http://www.hp.com/recycle.</u>	(4) For other cartridges these envelopes can be requested at http://www.hp.com/recycle .
(10) <u>HP worked with the Bayerisches Institut für Angewandte Umweltforschung und -technik (BIfA) – the recycling facility is located in Bavaria – to develop a recycling solution.</u>	(5) HP recycles the cartridges in a factory in Bavaria.

Table 1 shows that a report sentence may present information from several release sentences in compressed form, i.e. the treatment of a release sentence is often highly selective.

Moreover, the sentence numbers in the left column indicate that many sentences in the original release are not used in the report. This is a general finding that parallels the results of Walters & Walters (1996). Of the 2,074 sentences that *could* have been used in the 95 reports, only 401 (19%) were actually used. Hence the press reports are much shorter than the releases: The 83 reports that did not add background information to the release data were on average 106 words long, while the average length of the releases on which they were based was 477 words. When comparing the mean sentence lengths for each of the 95 pairs of a release and the corresponding report, we find that it significantly decreases from 22.4 to 18.7 words (paired t-test, $t = 2.37$, $df = 94$, $p = .02$).

Having aligned corresponding sentences from releases and reports, we set out to identify the transformations applied to the release in each press report. As suspected, newspaper journalists are critical users of release materials: Only 14 out of the 401 sentences used in reports were copied verbatim; the other 387 were transformed in some way.

On the basis of an initial analysis of the reports based on 10 releases, we compiled a list of transformations. This list was used as a coding scheme for the analysis of the entire corpus. Transformations of headlines and direct quotes were not included in the corpus for this study, since they present specific editing constraints that need to be dealt with separately. Our final list contained 17 operations. When coding the entire corpus, we encountered a number of transformations that did not match any of the labels constructed so far. They were assigned to a category 'uncoded transformations'. When the coding had been completed, 2 operations turned out to be so infrequent that they were also included in the 'uncoded' category. Eventually, the corpus consisted of 1,305 transformations, 1,101 of which were assigned to one of our 15 labels.

The entire corpus was seen by two coders. Coding turned out to be a complex task, since many transformations had to be identified in one and the same sentence; the mean number of transformations per edited sentence was 3.4 ($n = 387$). Coding agreement was first calculated on the most fine-grained level. On this level 17 transformations were distinguished, 12 of which had a reversed variant as well (see below), and an additional category contained uncoded operations. For these 30 categories the coding agreement was 49%, and Cohen's Kappa was .44.

However, Kappa is known to be not quite reliable when there are great differences in frequencies between codes, and such differences had occurred in the original codings. Hence we also calculated coding agreement on a somewhat higher level of abstraction. Later in this study we will distinguish between two main orientations behind the operations: Improve readability and neutralize the wording of the release; since readability transformations are a much larger group than neutralizations, they were further divided into deletions (see section 3.1 below) on the one hand and substitutions or additions on the other hand. When the codings are collapsed into these three categories and the other codings into a fourth category, intercoder agreement rises to 68% and the Kappa increases to .55. In other words, the two coders more or less agree on the *type* of transformation they are dealing with.

While both Kappa's are clearly beyond chance ($p = .000$) and count as 'moderate' according to general standards, the low proportion of agreement on the fine-grained coding made it necessary to examine all coding differences; all of them were resolved by discussion between the two coders. Many of the disagreements concerned passages for which both coders agreed on a first operation, while one of the coders observed an additional transformation.

In order to further explore the intersubjectivity of our codings, we performed a separate coding reliability study in which we presented lay subjects with fragments from our corpus and asked them to code them, using one out of three transformation labels taken from our scheme. This study, details of which can be found in the *Appendix*, showed that these three transformations were agreed upon by between 73% and 76% of our subjects. This reliability study makes us more confident that three important transformations can be reliably identified, even by untrained lay coders.

2.3. Classifying and explaining the transformations: A preview

This section presents an outline of the main argument in our transformational analysis. This analysis was performed with 15 of the initial 17 transformations; two transformations were so infrequent that they have been added to the category ‘uncoded’. Let us first note that a transformation can take place in two directions. For instance, an item may be replaced by a less formal item or by a more formal one, an item may be deleted or added and so forth. Table 2 presents an overview of the frequencies of the 15 transformations and the directions in which they take place. There is a clear difference between the first 11 transformations and the remaining 4 transformations with respect to their directions. Transformations of the first group almost completely occur in one and the same direction: For instance, information is deleted, not added, and numbers are replaced by words, not the other way round. The reversed counterparts of these transformations never occur in more than 15% of the cases, with an overall proportion of ‘reversed transformations’ of 5.7% (Chi²-tests for all transformations yield p-values of .000, except for adding explanations where $p = .001$; $df=1$ in all cases). These 11 transformations will be henceforth called *one-way transformations*.

Table 2. Frequencies of the transformations in both directions. Percentages are taken from the total of coded transformations (n=1101)

Category	Transformation label (reverse operations between brackets)	Normal	Reversed
ONE-WAY TRANSFORMATIONS			
<i>Readability</i>	1 Omit (add) details	262	16
	2 Omit list element or generalize	36	-
	3 Shorten (extend) the phrasing	93	12
	4 Replace (introduce) jargon	104	2
	5 Make less (more) formal	68	5
	6 Replace (introduce) numbers and symbols	87	3
	7 Add (remove) background information	71	4
	8 Specifying or adding (remove) causal information	19	2
	<i>Readability totals</i>	<i>740 (67.2%)</i>	<i>44 (4.0%)</i>
<i>Neutrality</i>	9 Replace (introduce) company/product names	31	3
	10 Make less (more) positive	114	8
	11 Attribute statement to company source	30	-
	<i>Neutrality totals</i>	<i>175 (15.9%)</i>	<i>11 (1.0%)</i>
TWO-WAY TRANSFORMATIONS	12 Introduce (replace) company as subject	38	17
	13 Remove (add) announcement constructions	11	14
	14 Remove (add) hedges	10	7
	15 Syntactic upgrading (downgrading)	22	12
	<i>Two-way totals</i>	<i>81 (7.4%)</i>	<i>50 (4.5%)</i>
<i>Totals coded transformations</i>		996	105
<i>Uncoded transformations</i>		204	
<i>Total of transformations</i>		1305	

The one-way transformations are further divided into those seemingly motivated by readability considerations (67% of our coded transformations) and those that appeared to be specifically related to worries concerning the neutrality of the text (16%). This distinction introduces the two main orientations behind the reworking of press releases by newspaper journalists: Readability (to be discussed in section 3) and neutrality (section 4).

