PRESS RELEASES AS A HYBRID GENRE: ADDRESSING THE INFORMATIVE/PROMOTIONAL CONUNDRUM

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Abstract

Press releases are short pieces of writing issued by companies or institutions to communicate newsworthy information to the journalist community on the one hand, and to the general public (indirectly through newspaper reporting, or, increasingly, directly by making press releases available on corporate websites) on the other. While ostensibly informative, press releases also carry an implicitly self-promotional purpose, in so far as the information they contain comes from a source internal to the organization which is the object of the release itself.

This paper explores the generic features of press releases and investigates the way in which they codify the different communicative purposes and multiple receiver roles which distinguish the genre. Drawing on Bhatia's work on genre (Bhatia 1993, 2004), and building on Jacobs's preformulating features (Jacobs 1999a), which can be seen as linguistic strategies aimed at achieving the primary and most ostensible purpose of the press release (i.e. getting the story in the news with as little manipulation as possible on the part of journalists), the paper identifies a set of moves and strategies common to the genre, and links them to communicative purposes on the one hand, and to envisioned audiences on the other. It is argued that the press release occupies a hybrid position along the informative-promotional continuum, and that identification of its communicative purpose relies as much on core as on peripheral textual features.

Keywords: Press release; Genre; Communicative purpose; Promotional genres; Reporting genres; Hybrid genres.

1. Introduction

The press release has always occupied a special place in the theory and practice of public relations. It is credited with being the key textual genre at the heart of the discipline since its inception at the beginning of the 20th century, when Ivy Lee was hired by the Pennsylvania Railroad to provide the media with information about an accident the company had been involved in, and remains to this day the staple of proactive public relations. As such, it has always been the object of much interest on the part of public relations practitioners, and especially of those involved in PR education[1]. It has only been recently that the interest for this genre has extended to scholars working

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[1] Tips on "how to write the perfect press release" abound, and the plethora of books available on the topic (with best-sellers like Aronson, Spetner, Ames 1998, Fletcher 2004; McIntyre 1992) is now compounded by several software packages (such as Envision's "Business-in-a-box") that claim to enable users to write and deliver foolproof press releases. At the same time, despite being invested with a prominent role in PR practice, press releases are often dismissed by journalists as badly written pieces of promotional material (cf. DeLorme and Fedler 2003) – a fact which, however, does not prevent them from being relied on when writing news reports (cf. van Dijk 1988, Bell 1991).

in the domain of linguistics, with research focusing, on the one hand, on the generic features of the press release (Jacobs 1999a, 1999b; McLaren and Gurâu 2005) and, on the other, on the professional practices and textual outcomes surrounding the production of press releases (Sleurs, Jacobs, van Waes 2003; Sleurs and Jacobs 2005) and their subsequent use in news reports (Walters, Walters, Starr 1994; Walters and Walters 1992; Lenaerts 2002; Catenaccio 2006; Pander Maat 2007)[2].

This paper aims to contribute to our understanding of the press release by looking at contextual, as well as textual, aspects of the genre, with a view to investigating the way in which the different communicative purposes and multiple receiver roles which distinguish it are codified. In so doing, the paper will build on previous attempts to account for the textual structure of press releases in a genre-theory perspective (McLaren and Gurâu 2005) and, more generally, on principles drawn from genre theory research (most notably Swales 1990; Bhatia 1993; Bhatia 2004).

The study was conducted on a small corpus of corporate press releases collected from a variety of sources, both print- and web-based. As regards the former, forty-nine press releases actually received by a business journalist working for a British broadsheet over three ordinary days (24-27 April 2005) were viewed. An additional number of press releases were collated from UK and US web sources, for a total of 70 releases. The informant corpus was mostly made up by business releases announcing products or services, and was therefore fairly homogeneous in topic (though not in form) and characterised by a strong marketing component. Since, however, the press release as a genre is generally understood to cover a variety of topics and purposes[3] (cf. Lassen 2006) of which product launch is only one, in selecting the additional web-based material care was taken to widen the scope of the inquiry to include releases other than product-related. These comprised crisis response press releases and releases covering aspects of corporate activity not linked to product promotion. The choice to include different types of press release was based on the assumption – which the study aimed to verify – that the social and professional activity type of which the press release is a rhetorical embodiment should be accounted for in terms as general as possible, but at

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[2] The way in which press release material is used in news reports has been the object of a number of previous studies, but rarely in a linguistic perspective. See, amongst others, Callison 2003; Walters and Walters 1996; Walters, Walters, Grey 1996; Ohl, Pincus, Rimmer, Harrison 1995; Walters and Walters 1992).

[3] The type of material that goes under the name of press release is much and varied, both in content (from product launches, to crisis responses, to the announcement of financial results) and in format (press information can also appear in letter form: This occurred fairly frequently in the informant corpus). It is not rare for press releases to refer to other documents, which are sometimes presented in the form of enclosures, or more often made available on request, frequently in electronic form. Although the presentation of different materials in press release form is of interest in itself – especially in so far as it points to the relationships existing between genres within systems (Bazerman 1994), or their interconnectedness in genre chains (Fairclough 2003) – I will concentrate here on what are generally perceived as "prototypical" (Swales 1990: 52) examples of press releases, i.e. press releases that 1) tell a story and 2) display features of preformulation (i.e., are written to be retold). It should be remembered, however, that genres constantly adapt to evolving communicative needs (Berkenkotter / Huckin 1995; Bhatia 1997a, 2004) and are also subject to more idiosyncratic types of intervention (Bhatia 1997b); they are therefore to be seen as "fuzzy" categories rather than described definitionally (Swales 1990: 49). As a result, although care was taken to ensure that the press releases selected for analysis should be as representative as possible, it will always be possible to find specimens of the genre whose features do not match up exactly with the ones described in this paper.

the same time precise enough to be described in terms of typical rhetorical moves and associated linguistic strategies.

2. A hybrid genre

Press releases are relatively short texts resembling news stories and containing what is considered by the issuer to be newsworthy information; they are generally sent to the journalist community (but the intended primary readership has been recently shifting to the general public)[4] with the purpose of having them picked up by the press and turned into actual news stories, thus generating publicity, in the conviction that third-party endorsement is the best way to promote a company's image and reputation. As a result, they display a typical mix of informative and promotional which makes them prime examples of what have been called "hybrid genres" (cf. Bhatia 2004: 90; Fairclough 1992: 207) – i.e. genres which are the result of the blurring of boundaries between discourses, and which appear to be especially prominent in – though by no means limited to – the domain of contemporary media (Fairclough 2003: 35)[5].

