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‘Peace and Cohesive Harmony’: A diachronic investigation of structure and texture in ‘end of war’ news reports in the Sydney Morning Herald

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Abstract

This paper presents one aperture from a multistratal, diachronic investigation of the changing context of war news reporting in the Sydney Morning Herald from 1902 to 2003. The larger study applies an ensemble of systemic analyses and theoretical perspectives to ‘end of war’ reports from seven wars over this period. In this paper, a cohesive harmony analysis (following Hasan, 1984, 1985) is applied to three texts (Boer War, Korean War and Iraq War), providing empirical evidence for structural boundaries in the texts and giving an account of the semantics of topical relevance (cf. Cloran, 1999; Lukin, 2008 in press). The findings are compared across the three texts and considered as evidence for shifts in the contextual configuration of the parameters of field, tenor and mode (cf. Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Hasan, 1995).

Key Terms: cohesive harmony, diachronic, context, media discourse, Sydney Morning Herald, armistice

1 Introduction

The unfolding of meaning in news reports has been one of the preoccupations of linguistic studies of news discourse (e.g. Bell, 1998; Iedema, Feez, & White, 1994). This paper demonstrates an application of Hasan’s cohesive harmony framework to describe changing news report structure, as part a diachronic investigation of the construction of meaning in news reports. The study focuses on *Sydney Morning Herald* reports of the conclusion of seven overseas wars (1902 to 2003) involving Australian military personnel. Three texts were selected for cohesive harmony analysis: the Boer War text (3rd June, 1902), Korean War text (28th July, 1953), and Iraq War text (10th April, 2003). The Boer War text is made up of ‘coranto’ units with individual headings and datelines and short telegraphic sentences. The Korean War text ran under the headline *KOREAN TRUCE SIGNED* and was accompanied by a map and a photograph of part of the signing ceremony. The Iraq War text reported the ‘fall of Baghdad’, the end of a phase of the Iraq conflict that at the time was construed as if it were the end of the war (although we now know it was not). The report and its headlines and photograph took up most of the front page of the newspaper.

The principle of ‘cohesive harmony’ developed out of Halliday and Hasan’s work on cohesion (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, 1985) in order to capture differences in perceived coherence of texts which could not be explained by analyses of cohesion alone (Hasan, 1984). It combines the analysis of resources of cohesion (e.g. synonymy, pronominal reference) between clauses and larger semantic sections of a text (through cohesive chains) with the analysis of relations between elements within the clause (through transitivity relations, e.g. Participant-Process) (Hasan, 1984: 211-214). Cohesive harmony analysis thus takes into account three important dimensions, considering the semantic relations between

paradigmatic options, syntagmatic relations between grammatical elements at clause and group rank, and how these relations are echoed as the text unfolds.

The analysis of cohesive harmony begins in the same way as cohesion analysis (see Halliday & Hasan, 1976, 1985), with the identification of cohesive chains. A cohesive chain is formed by tokens related to each other by the semantic relations of co-reference, co-classification, or co-extension (Hasan, 1984: 84). Next, we examine the interaction of tokens in each chain (relevant tokens, RTs) with other RTs through syntagmatic relations at group and clause rank. Figure 1 shows interactions between three chains in the Boer War text: chain (b) is an Identity Chain, as all tokens refer to the same referent (the Lord Mayor of London). The other two chains (a and c) are Similarity Chains, with tokens related by synonymy. All tokens shown here are central tokens (CTs) because they participate in chain interactions, either through group/phrase rank relations, as in (i), or at clause rank, as in (ii).