The four remaining operations are bi-directional: Their directions are more evenly spread, with the reverse operations making up 35% up to 60% of the row totals. We will further speak of *two-way transformations*. As an example of these operations, consider transformation 12, which concerns hedges. Sometimes journalists remove hedges when reworking the release text, while in other cases they introduce hedges. Instead of dismissing the two-way transformations as relatively infrequent, we will try to explain their bi-directionality in terms of the same account that is suggested by the first 11 transformations. In section 5 we will argue that these transformations are sensitive to conflicting constraints stemming from different orientations, or different subconstraints within the same orientation. For instance, removing hedges may enhance readability, but sometimes hedges are needed to preserve the neutrality of the text. This analysis is meant to further support our account of the orientations behind the editing process.

To sum up, our proposal aims to account for both the one-way transformations in their dominant directions (67% and 16% of the coded transformations respectively) and for the two-way transformation in both directions (12%). In other words, the vast majority of the coded transformations is covered by our framework.

The structure of the paper will be as follows. Sections 3 and 4 deal with the readability and neutrality-oriented transformations respectively. Section 5 is devoted to our two-way transformations. The implications of the study are discussed in section 6.

3. Readability transformations

In this section we discuss all transformations that did *not* seem to be specifically related to maintaining a neutral stance in the news reports. Given the earlier work on journalistic editing as discussed above, it is more than plausible that the aim of these transformations is to improve the readability of the text for a general audience. We will use this assumption as a heuristic, in the sense that we will use it to make sense of our data and see how far it gets us. We will apply textual analysis to the different transformation types to further refine the assumption, ending up with a more specific account of the readability conception at work in the release transformations. This section will distinguish between three types of transformations: Deletions, substitutions and additions.

3.1. Deletions: Making the text more direct

We have seen that many of the release sentences do not reappear at all in the subsequent press reports. However, the work by Bell (1984) has already illustrated that the tendency to present shorter versions of release information may also be evident within

the used sentences, i.e. in how particular sentences are edited by journalists. In our first three transformations, the sentence is stripped from irrelevant or redundant material.

T1 Omitting details (names, places, dates, numbers)

Release sentences are quite long on average (more than 20 words) and are often packed with detailed information. The single most frequent operation in editing release sentences was to leave out some of this information. Omitting details may take place on the micro-level of deleting modifiers in nominal groups (see 1 to 4 below), but also on a clause level (see 5 and 6).

	Press release	Press report
1	To the <i>two</i> most popular <i>HP inkjet-print</i> cartridges (<i>HP Nr. 56 black en HP Nr. 57 three colors</i>).	The most popular types of cartridges
2	Royal KPN Inc.	KPN
3	The turnover <i>for 2004</i> was ...	The turnover was ...
4	Net-profit (one word in Dutch)	Profit
5	... to implement its expansion strategy, <i>which focuses on specific market segments and core activities</i>	... to enable the further expansion of the company
6	HP worked with the Bayerisches Institut für Angewandte Umweltforschung und –technik – the recycling facility is located in Bavaria – (BIfA) to develop a recycling solution.	HP recycles the cartridges in a factory in Bavaria.

We found 262 instances of detail deletion in our corpus. Now it would be very peculiar if there was not a single case of the reverse operation, namely adding details. Compare 7 and 8:

	Press release	Press report
7	The selling of 12 large supermarkets in Poland	The selling of 12 large supermarkets in Poland, <i>which had been announced in November 2004</i>
8	The two companies together are the clear number two on the Dutch call centre market	The company will be the number two <i>behind market leader SNT</i>

These cases were given the ‘reverse’ coding. We found 16 such cases (see Table 2 above).

As the numbers show, the overwhelming tendency is to leave out information when editing release sentences. When details are added, they probably come from additional documentation at the disposal of the journalist in question (as is the case in 7), or are supplied from domain knowledge (see 8). They present specific background information that supplements the release information.

Bell (1984) has claimed that journalistic editors prefer deletions that require no reworking of the remaining text. We applied a more fine-grained coding to our 262 detail deletions in order to test this hypothesis. We found that 72% of these deletions could indeed be characterized as ‘simple deletions’ in the sense that the immediate context could be left intact. The fragments 1 to 5 above exemplify this kind of deletions.

We then examined the syntactic contexts of the simple deletions (n=189) and the type of information that was involved. This analysis showed that most simple deletions

were applied to complex NP's (27%; see 1 and 2) and adverbial phrases, often introduced by prepositions (31%; see 3). More than half of the complex NP's were official company names (see 2). More than 40% of the deleted adverbial phrases referred to time information, often the time frame associated to certain bits of financial information (see 3); such time information was generally already given at earlier points in the text. Other regular loci of deletion were adverbs accompanying numerical information such as *approximately*, complex nouns stripped of their prefix (see 4) and numbers that were rounded off (e.g. *2,014 million* becoming *2.01 million*). This shows that many simple deletions took place on a micro-level. Deletion on a clause level, such as the relative clause that is omitted in example 5, is less common.

Although many deletions leave the surrounding text intact, we should not conclude that editors go for the easiest deletions. The fact that most deletions take place on the micro-level of phrases, not clauses, implies that they require detailed attention to the wording of the release. Moreover, we may doubt whether a reduction is the main motive for this kind of transformations, since they offer a quite modest result in terms of saved space. We already saw that sentence length in the reports is lower than that in releases, but not dramatically so (18.7 vs. 22.4 words). Saving space is primarily done by omitting sentences altogether, not by pruning sentence constituents. It appears that the deletion of details within sentences is more important for readability than for adjusting the text to the allotted space.

T2 Omitting elements from lists or using a general label for the list

A regular strategy for shortening the release text is to omit elements from coordinated structures or replace the list by a general label (see also Bell 1984, 83).