This hybrid nature had been pointed out by Jacobs in the conclusions to his 1999 study, where he drew attention to the fact that "the 'unpaid publicity' that press releases are said to be geared at seems to keep the middle ground between advertising and news reporting" (1999: 307). Jacobs also suggested that such hybridisation could be related to the general trend towards what Fairclough (1992, 1994) calls the "commodification" of discourse, i.e. the tendency of market discourses to colonize other types of discourse, a phenomenon extensively studied by Bhatia in his investigation of genre mixing, bending and embedding for the purposes of promotionalization (Bhatia 1999, 2000, 2004).

While both Fairclough and Bhatia seem to imply that this process of commodification, or promotionalization, is a feature of modernity (and, as such, the result of a "colonization" of professional genres on the part of advertising), in the case of the press release the mixing of promotional and informative was *constitutive* of the genre from its very origin. That press releases were not solely informative was obvious to the recipients of the first specimens that were issued back in the early 20th century. In fact, press releases were charged with advertising under false pretence, and as such initially opposed – so much so that Ivy Lee felt obliged to accompany his press release with a "Declaration of Principles", part of which reads as follows:

> This is not a secret press bureau. All our work is done in the open. We aim to supply news. This is not an advertising agency; if you think any of our matter properly ought to go to your business office, do not use it. Our matter is accurate. Further details on any subject treated will be supplied promptly, and any editor will be assisted most cheerfully in verifying directly any statement of

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[4] The advent of the World Wide Web has radically changed the participation framework of many traditional genres (cf. Garzone 2007), including the press release, which, thanks to electronic distribution and the creation of virtual newsrooms accessible to the general public, enjoys now a much greater visibility than it ever had in the past. In a recent paper, for instance, McLaren and Gurâu (2006) identify investors as the main addressee of the biotechnology press releases which are the object of their study, and there is evidence that press releases are being used more and more frequently as direct marketing tools. However, press release continue to be sent to members of the press, and even when they are not, there is a presumption that they are meant for journalists which lends them credibility.

[5] On this topic see the special issue of *Text* on *Media Discourse – extensions, mixes, and hybrids* (2004), edited by J.O. Östman and A.M. Simon-Vanderbergen; cf. in particular Ungerer 2004.

fact. In brief, our plan is, frankly and openly, on behalf of the business concerns and public institutions, to supply to the press and public of the United States prompt and accurate information concerning subjects which it is of value and interest to the public to know about. (Ivy Lee 1906, quoted in Harrison and Moloney 2004)

Lee's decision to issue the declaration suggests a desire to assuage the suspicion raised by the perceived encroaching of "the world of private intentions" (Bhatia 2004) upon the conventional textual resources of the reporting genre, with its attached presumption of objectivity. In this sense, the first press release may be described as a typical example of genre bending resulting in an "innovatory discursive event" (Fairclough 1992: 97). This gave rise, in turn, to a new genre, the salient feature of which was interdiscursivity, i.e. the combination of different discourse types – news discourse, with its primarily informative focus, and promotional discourse, characterized by a persuasive intent – within the same genre.

Despite Lee's protestations, it is hard to believe that journalists were ever fooled by his claims to disinterestedness. Nonetheless, press releases quickly became an established practice in media relations[6], based on the mutual understanding on the part of press release writers and journalists that the (publicly unacknowledged) self-serving intent with which information was offered did not, in itself, undermine its validity. Thus, the inclusion of promotional language in self-styled "informative only" press releases – kept in check, to an extent at least, by the commonly held belief in the PR community that a degree of sobriety enhances credibility – is accepted by journalists as part of the make-up of the genre, to be culled or retained, when using them as sources, depending on various factors, among which type of publication and target audience (cf. Pander Maat 2007).

This suggests that there is, in press releases, a tension between overtly acknowledged and tacitly understood communicative purposes. Such tension is a direct consequence of the hybrid nature of the press release, with its close combination of promotion and information – two linguistic functions which, while not being necessarily in conflict from a rhetorical point of view, may be so from a professional perspective. In so far as communicative purpose is seen as a genre determinant, therefore, accounting for the multiple communicative purposes inscribed in press releases is a crucial step for a full description of the genre.

3. Press releases and communicative purpose(s)

The notion of communicative purpose occupies a special place in most genre-based approaches to language (cf. Miller 1984; Swales 1990; Bhatia 1993; Johns 1997), and is one of the main criteria used to determine genre membership. In the case of the press

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[6] Most of the initial distrust, however, lingered on, and to this day journalists remain wary of press releases, complaining that the little information they provide is so badly written and couched in so much promotional material that renders press releases unusable, at least in the form in which they are provided. Thus, the preformulated nature of press releases does not always result in verbatim quotations in news reports, but may be subject to editing (see Pander Maat 2007), sometimes involving extensive recontextualization (i.e. re-ordering of the events reported and of the saliency given to different pieces of information; White 1998) with the consequence that entirely different views may be presented in the published reports than the ones originally contained in the press releases (Catenaccio 2006).

release, however, defining communicative purpose univocally appears difficult at best, and, at worst, as Lassen (2006) [7] suggests, impossible.

On a very general level, press releases can be said to aim at conveying to the press and, through the press, to the general public, newsworthy, positively connoted, corporate/institutional information in a (fairly) standardised textual form. In this sense, they are the tangible products of a "typified rhetorical action" (Miller 1984: 159) grounded in recognised social practices, historically developed and socially situated, and, indeed, broadly characterised by a commonly acknowledged – if not univocally determined – communicative purpose.