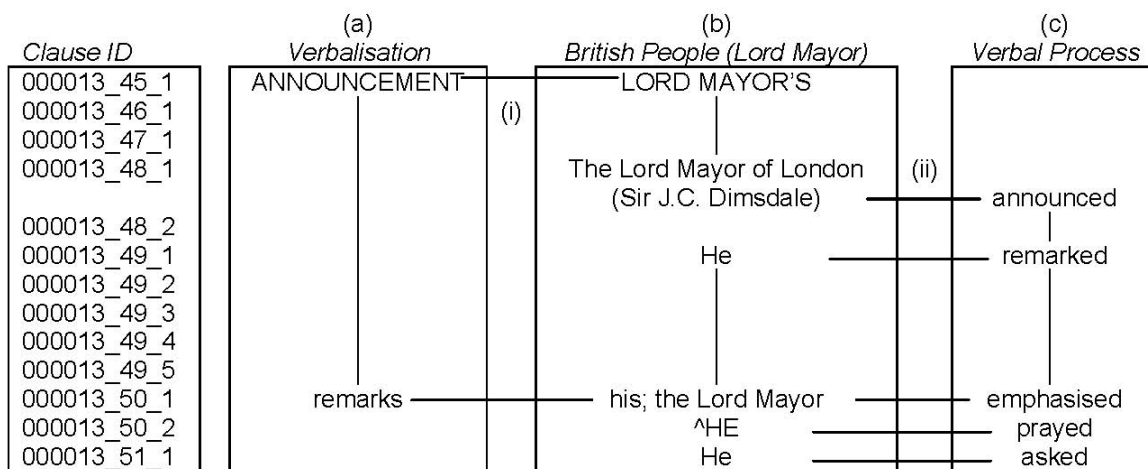


Figure 1 Extract of chain interaction from Boer War text

Since cohesive chains are “threads of semantic continuity” (Hasan, 1994: 138), the presence and absence of chains seen logogenetically can be shown to correlate with boundaries of semantic units (Cloran, 1999: 189). The visual representation of the analysis of chain interactions allows us to ‘read off’ the logogenetic patterns and the areas of topical consistency and change in the text. The following sections will present the analyses of the three texts, including the suggestion of semantic structural units in each text.

2 Analysis

2.1 Boer War Text

The chain interaction analysis of the Boer War text is shown in reduced form in Figure 2. The chains are shown vertically on the page, and the grey horizontal lines indicate where the segment boundaries appear to be (15 segments), based on the patterning of chain interactions and shifts within the chains. Although the words in each chain are unreadable, the overall patterning of interactions between chains is clearly visible. The semantics of the text are quite dispersed; many chains are very short or contain very few tokens, e.g. Song+Sing and Defeat, and many of the meanings are very localised. This reflects the fragmented, telegraphic composition of the text - a legacy of the telegraphic mode of communication. But some core chains provide crucial links to unify the segments. For example, the Great Britain/British People chains are virtually text-exhaustive and contain a number of identity chains such as

the one relating to the Lord Mayor of London (see Figure 1). Other core chains are the Participant chain relating to the Boers, and the Verbal and Co-operate/Yield Process chains. The chart's general shape (indicated by the broken line) shows that a small set of meanings are introduced at the beginning of the text and continue throughout, and new ideas are introduced throughout the text in interaction with the core chains. If we think of the analogy with musical harmony, we can see that there is a dominant key creating unity in the text with successive individual motifs being introduced and developed briefly and then abandoned.