	Press release	Press report
9	the program for <i>returning and recycling</i> ...	Its recycling program for ...
10	To <i>receive, examine</i> and pay giro slips	To pay giro slips
11	Watching <i>live television, film trailers</i> and music clips	For watching music clips, for instance,

T3 Shortening the phrasing

The journalist may also shorten the release sentence while preserving the information. This can be done by omitting redundant elements (see 12 and 13), or by choosing a more direct way of referring to the event (see 14; in this case the juridical focus on the take-over agreement has been replaced by an everyday focus on the result of signing this agreement).

	Press release	Press report
12	The plastics and metals <i>from the cartridges</i>	The plastics and metals (it was evident from the preceding text that they come from the cartridges)
13	<i>Will receive</i>	Receives
14	<i>Company A and company B have reached an agreement on the take-over of B by A</i>	Company A has taken over company B

Just like deleting information, shortening the phrasing saves some space, but its main effect is that the task of the reader is made less demanding. The notion of readability

behind all deletions is to provide the reader with a more *direct* route to the information to be conveyed, eliminating both unnecessary details and unnecessary words. Perhaps this is what Bell, himself a journalist, means when speaking about ‘tightening up’ the text. Such tightening up operations produce the informational ‘density’ that is so characteristic of news reports. Part of tightening up is that syntactic structures are being simplified. Hence the more direct route is not only shorter, but also less complex in structural terms.

3.2. *Substitutions: Making the text easier to read*

Readability cannot only be improved by making the text more direct, but also by *clarifying* it. Bell (1991) mentions clarifying copy as an important motive for editing, although he does not discuss this orientation in terms of specific editing operations. While directness is primarily served by deletions, clarification is most typically achieved by replacing press release text and by adding text to it. Let us first examine a number of substitutions.

T4 Replacing jargon by plain language

When the journalist replaced words that presupposed particular domain expertise of the reader, the transformation was coded as cutting down on jargon:

	Press release	Press report
15	Subsidiary companies	Daughters
16	The X-holding	The X-group
17	CEO	Top man
18	EBITDA (financial term)	The result before taking into account interest, taxes and write-downs

The general audience cannot be expected to comprehend the specialist terminology in the left column.

T5 Replacing formal by less formal expression

Formal language was defined as a lexical choice from an ‘official’ register. Often, jargon can also be considered to be formal language in this sense. In this study, however, we distinguished between jargon, which presupposes specific background knowledge of readers, and formal language of a more general character. Some examples of formality changes are:

	Press release	Press report
19	Employees	People
20	Acquires (in the sense that one company acquires/purchases the other company)	Buys
21	(Company X) <i>operates</i> 400 establishments (‘exploiteert 400 vestigingen’)	(Company Y) <i>has</i> 400 establishments

While the lexical items replaced in fragments 20 and 21 were not considered to be specialist in the sense of requiring extensive economic or financial expertise, the replacements will make the text easier to understand for many average readers.

T6 Replacing numbers and symbols by words

A particularly systematic feature of the editing policy of daily papers is their habit of avoiding numbers and symbols:

	Press release	Press report
22	The last 15 years	The last <i>fifteen</i> years
23	€1000	1000 <i>euro</i>

Although this editing rule may be a matter of ‘standardizing language’ in that it consists of following the newspaper’s stylebook (Bell’s fourth motive for editing), it can be better grouped with the readability transformations. After all, promoting readability is the ultimate motive for compiling a stylebook in the first place. While the lexical substitutions discussed above seem primarily concerned with promoting cognitive comprehension, symbol and number substitutions seem to be based on an idea concerning ‘ease of processing’ in a more technical sense of the word: The stylebooks seem to assume that words are easier to read than numbers and symbols.

3.3. Additions: Providing background information

T7 Adding general background information on entities

Names in the release text are often supplemented with information that enables the reader to categorize or understand the entity in question more adequately:

	Press release	Press report
24	Akzo Nobel	<i>Chemical group Akzo Nobel</i>
25	Ipod	<i>The Ipod music player</i>
26	V&D and Bijenkorf	<i>V&D and Bijenkorf (also owned by KBB)</i>
27	The Dow Jones Sustainability Index	<i>The Dow Jones Sustainability Index for producers of cyclical consumer goods</i>
28	During the third quarter	<i>During the third quarter, ending end of June</i>
29	A profit of €61 million	<i>A profit of 61 million dollars (50 million euros)</i>

The majority of these additions are made within the context of company or product names. However, in fragment 28 the journalist has tried to prevent a misunderstanding concerning the quarter for which certain financial results are given. And in 29, an amount is given in the home currency as service to the reader.

The difference between this transformation and that of adding details (see above) lies in the general nature of background information, and its link to certain entities already present in the text (companies, persons, concepts, amounts). While adding details requires specific sources besides the release, background information can be supplied immediately from prior knowledge. Given its frequency (n=71), this seems to be the standard way of enhancing clarity, more than adding details (n=16) or adding causal information (n=19).

T8 Explaining by specifying or adding causal information

Besides background information on entities, journalists may supply explanatory information to enable a fuller understanding of the events that are described. For instance, the reader of the press version of fragment 30 will understand better why digital post is more cost-efficient, and the reader of the press version of fragment 31 will see why only music lovers in the UK, France and Germany are mentioned here.

	Press release	Press report
30	For companies, digital post will be considerably more cost-efficient when compared to sending paper bills and giro slips	For companies, digital post will be more cost-efficient. <i>No money has to be spent on stamps and on the production and printing of paper forms.</i>
31	Apple announced today that music lovers in the UK, France and Germany have bought and downloaded more than 800,000 songs at the iTunes Music Store	A week after its launching, already 800,000 songs have been downloaded from the European version of iTunes. <i>Only English, French and German music lovers can legally download music from the site.</i>

Adding causally relevant information is much less frequent than adding background information on entities. Presumably, it is a much more expensive operation in terms of attentional resources. While categorical information can be added to nouns lacking such information on a routine basis, assessing the need for additional causal information requires a thorough analysis of the particular text passage and the inferences that need to be made here. Still, both kinds of additions embody a more ambitious conception of readability: Readable text is sensitive to the reader's need to understand what is being discussed.