In a way, the fact that the press release's communicative purpose is a composite one should not surprise: After all, the concept is usually interpreted in terms of "a *set* of communicative purpose*s*" (Swales 1990; Bhatia 1993 following Swales 1990; my emphases). Yet, acknowledging multiplicity of purposes says little about what exactly they are, in what way they are related to each other, or, indeed, what strategies are used to convey them. In fact, as Askehave and Swales (2001: 198) have pointed out, recognising that communicative purposes may be multiple and stratified does not necessarily make their identification easier, and although Swales attributes "considerable heuristic value" to the fact that "the purposes of some genres may be hard to get at" (Swales 1990: 46), especially in so far as it shows that discourses are often multi-functional, such difficulty can sometimes hamper, rather than facilitate research. In particular, one should be wary to take *declared* communicative purposes at face value: As Lee's 'Declaration of Principles' shows, there may be substantial differences between what a text purports to do, what it is perceived by the recipient as actually doing, and what it actually does. Also – as is the case with the press release – a text may do more than one thing at the same time. As Candlin (2006: 26) has recently pointed out, if we want to account for interdiscursivity in texts and genres we must recognise that different discourses / identities / purposes are not "distinctively identifiable and coded (textualised)" in a given text, but "all discourses are concurrently in play at one and the same time".

Such a shift in focus from textually codified purpose to situation-bound dynamic intentionality demands that researchers move away from "textual description as a primary mode of analysis" to focus to a greater extent on contextual aspects. This does not mean that text-based approaches should be abandoned altogether; but they should be combined with an "ethnographically motivated dimension which draws on qualitative evidence from participants' narratives and accounts," with particular attention given to their conditions of production and reception (Candlin 2006: 38; but see also Askehave and Swales 2001; Bhatia 2004).

The need for such an approach was implicitly recognised by Jacobs (1999a) in his study of the metapragmatics of press releases: While focusing on text-internal aspects, it pointed beyond the text – both forward (what do journalists make of press releases?), but also backwards: What are the motives for writing press releases, who is involved in writing them, and what other factors have contributed to the codification of the genre as we know it?

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[7] The genre status of the press release has been recently challenged by Lassen (2006), who has argued that the press release cannot be considered a genre because it does not have a univocally identifiable rhetorical objective, or communicative purpose. Rather, Lassen suggests, the press release resembles a media channel – in systemic terms, an element of Mode (2006: 527), conceding, however, that they may also be categorized, following Fairclough (2003), as a *disembedded genre*.

Answering these questions may help shed some light on the stratification of communicative purposes in press releases. To fully account for this aspect of the genre, a text-based analysis must be combined with an in-depth understanding of the various steps involved in press release writing, as well as of the type of contribution provided by the multiple participants involved to a greater or lesser degree in press release production and reception. Carrying out a project of this kind is a major enterprise (as testified by a growing body of research on press releases being carried out from different perspectives, many of which are represented in this volume), and goes beyond the scope of this paper. Some contextual aspects, however, need to be considered before moving on to textual analysis, as they provide a necessary background against which textual features can be analysed.

4. Interdiscursivity in press releases: Contextual aspects

One key aspect of press releases, at least in their "original", pre-technological state, is their nature as "mediated discourse", whereby information meant to reach the general public is addressed to journalists as necessary go-betweens between the company or institution issuing the release and the end-reader. Thus, press releases can be said to aim at being persuasive on two accounts: On the one hand, they must persuade journalists that they are newsworthy; on the other, they must persuade the general public that the company is profitable / trustworthy / offers something they need etc. In the two cases, the nature – and the means –[8]of persuasion may be different, although there may be some overlapping. It may be expected, for instance, that journalists be persuaded by factual elements, whereas a more general marketing objective may be best conveyed through promotional, or at least positively connotated, language. Yet, too much positive language may obfuscate informativity, and result in no coverage at all.

Public relations manuals concur in stating that media coverage, achieved mostly through press releases, is a key instrument of publicity, and one potentially more powerful than advertising (as well as being more economical); at the same time, they insist that press releases, in order to pass the test of the information gatekeepers, must avoid overtly promotional language. Thus, we are faced with a paradox: The end-purpose is a promotion of some sort, but overt promotion must be carefully avoided; in fact, public relation practitioners argue that the less a press release manifests itself as promotional, the more it is likely to be used by journalists, and therefore the more potentially promotional it becomes[9].

As pointed out above, the ostensible objectivity of press releases only thinly masks their underlying promotional intent. In fact, the success of the press release as a media communication strategy relies on the mutual understanding of press release writers and members of the press that promotional intentions are very much prominent. This understanding is part of the discursive competence (Bhatia 2004: 144) shared by the traditional participants in this professional practice, which involves, amongst other things, the awareness on the part of press release writers that an excess of promotional

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[8] As Virtanen and Halmari (2005: 8-9) point out, persuasion varies across texts and discourses, and, I would argue, within the same text depending on what audience is being addressed. Thus, a text addressed to multiple audiences will have multiple layers of persuasion inscribed in it.

[9] On the relationship between overt promotion and persuasion cf. Halmari and Virtanen (2005 b); Östman (1987, 2005).

content may be detrimental to the positive reception of the press releases themselves on the part of journalists; on the other hand, journalists a) *expect* a degree of promotional language (Shoemaker 1991; cf. Pander Maat 2007: 63) and b) are aware that by publishing press release information they are engaging in a process which is not only informative but also promotional, at least in so far as press release information is not used to the detriment of the body issuing the press release.

In recent times this already complex scenario has been made even more complicated by changes in the participation framework of the genre brought about by technological advances. The advent of the World Wide Web as the main distribution channel of press releases has resulted in the general public becoming a ratified participant in the process of press release fruition: With companies and institutions now almost invariably including press and media sections in their websites, where press releases (or, as they are increasingly being called, news releases) are published online with little or no delay compared to their communication to members of the press, press release writers now have an opportunity to entirely bypass journalistic intervention in reaching the public. Of course, the sanction provided by the reproduction – total or partial – of press releases on the part of reporters (Bell 1991: 92) continues to represent a crucial aspect of publicity; however, the possibility to reach the public directly in a form which is not obviously promotional certainly widens the range of communicative strategies available to corporate and institutional players. By extending the press releases' primary readership beyond the members of the journalistic profession, press release writers can convey promotional messages couched in a report-like form which may make them more easily acceptable than plain and blunt advertising. On the other hand, there is evidence that web distribution may have caused some textual conventions to shift, for instance in terms of the amount of promotional language allowable, which appears to be higher in e-releases than in traditional press releases (cf. Strobbe and Jacobs 2005; Catenaccio 2007).

The layering of communicative purposes and the oblique way in which they are realised suggest that we are looking at a genre that requires a high level of sophistication both in the codification and in the interpretation of intentions. This poses the question of how such complexity of purposes is reflected in the textual features of the genre, both in terms of overall textual structure and with regard to the linguistic strategies used to accomplish the communicative goals that characterise it.