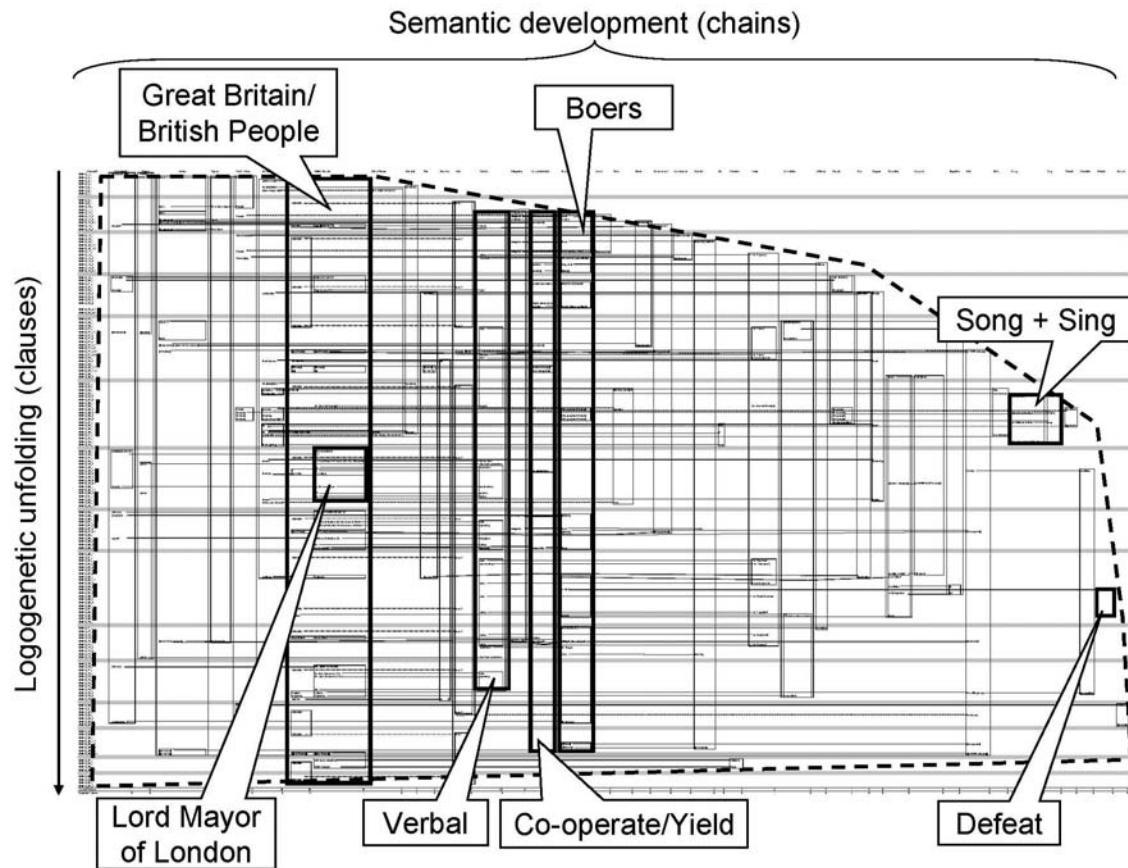


Figure 2 Overview of Boer War text chain interactions

A complementary view of the Boer War text chain interactions is presented schematically in Figure 3 as a network of relations coded by strength (repetitions of relational instances) and type of grammatical relation. The core chains, which interact strongly to give the text a degree of cohesion and unity, are the Great Britain/British People, Boers, Treaty, Jubilation, Co-operate/Yield and Verbal process chains. The Britain, Boers and Verbal chains in particular provide the textual backbone, with at least one remaining present in some form throughout the text. The core chains show that the text is centrally concerned with meanings related to the belligerents, cooperation and surrender to the treaty (especially by the Boers), jubilation in response to the end of war, and the verbal reporting of information and opinions (especially by the British).