3.4. Conclusions on readability transformations

To sum up, our analysis of readability transformations shows that journalistic editors define readable text as a text that:

- Provides a direct (shorter and less structurally complex) route to the information to be conveyed (the 391 deletions seem primarily concerned with directness).
- Uses everyday words (172 replacements concern technical or formal language).
- Is technically readable (87 replacements concern numbers and symbols).
- Helps the reader understand what is being talked about (90 additions provide background information).

In terms of the three main transformation types, we may say that deletions (n=391) and substitutions (n= 259) are much more frequent than additions (n=90).

4. Neutralizing the company-related perspective of the release

A concern that has not been mentioned in earlier studies of journalistic editing is the desire to preserve distance to the perspective of the organization issuing the press release. However, in a recent study (Pander Maat 2007) we found that newspaper journalists deal quite critically with explicit promotional devices in press release copy.

In that study promotional release passages were taken as a point of departure, in order to see how they were dealt with. In this study, we take a broader perspective in that we inspect transformations of whatever release passage for signs of neutralizing intentions.

Let us start this section on a terminological note. Although we use the label ‘promotional’ to refer to the positive language in press releases, this is not to say that this kind of language is concerned with promotion in the traditional marketing sense of promoting products or services. Many releases are not about products and services at all, but about the company’s activities in a much wider sense. But throughout these releases there is an attempt to maintain and possibly enhance positive perceptions of the company. And this section will show how this attempt may be resisted by the editor using the releases as input copy.

Three of our transformations seemed partly or dominantly motivated by such concerns, although we do not rule out the possibility that they are partly motivated by readability purposes (especially directness) as well.

T9 Removing or replacing company or product names

Journalists do not reiterate the company name, as is often done in releases. Instead, they use nominal anaphors such as *the company* (see 32), sometimes adding extra background information (see 24 above). In such cases, both the readability and the neutrality orientation are served by the same lexical substitution. More strictly related to neutrality are removals of references to the company in nominal modifications (33) and references to product names (34):

	Press release	Press report
32	Campina has had a long-standing relation with distributor Quality Brands International (QBI); all <i>Campina</i> sales in Greece in recent years were handled by QBI.	Campina has had a long-standing relation with distributor Quality Brands International (QBI); all sales <i>of the company</i> in Greece in recent years were handled by QBI.
33	Almost 2 million <i>Rabobank</i> customers receive digital mail at <i>www.privver.nl</i>	Many Dutchmen receive digital mail

T10 Making less positive

Journalists regularly reduce or eliminate the positive content and positive phrasings in company releases. Among the 115 transformations in this category we distinguish between 6 subtypes:

1. a sentence or clause containing positive information is criticized;
2. a clause containing positive information is entirely deleted;
3. a sentence or clause containing positive information is entirely reworked, and the revised version has a less positive tone than the original;
4. a positive constituent in a clause is replaced by a more neutrally phrased alternative;
5. a positive constituent in a clause is deleted, leaving the rest of the construction unaltered;
6. a positive or neutral constituent is replaced by a negative alternative.

The six operations can be illustrated as follows:

	Press release	Press report
34	The Board of Directors of KPN would like to thank him for his considerable contribution to the company's success	The "considerable contribution" to the success attributed to Henderson by KNP <i>needs to be taken with a pinch of salt</i>
35	<i>The program makes it as easy as possible for customers:</i> A stamped self-addressed envelope will be added	A stamped envelope will be added
36	Gemini – which had a turnover in 2003 of about USD 200 million – <i>plays a prominent role in this market</i> in applying 'category management'	Gemini has a turnover of USD 200 million.
37	From July 1, Vodafone customers may <i>take advantage of an extra low rate</i> of 50 eurocents per Mb for their Vodafone UMTS-daticard	Telecom company Vodafone has reduced the price for laptop internet cards for business consumers.
38	 can be <i>freely obtained</i> at www.hp.com/recycle	 can be <i>requested</i> at www.hp.com/recycle
39	The net result increased by <i>almost 17%</i>	The net result increased by 16.5%
40	Campina, <i>one of Europe's leading dairy product companies</i> , ...	Dairy product company Campina ...
41	Interpay will inform <i>all</i> businesses involved	Interpay will inform the shopkeepers involved
42	With the new masts KPN will <i>immediately reach as much as 30%</i> of the population	The new masts will <i>only</i> reach 30% of the Netherlands <i>yet</i>
43	For only €2,25 Vodafone customers can buy a bundle of 25 sms messages	Vodafone <i>requires</i> , however, the purchase of <i>at least 25</i> messages

An explicit criticism of the release text is illustrated by 34. This operation is exceptional: Making the release text into a topic of its own is not what journalists generally do when they do not accept release information. Jacobs (1999a) has already observed that the release text generally remains unmentioned; this even goes for press reports which are entirely based on the release information.

The usual response to dubious phrasings and information from releases consists of simply editing it into acceptable form, just as less readable passages are silently repaired. A first option is of course omitting the positive sentence or clause altogether. This is made easier by the fact that some of these clauses lack information in the journalistic sense of the word. Compare the introductory sentence in 35, which really seems to 'beg for deletion' since it adds a positive qualification but nothing more. Likewise, the press release main clause in 36 is entirely ignored in the press report, leaving only the relative clause, providing numerical information on the newly acquired company.

Another regular operation that removes positive elements is an overall reworking of the sentence, such as the one illustrated in 37. The end result of this operation is a more neutral rendering of the entire event, in which positive evaluations (see italics) have no place anymore.

Since the operations discussed so far considerably shorten the release text and make it more readable at the same time, they provide no decisive evidence yet that journalists are primarily concerned with neutralizing the release text. This is different for the next operations, which have a more narrow focus in that they concentrate on certain clause constituents. In 38 and 40, a verb phrase and a numerical indication respectively are replaced by less positive alternatives. Cases like these clearly display the editor's orientation toward neutrality.

This goes even more for cases in which small elements are selectively deleted, the deletion being the only editing operation. Compare 39 and especially 41, which show that journalists go to great lengths in correcting positive phrasings on a micro-level. In 41, the intensifying quantifier *all* can be considered positive in that it stresses the careful way of handling a certain transaction by the company.