5. Interdiscursivity and textual features

If the combination of informative and promotional intents in press releases emerges clearly from the brief overview of the contextual condition of their production and reception, the way in which it is realised textually demands a closer investigation. Press releases have been often described as news article look-alikes whose real identity is betrayed by a detectable positive bias towards the featured company/institution. This structural closeness[10] to news reports is a natural consequence of preformulation requirements, whereas the positive bias is obviously linked to promotional purpose. In genre-theoretical terms, overall textual organisation (moves) would therefore appear to be drawn from the genre of the news report, with the input of promotional discourse being mainly limited to lexical and stylistic choices. In fact, so similar are press releases

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[10] Cf. Morton 1986 on the positive correlation between camera-ready copy and publication rate.

to news articles that publishing a press release in a newspaper (a rare, but not impossible occurrence, as Erjavec (2004, 2005) points out) without indicating its source turns it instantly into a news article, however questionable in terms of journalistic integrity this may be.

Studies of the textual features of the press release have usually focused on the preformulated portion of this type of text – the "story". This is the reason why, from a text-organizational point of view, the genre has been seen as mirroring the move structure of the news article. Recently, however, a study by McLaren and Gurâu (2005) based on a corpus of press releases issued by companies in the UK biotechnology sector has shown that the move structure of the press release only partly imitates the one of the news article. According to their findings, this move structure can be schematically described as (1) Announcement – (2) Elaboration – (3) Comment (CEO) – (4) Contact details – (5) Editor's note, with moves 1 and 2 being mostly information-oriented, move 3 being more clearly evaluative, and move 5 being optional.

While McLaren and Gurâu's description is convincing and, with the introduction of move 4 (Contact details), identifies a key feature of the genre, I believe that further conceptual distinctions are needed. In particular, McLaren and Gurâu consider moves 1-3 (the core part of the press release, and the one which, structurally, most resembles a news article), on a par with moves 4 and 5, which, however, appear to serve a function that can be best described as "bracketing" (Goffman 1974).
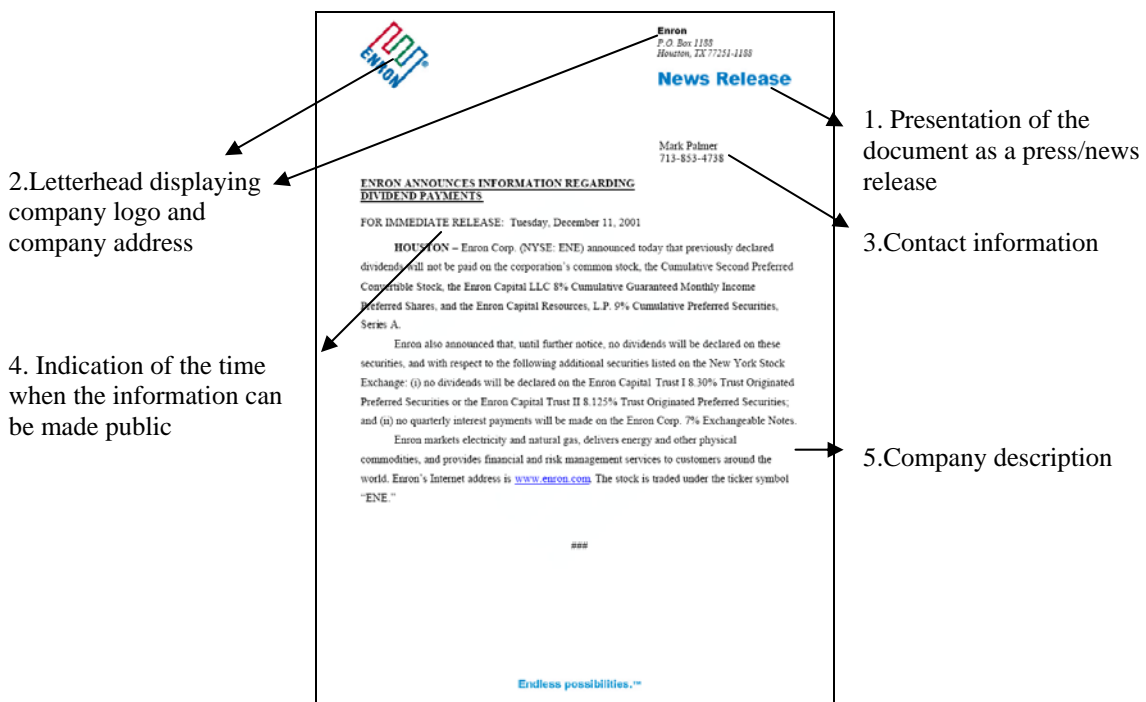

Fig. 1

To illustrate this point, let us take as an example the press release reproduced in fig. 1. What makes us recognise this text as a press releases? To begin with, it declares itself to be a press release. It is explicitly introduced as one (1), it is printed on company paper displaying the company logo and address (2), it provides information on how to obtain further details (3), it contains an indication of when the information contained in

the press release can be made available to the public (4), and provides a brief company description (5) (corresponding to the Editor's note in McLaren and Gurâu's account), which may or may not be graphically separated from the main body of the press release.

Two things are worth noticing: First, all these features represent explicit indicators of the press release as professional practice; and second, they are all peripheral – also visually, in terms of layout – to the part of the press release which aims at being reproduced in news reports.[11] Notice also that the brief company description (5) often accompanying the press release is less markedly peripheral than the rest of the information and occupies, in fact, a boundary position both in terms of layout (it comes at the end of the press release, but it is not necessarily separated from its main body) and function (it may be incorporated in part or in full in news reports, but its reproduction is not the main aim of the press release).

Despite being visually marginal, however, all these features provide an essential framing for the correct interpretation of the text they enclose, regardless of any other features that may set it apart from a genuine news report. This is confirmed by the fact that if press releases succeed in being quoted verbatim integrally in press reports they *become*, as pointed out above, news reports[12], but – crucially – the only parts of the press release which *must not* be reproduced if the transformation is to take place are the ones highlighted in fig. 1.

Thus, it is the very "dispensable" elements of the press release which most clearly point to their source, and alert the receiver to the promotional intent of the release itself. Explicit framing is essential to the correct interpretation of the press release as a press release. Once the framing is dropped, and the source of the information concealed (or appropriated by the journalist, who by reproducing the press release encourages authorial misattribution), the promotional element in press releases becomes "objectified", and thus less likely to be considered critically by the end-receiver.