Perhaps the most telling observations are cases such as 42 and 43. In 42 the journalist replaces a positive evaluation of a certain proportion by a negative one; in 43 the press report adopts a totally different perspective on the event, stressing the limitations of the new offer.

T11 Introducing the company as the source for the statement

Bell (1984: 99) has warned against the removal of source attributions from input copy, because this may result in 'over-assertion', i.e. making stronger statements than is justified. However, interestingly, the reverse operation is much more common. Regularly, release statements are transferred to the report as something said, or sometimes thought by representatives of the company. Exceptional cases in which the quote is commented upon by the journalist, such as fragment 34, are excluded here. Nevertheless, even without adding any comments, attributing information to a company source creates distance between the company's and the reporter's perspective. This applies to direct quotes (see 44) as well as to indirect representations of language and thought (the other fragments):

	Press release	Press report
44	Super De Boer's own brand is <i>clearly cheaper</i> than Albert Heijn's brand. That <i>advantage</i> needs to be maintained	Its own brand should remain "clearly cheaper" than that of Albert Heijn.
45	As indicated in the annual figures for 2003, the financial consequences of the current market situation cannot be reliably assessed right now	The financial consequences of the current market situation cannot be reliably assessed, <i>according to the wholesaler</i>
46	The two companies together are the <i>clear</i> number two on the Dutch call centre market	<i>By their own account</i> the companies will be the number two in the Netherlands
47	The expansion of the group at home and abroad will be continued at the same pace	For this year, <i>Blokker</i> again <i>expects</i> a rise in the turnover
48	Today the BASE management has informed the works council of its intention to change the current organization to further implement its expansion strategy	<i>According to the management</i> , the restructuring is required to allow the further expansion of BASE

Normally, one would expect a source to be explicitly introduced when statements are reported that reflect the source's assessment or evaluation, as is the case in 44 and 45 above. However, almost half of the source additions concern factual statements regarding the company's products or performance. For instance, the statement in 46 is fairly easy to check for an economic journalist. The reason for introducing a source here can only be that the release statement as it stands may be considered too positive.

A more subtle function of distancing in a release statement is illustrated by 48. Here, the release presents the rationale for a restructuring in an embedded non-finite clause. In the reports, the reason given is presented as an assessment made by the management, taking away much of its self-evidence.

5. Two-way transformations

It is quite common that a transformation realizes several stylistic objectives at once. Deletions of details may both tighten up the text and make it easier to comprehend. Likewise, replacing product names by common nouns both clarify and neutralize the wording. However, other transformations are favored by one orientation but go against another one. Such transformations may be applied in both directions, depending on the relevance and the force of the orientations in the particular context. Hence this section discusses the way newswriters actually ‘juggle’ various constraints.

T12 Operations concerning the company as the sentence subject

Often, press release sentences with agentless passives or impersonal subjects are reworked into sentences with personal subjects. Most often the subject phrase refers to the company, given that most activity sentences in releases are ‘about’ the company’s actions and that the most direct representation of such events involves a subject agent.

	Press release	Press report
49	Gemini’s <i>assortment contains</i> about 2,500 products.	Gemini <i>sells</i> about 2,500 products.
50	This (the reorganization referred to in the preceding sentence) could <i>have an impact on</i> 200 jobs.	KPN will possibly <i>cut</i> 200 jobs.

However, in other cases the ‘company subject’ is eliminated in favor of impersonal subjects (see 51); or somewhat more subtly, company subjects in the semantic role of agent are replaced by non-agent subjects (see 52):

	Press release	Press report
51	KPN <i>offers</i> unlimited use of UMTS	<i>Laptop owners</i> may make unlimited use of UMTS
52	Beter Bed has <i>realized</i> a net profit of €3.3 million compared to €0.6 million in the first half of 2003.	Beter Bed <i>saw</i> its net profit rise compared to the same period last year.

Introducing personal subjects may be a way to enhance the readability of the news. However, how do we explain the reverse operation, i.e. eliminating or replacing personal subjects? We felt that the tendency of journalists to distance themselves from the company perspective might be at work here. In that case, sentences in which company subjects are associated as agents with positively evaluated events might be viewed as promotional; and these sentences should be treated differently than those on negative or neutral events.

To test this hypothesis, we coded the events reported in sentences with ‘subject transformations’ (n=57) into three categories: Positive, neutral and negative. Examples of positive events were raising profits, expansions, and new or special activities or products. Neutral events were personnel changes, reorganizations and general information on the company (e.g. its product range or its turnover). Negative events were, for instance, job cuts and costs to be made for settling debts. Table 3 reports the frequencies for both kinds of subject transformations for positive and neutral/negative events.

Table 3. Frequencies for subject transformations according to polarity of event type

	Company subject introduced	Company subject removed or changed into non-agent
<i>Positive events</i>	16	16
<i>Neutral or negative events</i>	22	1

Table 3 shows that different kinds of events are treated differently by journalists ($\chi^2 = 13.06$, $df = 1$, $p = .000$): While neutral (see 50) or negative events (see 51) were systematically personalized, de-personalization only occurs in positive sentences (compare see 51 and 52). Therefore, the finding that company subjects are sometimes introduced and sometimes eliminated may be explained with reference to the two main orientations of journalists reworking releases: Personalizing by introducing company subjects seems to reflect the orientation of enhancing readability, while de-personalizing reflects the desire to neutralize the text. While in neutral and negative contexts the readability constraint reigns supreme, it needs to be balanced against the equally important constraint of neutrality in positive contexts.