In so far as genres can be defined as *recognizable* communicative events which raise a set of expectations as to their communicative purpose, therefore, the obliteration of the features that make them recognizable challenges their generic integrity. Thus, a first, preliminary identification of the generic features of the press release must take into consideration peripheral, as well as core elements: Peripheral features may, in fact, be as relevant as the core (if not more) in so far as they trigger genre-specific responses.

6. Models for analysis: Features of reporting and advertising genres

One of the consequences of focusing on the preformulated portion of press releases has been to look at them as "quasi-news articles". Such an approach, besides being based almost exclusively on formal aspects, tends to foreground the informative component of

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[11] Jacobs (1999a: 20), following Goffman (1974), suggests that these features should be considered as "ritual openings and closings, establishing and concluding certain kinds of participations". While I agree with the "bracketing" function of peripheral features, I believe that in so far as they are essential for the interpretation of the press release as a press release they should be accounted for as part of its generic structure.

[12] Ivy Lee's first press release is often cited as a success story because it was published practically unabridged by the New York Times. This rarely happens nowadays, but it is not impossible ideally, and sometimes, also in practice (cf. Erjavec 2004, 2005).

the press release as a genre[13], with promotional elements being interpreted as something which is added on to a substantially news report-like structure. If, however, *all* the formal features of the press release are taken into consideration, it becomes easier to see the relevance of some of them to the interpretation of the genre in a promotional key. The contact details, for instance, suggest that a response is expected or invited – a feature which is typical of promotional genres, but not of reporting ones.

The peripheral collocation of some of the most obviously advertisement-like features (the company logo, the contact details) may lead to the conclusion that it is possible to establish a clear demarcation between informative and promotional textual features, with the former being located at the core, and the latter in the periphery and serving a primarily framing function. However, the intrusion of promotional language in the core suggests that such an explanation is too simplistic, as it implies that the textualisation of promotion spills out from the periphery into the core. Moreover, neatly separating the informative component of the press release from its promotional one would once again conceptualise communicative intents as discrete.

The question then is: In what ways is the hybrid nature of the press release textualised in the genre? In what way are the features of promotional and reporting discourse combined in the rhetorical and cognitive structure of the press release so that we recognise it as a genre in itself?

A starting point for the identification of the cognitive moves and linguistic strategies typical of the genre is to look at the way in which they relate to the generic features of news reports and advertisements respectively, which are illustrated below.

6.1. *Structure of news articles*

News articles have been the object of much research in recent years. One of the typical features of new reports is their "inverted pyramid" structure, with the tip containing the most important information and the rest of the report specifying, expanding or detailing it (Hoey 1983). Van Dijk's in-depth study of news discourse (1988) further identified the typical "instalment" organisation of news stories, with the main event, first presented in the summary (headline plus lead) being returned to repeatedly in the course of the report. A similar framework has also been developed by White (1997, 1998) for the analysis of what he calls the "hard news reports", which he sees in terms of a "nucleus" (the summary) accompanied by a number of "satellites" whose purpose is to specify the information provided in the nucleus. Satellites do not need to appear in a pre-determined order, but rather can be arranged (and re-arranged) in several ways. Thus, both van Dijk's and White's studies show that news reports have a flexible, recursive structure: A concise version of the issue at hand is provided in the headline and lead, and the main points are then picked up again, re-worded and expanded at different points in the article, with supporting information (such as background, follow-up, evaluation) also being provided in a flexible order.

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[13] Bhatia, for instance, includes press releases among those public and professional genres "which tend to be persuasive though not in the sense of marketing", pointing out that despite being "designed to serve informative purposes, they invariably focus on only positive aspects and incorporate persuasive and sometimes even promotional elements" (Bhatia 2004: 90).

6.2. *Textual features of advertising*

Promotional genres have also been studied extensively in the last few years, especially in the work of Bhatia (1993, 1997a, 2000, 2004). In particular, it has been shown that they all share aspects of textual organization which can be identified with certain cognitive moves (although not all moves are present in all promotional genres, or in all the specimens of one particular genre). With reference to advertisements, Bhatia identifies the following move structure (Bhatia 2004: 65):

1. headline (for reader attraction)
2. targeting the market
3. justifying the product or service
   - *by indicating the importance or need of the product or service* and/or
   - *by establishing a niche*
4. detailing the product or service
   - *by identifying the product or service*
   - *by describing the product or service*
   - *by indicating the value of the product or service*
5. establishing credentials
6. celebrity or typical user endorsement
7. offering incentives
8. using pressure tactics
9. soliciting response.

This structure is well exemplified in a leaflet advertising Cisco powered network designated services, which is reproduced in figures 2, 3 and 4. The brochure opens with a headline ("extend the power with your network with Cisco network designated services") which immediately identifies the service and evaluate it positively ("extent", "power"). The picture below the headline, portraying a group of smart business people in a contemporary, trendy-looking setting (huge windows, elegant black sofas, tasteful black-and-white photography), can be seen as an example of "targeting the market" by appealing to a category of people with whom potential customers would be able to immediately identify. The next move ("justifying the product or service") is realised by "indicating the need for the service". This move is realised by describing the service's importance in "today's business climate" and relating it more specifically to a company's day-to-day needs and potential benefits in acquiring the service ("if you … you have much to gain"). In column 2 fig. 3 the product is detailed: it is first identified (the Cisco powered network) and described (includes Cisco-certified service providers), and then its value is indicated ("you can be confident you are getting the same benefits"). Credentials are established by referring to the process of selection and certification through which the members of the network are recruited. Typical user endorsement appear at various points and are graphically highlighted. Moves 7 and 8 ("offering incentives" and "using pressure tactics") are not realised in this text, but response is solicited by indicating how to obtain the service ("find a service provider") as well as by providing other relevant contacts.

 Other distinguishing features are the strong reliance on interpersonal features ("you" and "we"), insistence on positive evaluation of the service, and an emphasis on the benefits for the customer.
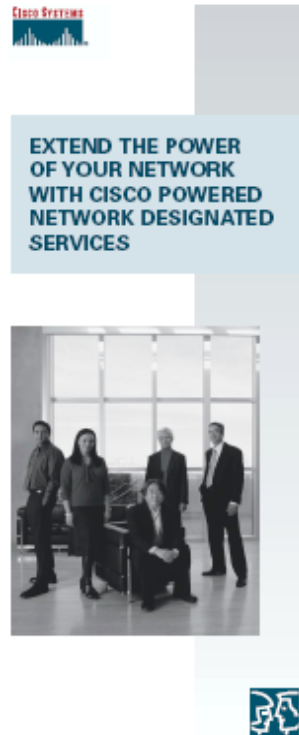
Fig. 2

LOOK FOR THE CISCO POWERED NETWORK MARK

Cisco Powered

Cisco Systems® understands that for many businesses today, finding the right service provider is critical to your success. That's why Cisco created the Cisco Powered Network mark—to help you find service providers that use Cisco equipment in their network.

A service provider that displays this mark has built its services end to end with Cisco equipment and has met quality standards set by Cisco. In addition, Cisco provides these service providers with comprehensive support to help ensure quality results, including security audits, troubleshooting, assessments, best practices, and training programs. You can be confident you are getting the same benefits that you have enjoyed with your own Cisco equipment:

- High reliability
- Industry-standard technology
- Optimized network security
- Compliance with Cisco standards and support requirements
- Interoperability with your network

Cisco has awarded the Cisco Powered Network designation to a select group of service providers worldwide. The most successful service providers in more than 60 countries display the Cisco Powered Network mark.

They offer a wide range of network-based services for almost every business need. You can be assured that Cisco recommends any network service that displays the Cisco Powered Network mark.

"There is a tremendous advantage to staying with Cisco all the way through the network."

John Weigant, Vice President, Super Computing Services, New Tech Sciences

Today's Business Climate

The challenges of today's business climate—Internet security risks, global expansion, remote workers, decentralization of operations, high-speed communications, 24-hour interactions—are increasingly difficult to manage in-house.

More and more, businesses are turning to service providers to extend the power of their networks and decrease technology costs.

By out-tasking a portion or all of your networked business functions, however, your service provider's network essentially becomes an extension of your network. You need the same reliability and performance that you have carefully built for your business. If you have built your network with Cisco® equipment, you have much to gain by choosing third-party network services that are also delivered over a network using Cisco products and technologies.

http://www.cisco.com/cpn

WHY OUT-TASK

If you decide to entrust the management of critical business services to a service provider, here are some of the benefits you may enjoy:

- Lower infrastructure investment and total cost of ownership
- Ability to focus your business on its core competencies
- Reduced operations and maintenance costs
- Increased return on investment (ROI)
- Access to world-class capabilities and leading technologies
- Secure access to mission-critical applications, data, and transactions for partners and customers
- Access to revenue-enhancing services supported by VPN and IP telephony technologies
- Increased productivity

Most Common Out-Tasked Services

- Intranet and Internet hosting
- VPN
- Metro Ethernet
- Optical transport
- Business voice (IP telephony)
- Network security
- Disaster recovery
- Data storage
- Dedicated Internet access
- Backbone network

"The out-tasking relationship is key to solving our business problems."

Joseph Quinlan, Director, Internet Architecture, Pierson Technology

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

7. The interplay of promotional and informative in press releases

The question now is: Given our generic knowledge of both news reports and advertisements, is it possible to identify their legacy in the textual organization and the lexico-rhetorical strategies employed in press releases?

To answer this question, the small corpus of press releases collected for this research was examined for structural regularities, both of a formal nature and in respect of the role in the textual organization of the releases under investigation. The study led to the identification of number of moves which occurred in the majority of the press releases, and which are illustrated in the press release reproduced in fig. 5.

This press release was downloaded from the company's internet site, which accounts for the peripheral nature of some of its features being even more accentuated. In particular, the section above the headline and the press contacts below are separate from the rest if the text: The "News@Cisco/Press release" is an unchanging feature of the press section of the website, and the "press contact(s)", despite changing with each press release, is visually separate from it[14].

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[14] The changing visual layout of press releases published online is in itself of interest, and is to be considered in the context of the changing literacies prompted by the advent of the internet and the rise

News Release

Cisco Systems Supports National Groundhog Job Shadow Day 2006
More than 100 Cisco U.S. Locations to Host Networking Academy Students

SAN JOSE, Calif., January 30, 2006 - Starting February 2, Cisco Systems® will kick off Job Shadow Days at five primary sites across the country: Atlanta, Ga., Chicago, Ill., Herndon, Va., Raleigh, N.C., and San Jose, Calif.

In conjunction with its business partners and customers, Cisco will be helping thousands of students from the Cisco Networking Academy program learn first-hand about working in the information technology (IT) industry. By May, Cisco will have hosted students in up to 100 field sites across all 50 states.

The Cisco Networking Academy provides students with the Internet technology skills essential in a global economy. The Program offers students and workers who want to expand their IT knowledge or consider a career in the high-tech industry valuable networking and IT skills.

"Hosting students from the Networking Academy provides Cisco employees with a tremendous opportunity to give back to the community and help shape the future leaders of our industry," said Tae Yoo, vice president of corporate affairs, Cisco Systems. "Job shadowing presents a wonderful chance for students to broaden their horizons. The program exposes young people to career opportunities and helps translate how what they learn in the classroom leads to success in the workplace."

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that demand for IT professionals will grow by nearly 50 percent through 2012.
Cisco's Job Shadow Day will help students from Job Corp centers, high schools and colleges throughout the country position themselves for highly rewarding futures in the IT Industry.

Designed to encourage students to participate in careers and pursue educational opportunities in IT, Cisco's Job Shadow Day events feature technology demonstrations, facility tours and the opportunity for students to hear directly from a variety of technology professionals about what a career in IT entails on a day-to-day basis. Technology professionals will give presentations, and students will have the opportunity to meet one-on-one with mentors during lunchtime roundtables and throughout the day.

National job shadowing is a coordinated effort of America's Promise, Junior Achievement, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Labor. The U.S. Department of Labor honored Cisco as a Corporate Gold Award recipient as a result of its Job Shadow Day efforts. Cisco employees devote hundreds of hours to Job Shadow Day activities, and as a result, Cisco provides a matching donation to Junior Achievement.