T13 Removing or adding announcement formulas

Press releases may contain ‘announcement formulas’, that is to say, statements in which speech act verbs are coupled with an object constituent referring to the release information itself. These statements may be deleted (see 53), but may also be added (see 54):

	Press release	Press report
53	<i>Ahold announced today that</i> Bill Grize, President and CEO of Ahold US Retail, will withdraw from the Board of Directors.	Board member Bill Grize is leaving the Board of Directors of Ahold.
54	Maarten Henderson (55), CFO of Royal KPN Inc., has decided to continue his career elsewhere.	Financial manager Maarten Henderson (55) of KPN, has decided to continue his career outside KPN. <i>KPN announced this yesterday.</i>

It is obvious that eliminating announcement formulas makes the text shorter and more direct (also see Bell (1991, 71). Why then add them? We might speculate that the announcement event *itself* is deemed relevant when the news is unexpected. In that case, the question ‘who told you so?’ might be relevant. However, we found no correlation between announcement formulas and the type of news; examples (53) and (54) illustrate that quite similar news items can be treated differently. Hence we suggest that introducing announcement formulas creates a distance between the perspective of the company and that of the journalist.

Therefore, adding announcement formulas reflects the neutralizing orientation, while eliminating them reflects the desire to enhance readability.

T14 Removing or adding hedges

We defined hedges as all devices that decrease the strength of statements by indicating uncertainty about whether an event will occur. Such elements may be eliminated in order to produce a more direct version of the text. Look what happens to the introduction *the intention is to...* in 55 and to the adjectival *expected* in 56:

	Press release	Press report
55	<i>The overall intention is</i> to dispose of non-core activities	Non-core activities will be disposed of or farmed out
56	They will create an new enterprise with an <i>expected</i> turnover for 2004 of €60 million	The combined turnover will arrive at € 60 million
57	At present it is yet unknown <i>what consequences this will have for the number of jobs</i>	It is unclear yet <i>how many jobs</i> the restructuring will cost.

A special case is 57, in which the company leaves it open whether or not the restructuring will eliminate any jobs, while the journalists takes this for granted.

Bell (1984: 97) draws attention to the dangers of removing hedges in input copy, and rightly so, because this operation may result in over-assertion, just like the removal of source attributions may. But for our present purposes, it is more important to point out that hedges are just as often *introduced* by journalists as they are removed. Introducing hedges results in weakening a statement. Examples are the following:

	Press release	Press report
58	In the Netherlands, KPN <i>will</i> offer UMTS-coverage in about 40 big cities.	In the Netherlands, KPN <i>wants to</i> offer UMTS-coverage in about 40 big cities.
59	If the banks change the conditions and tariffs after May 1, they <i>will</i> inform their customers in time.	If the banks want to change tariffs, they <i>are obliged to</i> inform the shopkeepers on time

In both cases the future auxiliary *will* is replaced by modal verbs or phrases that leave open the possibility that the event will not occur.

We suspected that the choice for eliminating hedges or introducing them would again be sensitive to the two orientations of enhancing readability and neutralizing the text. In that case, the choice of modalities should be different according to the type of information presented. In neutral or negative information, the desire to enhance readability should lead to the elimination of hedges. In contrast, positive statements about the achievements of the company are more likely to be toned down by hedges, because the press report needs to prevent promotion. The following kinds of information were considered positive: Statements containing product claims (see 58), low prices, praise for leaving officials and ‘promises’ (see 59). Examples of neutral information are reorganizations (see 55) and financial data (see 56). Job losses are negative information (see 57).

Our expectation was confirmed. Table 4 shows that hedges were invariably removed in neutral or negative contexts, while they were regularly inserted in positive contexts ($\chi^2 = 13.25$, $df = 1$, $p = .000$). The contrast between the two kinds of context is even sharper here than it was for the transformations regarding ‘company subjects’ discussed above. For subject transformations, the positive context introduced neutrality as a constraint besides readability, while for hedges the positive context entirely replaces readability by neutrality as the primary constraint.

Table 4. Frequencies for modality transformations according to event type polarity

	Hedges inserted	Hedges removed
Positive events	6	-
Neutral or negative events	1	10

T15 Syntactic rearrangements: Splitting and merging

A final category of transformations that does not predominantly occur in one direction is assigning a different syntactic status to a piece of information. Bell (1984, 87) already observed that editors ‘split’ and ‘merge’ sentences. But what direction would be most common for these rearrangements? Our first impression was that journalists often split sentences, so that lower level constituents get promoted to the clause or sentence level:

	Press release	Press report
60	Ahold announced today that the sale of twelve large Hypernova supermarkets in Poland to Carrefour has been completed.	Ahold announced today that the sale of twelve large Hypernova supermarkets in Poland has been completed. <i>Carrefour will be the new owner.</i>
61	Ahold announced today that <i>the sale of twelve large Hypernova supermarkets in Poland to Carrefour has been completed.</i>	<i>Ahold has completed the sale of twelve large Hypernova supermarkets in Poland to its French competitor Carrefour.</i> This was announced today by the Dutch supermarket group.

Generally, this kind of rearrangement reduces the syntactic complexity of the release text. At the same time, it tends to make the report longer. This may explain why we also found cases in which information is moved from separate release sentences into lower level constituents in report sentences:

	Press release	Press report
62	Philips Electronics Inc. has acquired Gemini Industries Inc., the most important supplier of consumer electronics and computer supplies in North America. <i>Financial details have not been disclosed.</i>	Philips Electronics Inc. has acquired the American supplier of consumer electronics and computer supplies Gemini Industries <i>for an unknown price.</i>
63	The company result over the first half of 2004 has decreased to € 1.8 million compared to 2003 <i>and amounts to € 36,9 million.</i>	The company result has decreased to € 1.8 million <i>to € 36,9 million.</i>

Clearly, this kind of syntactic downgrading takes place in the context of ‘tightening up’ the release copy. That is to say, syntactic rearrangements are pulled in two directions by different aspects of readability: A desire to reduce syntactic complexity may lead to placing important information in separate sentences, while merging two clauses or sentences into one may produce a shorter and more direct version.

6. Conclusions

Newspaper journalists are quite critical in their use of press release sentences. In this study we coded the kinds of transformations release sentences undergo before ending up as newspaper sentences. Coding all these changes proved to be a complex task, which required extensive discussions between coders. It is worth the effort, however, since the corpus of transformations enables us to propose a number of different orientations behind the editing of release sentences. Readability operations were concerned with the directness and clarity of the sentence and with providing necessary background information. Neutralizing operations involve toning down the company’s enthusiasm

about its products and results, and distancing the reporter's perspective from the company perspective. These two orientations account for 67% and 16% of the coded transformations respectively. Four other transformations (another 12%) could be explained as a result of interactions between two different orientations. Only 5% of the transformations could not be accounted for: That is, they worked in the opposite direction, making the report less readable and more positive in tone than the release had been.