Additional information about Cisco's Job Shadow Day initiative is available at:
http://www.cisco.com/go/promoteitcareers

For more information about the Cisco Networking Academy Program, visit:
http://www.cisco.com/go/netacad

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of multimodal approaches to communication (cf. Kress and van Leeuwen 1996). For an account of some of the changes affecting the genre of the press release as a result of web-mediated distribution cf. Catenaccio 2007.

About Cisco Systems
Cisco Systems, Inc. (NASDAQ: CSCO) is the worldwide leader in networking for the Internet.
Information about Cisco can be found at http://www.cisco.com. For ongoing news, please go to
http://newsroom.cisco.com

Contact Information
Press Contact(s):

Cara Ann Sloman
Cisco Systems, Inc.
831 440-2411
csloman@cisco.com

Fig. 5

The press release does not attempt, strictly speaking, to promote a product or service, but rather to promote the company as such by indicating its involvement with educational institutions and its contribution to society. This suggests that the concepts of what qualifies as "promotional" in press releases may have to be interpreted in a broader sense than it is customary in advertising. In a crisis response situation, for instance, we may find face-saving strategies which still I would qualify as promotional in this broad sense.

When considering the core of the press release, the inverted-pyramid, recursive structure of the text is immediately apparent. The text opens with a summary, represented by the headline and lead, which is then followed by a number of expansions:

> **Cisco Systems Supports National Groundhog Job Shadow Day 2006**
> **More than 100 Cisco U.S. Locations to Host Networking Academy Students**
>
> SAN JOSE, Calif., January 30, 2006 - Starting February 2, Cisco Systems® will kick off Job Shadow Days at five primary sites across the country: Atlanta, Ga., Chicago, Ill., Herndon, Va., Raleigh, N.C., and San Jose, Calif.

Note that this summary is only informative in so far as the reader knows what Job Shadow Day is, and what it involves. At any rate, the summary is immediately expanded with details of Job Shadow Day:

> In conjunction with its business partners and customers, Cisco will be helping thousands of students from the Cisco Networking Academy program learn first-hand about working in the information technology (IT) industry. By May, Cisco will have hosted students in up to 100 field sites across all 50 states.

Further details are provided in the following paragraph. The language is only mildly promotional: The value of the event is emphasised; the language is evaluative, but not exceedingly so: Thus, Cisco 'helps' students, the skills it provides are 'essential' in the contemporary world, and they offer 'valuable' opportunities.

It is only in paragraph 4, which is almost entirely occupied by a quote, that truly evaluative and promotional language appears. As Jacobs (1999a) points out, quotes are indeed the place in press releases where openly promotional statements can be made (and, in fact, where most of the promotional language concentrate; cf. Pander Maat

2007), because they are always attributed, thus enabling journalists to avoid responsibility for the statements:

> "Hosting students from the Networking Academy provides Cisco employees with a <u>tremendous opportunity</u> to give back to the community and help shape the <u>future leaders</u> of our industry," said Tae Yoo, vice president of corporate affairs, Cisco Systems. "Job shadowing presents a <u>wonderful chance</u> for students to broaden their horizons. The program exposes young people to career opportunities and helps translate how what they learn in the classroom leads to <u>success in the workplace</u>."

In paragraph 5, however, we can see the beginning of a recursive structure: Background information is provided to support the thesis that the initiative is valuable, and further details of the activities involved are supplied. The closing paragraph, finally, establishes credentials by mentioning awards and other forms of recognition.

The move structure of the press release, as illustrated in the example analysed and adjusted on the basis of the other press releases included in the corpus, can be described as follows:

1. Press / News release caption (frame)
2. Headline
3. [Summary of main points]
4. ["For immediate release" formula]
5. Lead: Announcing newsworthy information
   - *Launching a new product/service*
   - *Announcing results and other company-internal information*
   - *Describing other types of company's activity*
6. Justifying the product or service or simply the newsworthiness of the information
   - *Indicating the need for the product/service etc.*
   - *Referring to the advantages for potential beneficiaries*
   - *Qualifying the result as positive*
7. Detailing product/service/company/other event which is the object of the release
8. Explicit promotional component: Attributed to company official, standard user   [recursively
   - *Emphasising positive results*   organised]
   - *Indicating reliability of company/product*
   - *Independently endorsing company results*
   - *Independent expert opinion*
9. Boilerplate description(s) / establishing credentials
10. Contact details
11. Company logo

While not all moves are present in all press releases, some of them appear to be obligatory. Of the peripheral ones, press / news release caption, contact details and company logo are always present, whereas the "for immediate release formula" is often omitted, especially if the press release considered is only offered in electronic format. As regards the core features, headline, lead, a justification of the newsworthiness of the information and some form of positive evaluation (whether in the body of the text, in which case it is fairly mildly worded, or in the quote, where it can be expressed in bolder terms, or both) appear to be constant characteristics. In the majority of the press releases analysed, positive evaluation is split into two components – a more clearly promotional one, and a more soberly evaluative one.

If headline, lead and some form of expansion containing evaluative elements are typical features of the news article, the nature of the steps identified in the corpus has

many points in common with the advertisement structure described by Bhatia. In particular, both the advertisement and the press release provide justifications of the value of product or – as the case may be – of the product- or company-related news. Other points in common are the use of endorsements, the detailing of products or services, their positive evaluation, the identification of customer needs (or occasionally social needs), the establishing of credentials through reference to past history, awards, successful partnership. Occasionally similar strategies are used in different moves: For instance, the use of quotes, which is a typical way of featuring a celebrity or typical user endorsement in advertisements, is regularly used to provide the view of the company issuing the press release. In both cases, the lexico-grammatical features are the same (expressive language, interpersonal involvement, audience-directedness).

Differently from advertisements, however, press releases do not use pressure tactics, and can be seen as soliciting response only indirectly, with the provision of contact details in the framing features. In this case, however, the response is asked of the journalist, and not of the end user; it may be argued, anyway, that the appropriate response would be the publication of the press release, not a request for further information. Still, requests for further information are generally welcome (unless they are prompted by crises), as they show that the press release managed to raise interest.