In Pander Maat (2007) it was found that newspaper journalists turn out to be much more critical in their approach to promotional language than journalists of special interest magazines. They tend to remove or replace explicit promotional elements. Because this study focuses more broadly on transformations in reports, we were able to present a more comprehensive account of the concern of journalists for neutrality. Besides eliminating explicit promotion, they may also refocus the sentence in order to achieve a more detached presentation. Likewise, they regularly distance themselves from the information by introducing the company as the source of the release statements. And they do not use company and product names as profusely as release writers tend to do.

However, in terms of frequency, neutralizing transformations are only a fraction of the editing work. The bulk of this work consists of reducing the release text and making it more readable. The fact that releases are not used entirely is not surprising, given that their average length vastly exceeds the space available for newspaper reports. As discussed in the introduction, this is only natural, given the need to provide both general and specialist media with information. However, our study reveals that the selection process does not only concern whether or not to use a sentence (or paragraph), but also what parts of a particular sentence are to be used, or whether the entire nominal group or only its core should be used. Most often, certain details are left out; release sentences and the noun phrases in them are often 'packed' with information, and not all information reaches the report. There are also a considerable number of cases in which the wording is so unwieldy that a shorter formulation is equally fit to convey the same information. Selection processes on this micro-level of text are more concerned with readability than with saving space.

An equally important finding is that the release style poses lexical readability problems. Release writers choose a formal register, freely use branch specific jargon and bluntly introduce entities (often companies) unknown to most readers. Journalists extensively adapt release material to make it suitable for the general reader, and add background information.

These results add to the insights in earlier studies on journalistic editing. For instance, we now know how journalists succeed in writing shorter words than release writers (see Walters & Walters 1996): They tend to replace technical jargon and formal terms by everyday words. At the same time, our study finds that report sentences are shorter than release sentences; it is unclear why Walters & Walters (1996) do not find such a difference.

As regards the work by Bell (1984, 1991), many of his observations are replicated in our data, but our account differs from his. Bell proposes four general editing motivations: Cutting, clarifying, maximizing news value and standardizing language. Our analysis of within-sentence editing operations provides mixed results regarding these motivations. For one thing, we found virtually no operations with the sole purpose of maximizing news value. We suspect that this orientation may be

important on higher levels of text structure; it may lead to deletions of entire sentences or paragraphs, or to reordering sentences. Likewise, a close analysis of deletion operations suggests that cutting is not an important concern in within-sentence editing. Finally, clarifying and standardizing language may functionally be subordinated to the purpose of making the text more readable. This readability concept is given a more fine-grained account in terms of deletion operations, lexical substitutions and additions enhancing readability. A further empirical contribution of our study is that besides readability there is a second important editing orientation: Neutrality.

Perhaps most importantly, this study not simply classifies editing operations under single functional orientations, but also shows how transformations may be multi-functional. Some transformations may serve two orientations at the same time, for instance by both clarifying and neutralizing the text. Other transformations are subject to several orientations that may pull them into different directions. In these cases, we find that the operation is applied in different directions, depending on the particular context at hand.

Needless to say, the account suggested by our corpus analysis has not been confirmed yet in writing research on the actual editing process. However, this study could provide a starting point for such research.

7. Discussion

Our transformation analysis provides evidence that releases are ‘unfit to print’ in several ways, the main deficiencies being a lack of clarity and a lack of neutrality. How can these obvious deficiencies as newspaper material be explained, given that the releases in this corpus have been written by communication professionals? Let us return to the notion of *genre conflicts*, which was raised in the introduction. Such a conflict arises when one considers using the same text in different functional environments while in fact the constraints characterizing the two contexts are incompatible, so that the text cannot felicitously be used within both genre contexts.

In their analysis of functional complexities affecting document design, Lentz & Pander Maat (2004) discuss two kinds of functional complexity that correspond to different kinds of genre conflicts. The first kind is caused by incompatibilities between *purpose constraints*, i.e. design constraints derived from the intended communicative function of the text or genre. Such incompatibilities arise when text producers need to combine multiple purposes and audiences that impose different constraints on the possible text features. Bhatia (2000) discusses an example of *generic* conflict, that is to say, a conflict *within* a genre, in which the purposes of regulating behavior and promoting goodwill are not entirely compatible. Our analysis has provided similar intra-generic conflicts in the news report, especially concerning the two constraints of readability and neutrality. But this paper has also shown a functional conflict *between*, not within genres. The press release does not just provide information; it informs in such a way that the company’s positive image is maintained or enhanced. This additional goal of image maintenance is lacking in press reports. These different sets of purposes impose partly contradictory stylistic constraints on the genres, so that one and the same text cannot felicitously be used in both contexts.

This line of reasoning implies that the attempt by release writers to ‘pre-formulate’ press language is a restricted one at best. As evidenced by the regular use of

promotional language, release writers do not fully comply with the neutrality standards characterizing the register of so-called 'hard-news' reporting (see White 1998). How they view this use of promotion needs to be investigated in a different kind of study, but it just might be that corporate release writers try to 'get across' as much of the company's perspective as possible, leaving it to the journalist to resist this attempt.

Another kind of incompatibility in purpose constraints, due to conflicting constraints derived from different audiences, may arise from the fact that releases are designed for journalists, while press reports are aimed at the general public. This possibility needs to be empirically examined in writing process research, but process-oriented and ethnographic work by Sleurs et al (2003) and Sleurs & Jacobs (2005) so far has shown that lay readers are not mentioned that often by writers, while the journalist gate-keepers deciding over the fate of the release certainly are.