That such a move structure is applicable to product-related and company-promoting press releases may be easy to accept. The moves suggested above, though, also seem to apply to other types of corporate press releases, some of which may not have been expected, at first sight, to be of a promotional nature. The press release below is a case in point: It is one of a series issued by Enron, the American energy provider infamous for its collapse in 2001, in the weeks before its bankruptcy filing, and represents part of the company's attempt to salvage its reputation. While hardly promotional in the strict sense of the word, it displays a structure in which information and evaluation are intertwined and recursively organized:

ENRON CORP. ELECTS WILLIAM POWERS, JR. TO BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND ESTABLISHES SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO EXAMINE RELATED PARTY TRANSACTIONS; SEC CHANGES INQUIRY TO FORMAL INVESTIGATION
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Wednesday, October 31, 2001
HOUSTON – The Board of Directors of Enron Corp. (NYSE: ENE) announced today the election of William Powers, Jr. to the Board, effective immediately. Powers is dean of the University of Texas School of Law in Austin, Texas.
In addition, the Board has appointed a Special Committee, to be chaired by Powers, to examine and take any appropriate actions with respect to transactions between Enron and entities connected to related parties. In addition to reviewing the transactions in question, the Special Committee is charged with communicating with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and recommending any other actions it deems appropriate. Powers will be joined on the committee by independent directors Frank Savage, CEO of Savage Holdings LLC, Paulo Ferraz Pereira, executive vice president of the Brazilian-owned investment bank Group Bozano, and Herbert S. Winokur, Jr., chairman and CEO of Capricorn Holdings, Inc.
The Special Committee has retained William R. McLucas, a partner in the law firm of Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering, as its counsel. McLucas is a former head of the Division of Enforcement of the SEC. Wilmer, Cutler has retained Deloitte & Touche to provide independent accounting advice.
Enron also reported that the SEC has opened a formal investigation into certain of the matters that were the subject of recent press reports and that previously were the subject of its informal inquiry.
"I have asked the Board to take this action to address fully and forthrightly investors' questions and concerns," said Enron Chairman and CEO Kenneth L. Lay. "Responding to the SEC offers us an

additional opportunity to achieve this same goal for investors, and we will cooperate fully. We will also make every appropriate public disclosure during the course of the SEC's investigation."
Powers currently holds the John Jeffers Research Chair in Law and the Hines H. Baker and Thelma Kelley Baker Chair in Law at the University of Texas School of Law, where he teaches torts, products liability, jurisprudence, legal process, civil procedure and contracts. He received his J.D. from the Harvard Law School in 1973.
Enron is one of the world's leading energy, commodities and services companies. The company markets electricity and natural gas, delivers energy and other physical commodities, and provides financial and risk management services to customers around the world. Enron's Internet address is www.enron.com. The stock is traded under the ticker symbol "ENE."
###

The press release is organized around two key facts, both of which are clearly indicated in the headline: 1) election of William Powers to Board of Directors and appointment of Special Committee and 2) change of SEC's inquiry into formal investigation, as shown in the figure below:

a. Appointment of William Powers and of special committee

                              b. SEC investigation

c. Announcement of appointment

d. Reputation of appointee ("… is dean of the University of Texas School of Law")

e. Appointment of special committee + description of members etc.

            f. Description of committee functions
                 → liaising with SEC

                            g. From informal inquiry to formal investigation

                            h. Explicit evaluation of event as positive

i. Appointee's credentials

             l. Company's credentials

The textual organization of the press release develops along these two lines, which cross around the middle of the release. The bridge between the two lines is represented by the description of the functions of the Special Committee, which include liaising with the SEC. This textual organization can be described in terms of the moves identified above. In particular, moves 2 (headline) and 3 (summary of main points) are conflated in the example provided. The lead (move 4) is broken down into two parts, one (4a) presented as the lead proper (c: Announcement of the appointment of William Powers), and the other postponed (g). The presentation of what is ostensibly portrayed as the main focus of the release, i.e. the appointment of William Powers, is followed by an implicit evaluation of the appointee (the fact that he is the dean of the University of Texas School of Law is a way of establishing his, and indirectly, Enron's credentials), and can

therefore be seen as an example of move 9 (establishing credentials) combined with move 5 (indicating the beneficial nature of the event portrayed). The evaluation is followed by a description of the committee and of its functions (move 7: Detailing the event which is the object of the release). A further expansion of the main event (f) links this line to the secondary one, i.e. the one relating to the SEC investigation. The statement concerning this topic can be seen as the second part of a split lead (move 4b). In turn, this is followed by explicit reference to the event as a positive one ("Responding to the SEC offers us an additional opportunity …"); note that in this case the evaluation is more explicit and is couched in a quotation (move 8). Finally, the press release closes with the description of William Power's credentials, which, in turn, reflect positively on the company, followed by a standard paragraph on Enron, both of which can be seen as examples of move 9, although in the first case the credentials of the company are established indirectly.

More corpus based research is needed to verify whether the move structure described in this paper can be applied to the press release as a genre, possibly with variations according to subgenres. The evidence collected suggests that a degree of uniformity exists, although the strategies used to realize the moves described above appear to vary, and not all the moves may be realised in all specimens of the genre. As regards the relationship between the structure of press releases and the move structure of advertising genres, my investigation suggests that the codification of promotional intents is not only entrusted to positive language, but permeates the very structure of press releases: Similarities between press releases and advertisements can be detected in both core and peripheral features. More interesting still, in light of the hybrid nature of the press release, the same feature can carry an informative AND promotional intent simultaneously (as in the "detailing" move), and typical elements of informative discourse (neutral description) can be used strategically to achieve a promotional aim (the reproduction of the press release).

8. Conclusions

Defining the communicative purpose of the press release is difficult because a) it is multiple and b) the different purposes are not given discrete textualisations, but are conveyed though the same cognitive moves and, often, strategies. This results in the hybrid nature of the press release being reflected in a hybrid textual structure in which the same move can be interpreted in the light of reporting (the news article) or promotional (the extended advertisement) prototypes.

For a promotional interpretation of the press release to be activated, explicit framing is needed, and this is conveyed by what I have called the peripheral features of the press release: The explicit declaration that it is a press release, the company logo, company description, contact details. Although these features are not, in themselves, exclusive to press releases, they crucially contribute to the identification of press releases as such, and alert the reader – be it journalists or the general public – to the fact that they originate in the company or institution, and may, therefore, be biased. Without these, a "perfect" press release may well be interpreted as a genuine news story, and its evaluative components as the result of external judgement. The generic integrity of the press release as a genre combining news reporting and self-promotion relies on these peripheral features as much as on the explicit evaluative component included in their

body, and it is through them that the layered nature of the press release's communicative purpose makes itself manifest to the reader.

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