The second source of functional complexities and genre conflicts has to do with *incompatibilities between purpose constraints and non-purpose constraints*, i.e. design constraints that are not related to the communicative purpose of the document but to the design context. The classic examples of non-purpose constraints leading to intra-generic conflicts come from technical and legal restrictions on text formatting and phrasing; but the organizational context of the writing process is also an important source of non-purpose constraints. In our case, the lack of readability of many releases certainly requires an explanation in non-purpose terms, since it would clearly be disadvantageous for the company if reports based on its releases would be written just as poorly as the releases themselves. Why do releases show this blatant lack of anticipation of the stylistic needs of an 'outside' audience? Part of the explanation may lie in the audience orientation mentioned above: Press releases seem to address a journalist audience, not the general public. And since many journalists are domain experts, they can be trusted to be able to make sense of the press releases, no matter its intricate phrasing. However, the use of professional and company jargon in releases may also be due to powerful intra-organizational constraints affecting the lexical choices to be made in company documents. In other words, the formal and jargon-ridden language found in releases is simply the 'company discourse' that also fills other company documents such as annual reports and company brochures. For instance, functions of top executives, companies and departments are often referred to by their official (often English) names, which are probably the only acceptable designations of these referents in company-authored written language. However, these labels are at least unnecessary and often downright incomprehensible for the general public. The stylistic gap between the officially sanctioned self-presentation of the company and the journalistic perspective creates an intra-generic conflict that is hard to solve for the press release writer: It is hard to write a release that is maximally appreciated both by internal stakeholders and external audiences. Of course the conflict is also inter-generic in that the readability constraint is stronger in the news report contexts than it is in the press release context.

To sum up, we have discussed both intra-generic conflicts within releases and reports and inter-generic conflicts between the two genres. The inter-generic conflicts are twofold. First, the communicative purposes of both text types are not fully compatible. More specifically, differences between the genres concerning the text purpose (informing versus persuading) and the intended audience (journalists with domain expertise versus the general public) may give rise to conflicting constraints on the text. Second, the readability constraint is more important for news reports than for

press releases (where it competes with non-purpose constraints implied by the organizational writing context).

All this is not to say that the concept of preformulation does not capture a valuable intuition on what release writers try to do: Releases undeniably borrow features of news reports, notably the 3rd person perspective, and the overall structure from heading to lead to body. However, it is hard to believe that experienced release writers are unaware of the discrepancies between their raw materials and the journalistic end products; and given that they are probably aware of these differences, and at the same time do not drastically alter their writing style, it seems that the unaltered use of their release text is not their most important objective. They primarily want press coverage for their information, while the exact form of this coverage is of secondary importance. What their release should do is to persuade the press that it contains an event worth covering and, perhaps also, that using the release is not too difficult in terms of reworking. The selective use of press report conventions in release texts must be seen as part of these persuasion attempts. However, besides pleasing the journalist audience to some degree, corporate release writers need to produce texts that are acceptable and recognizable for their corporate colleagues, which often results in a combination of formal phrasing, company jargon, and occasional snippets of advertising. To a considerable degree, they leave it to journalists to rework their releases into a generally acceptable style. As Matheson (2000) has pointed out, the crucial characteristic of the press in our modern age is that it has acquired the authority to subsume the different institutional discourses of the source texts under a universal 'standard voice'. Our study has shed some light on the inner workings of this standardization process.

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Appendix: coding reliability study

We performed a separate coding reliability study in which we presented lay subjects with fragments from our corpus. We were specifically interested in three coding issues. For one thing, we had experienced difficulties distinguishing between removing technical jargon on the one hand and making the language less formal on the other (for explanations and illustrations of these categories, see section 3.1); hence we wanted to make sure that our codings would not be at odds with lay intuitions. Furthermore, we included a number of examples that had been coded 'make less positive' (see section 3.3), because assigning it often seemed a matter of personal judgment. Many of these transformations concerned subtle differences in the strength of a statement. Finally, we wanted to know whether the 'uncoded' transformations would be treated differently from the first three types.

Hence the materials for the study consisted of 40 examples of sentence pairs from our corpus:

- For 10 pairs, the transformation had been coded as 'make the release text less formal';
- For 10 pairs, the transformation had been coded as 'replace jargon by plain language';

- For 10 pairs, the transformation had been coded as ‘make the release text less positive’;
- The final 10 pairs had not received a label and hence had been assigned to the category ‘uncoded operations’.

The sentence pairs were presented in simplified form; other transformations than the ones we were interested in were removed. We used italics to draw attention to the transformed text. The subjects in our study were instructed that a study of journalistic editing of releases had revealed that three common revisions concerned formality, jargon and the positive tone of the text. For each sentence pair, they were to indicate which of these three operations were at stake. They were allowed to indicate more than one operation; but they were also allowed to indicate no operation at all, if they felt that the transformation did not fit one of the three labels. 39 first-year students of Communication Sciences at Utrecht University acted as subjects. None of them had received any stylistic training apart from the instructions for the study, which had illustrated all three operations by a single example.

The results of the study were both reassuring and enlightening (see Table 1).

Table 1. Mean percentages of subjects with correct and other codings for the four item categories in our reliability study; percentages referring to ‘correct’ codings are bold

<i>Coding result</i>	<i>Coded as ‘make less formal’</i>	<i>Coded as ‘replace jargon’</i>	<i>Coded as ‘make less positive’</i>	<i>No code assigned</i>
Item type				
Make less formal	76.4	13.6	8.2	9.2
Replace jargon	29.2	76.2	8.5	3.3
Make less positive	24.6	7.4	73.3	4.4
Uncoded transformations	42.8	15.1	17.9	30.8

Table 1 shows that around 75% of the subjects agreed on the three categories, and that the ‘other’ transformations were most often left uncoded (30.8%). Given that the subjects received no training at all, this indicates that the three categories have some intuitive plausibility.

At the same time, subjects identified a considerable number of formality changes in the items that initially had not been coded as such. Remember that subjects were free to assign more than one label to sentence pairs. Often, formality was assigned as a second label: This is why the percentage totals in table 3 exceeds 100%. 7 out of 30 items scored below 70% agreement on our initial coding. Most of these items were considered formality changes by a substantial minority of coders. For instance, terms such as *CEO* and *disinvestment* had been coded as technical jargon, but were considered formal by many subjects. For reasons explained in section 3.1, the code ‘replace jargon’ was given priority for these kinds of items.

The items in the ‘uncoded’ category were assigned a code relatively often, although the subjects were free to refrain from coding. Most of these codings concerned formality.