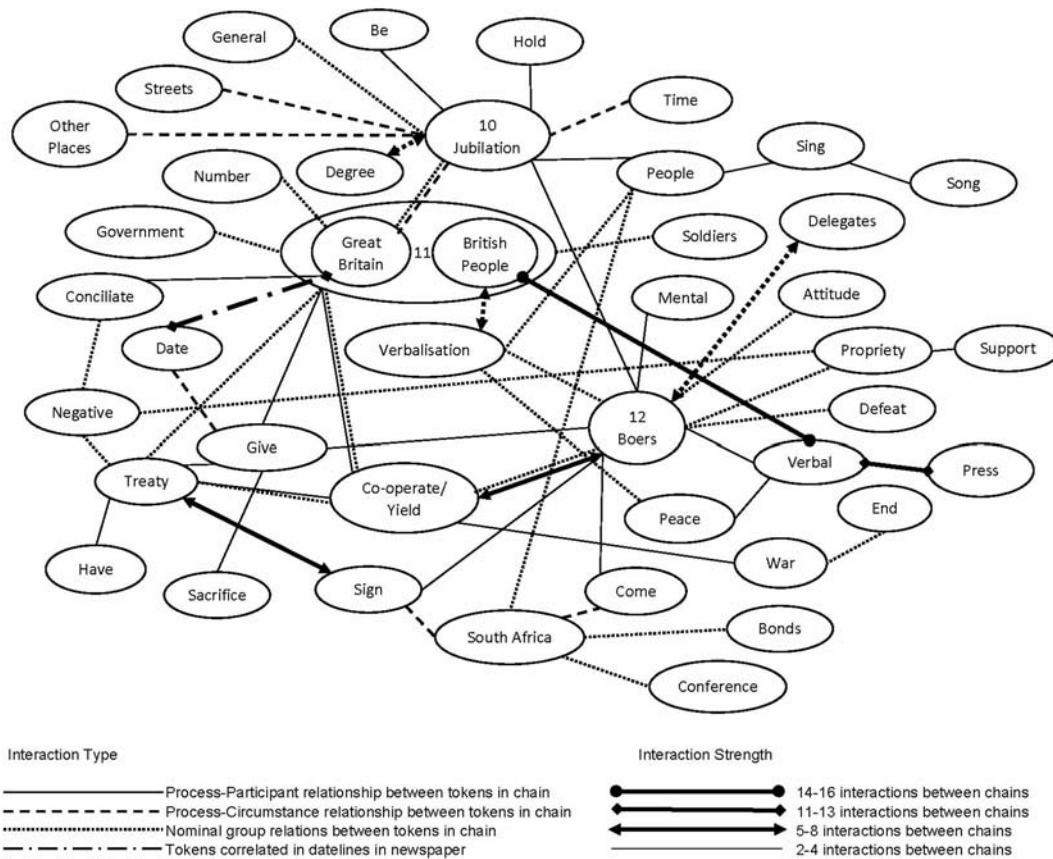


Figure 3 Chain interactions in the Boer War text

2.2 Korean War Text

Figure 4 gives an overview of the Korean War text chain interactions, with segment boundaries (12 segments) indicated. It is a similar shape to the Boer War text chart, broadening out as the text unfolds, but it then tapers off, suggesting that the text returns to previously introduced topics. The central part of the chart is highly concentrated, suggesting a tightly cohesive segment. Like the Boer War text, this text has several strong chains that are virtually text-exhaustive: Participant chains of the UN/Allies, Communists, and Truce, a Process chain of Signing, and a chain relating to Time. The time motif has proven to be very strong in this text in a number of ways, including through the selection and patterning of specific Circumstances of time (see Scott, 2008). Returning to the musical analogy, this text is similar to the Boer War text in that it maintains a dominant key but introduces a variety of related chords and individual motifs. These motifs are taken up and developed for a time, then later reintroduced in a slightly different configuration.

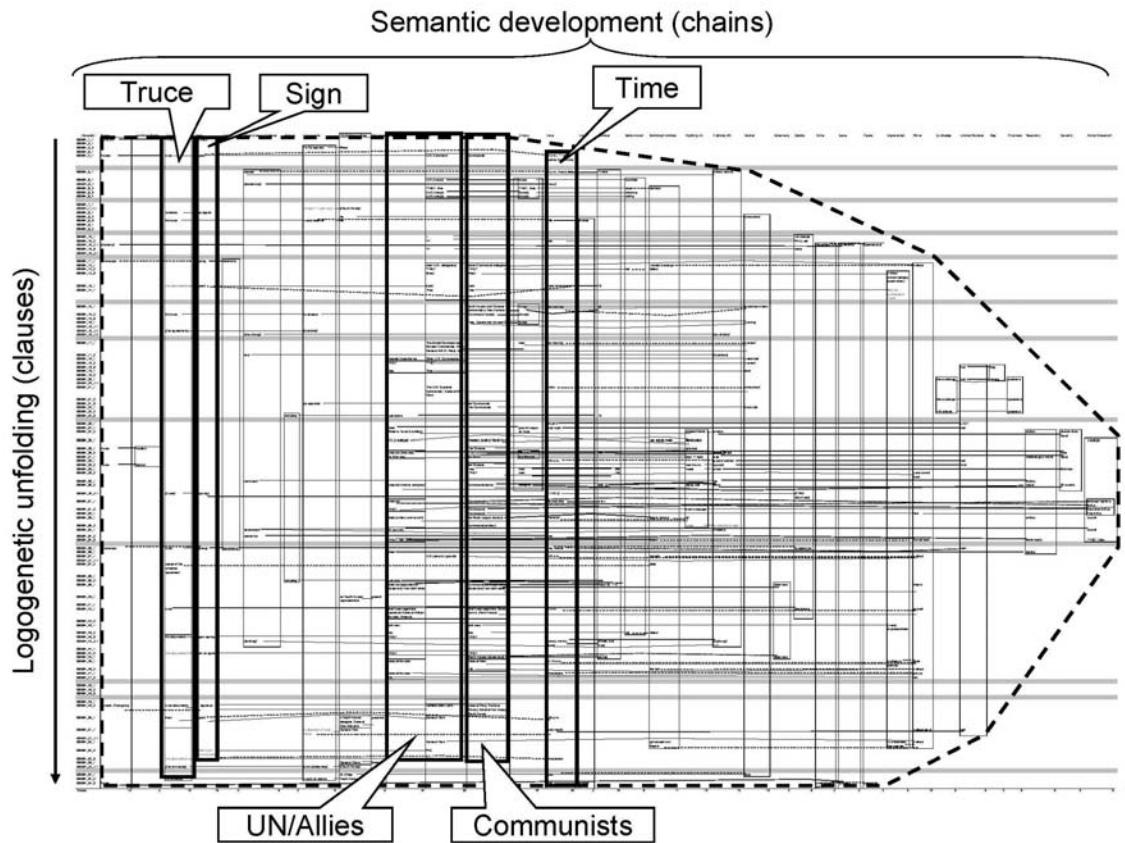


Figure 4 Overview of Korean War text chain interactions

The Korean War text chain interactions are shown topologically in Figure 5. The network of interactions is very involved and suggests sustained field development as the chains interact widely with other chains. The core chains are the belligerents – Allies, UN and Communists – Troops, Fighting-N (i.e. fighting as a nominal group), Truce, and Time. The text is thus centrally concerned with interactions between the belligerents in the final stages of fighting and the truce that brought an end to the war, and locating this process in time.

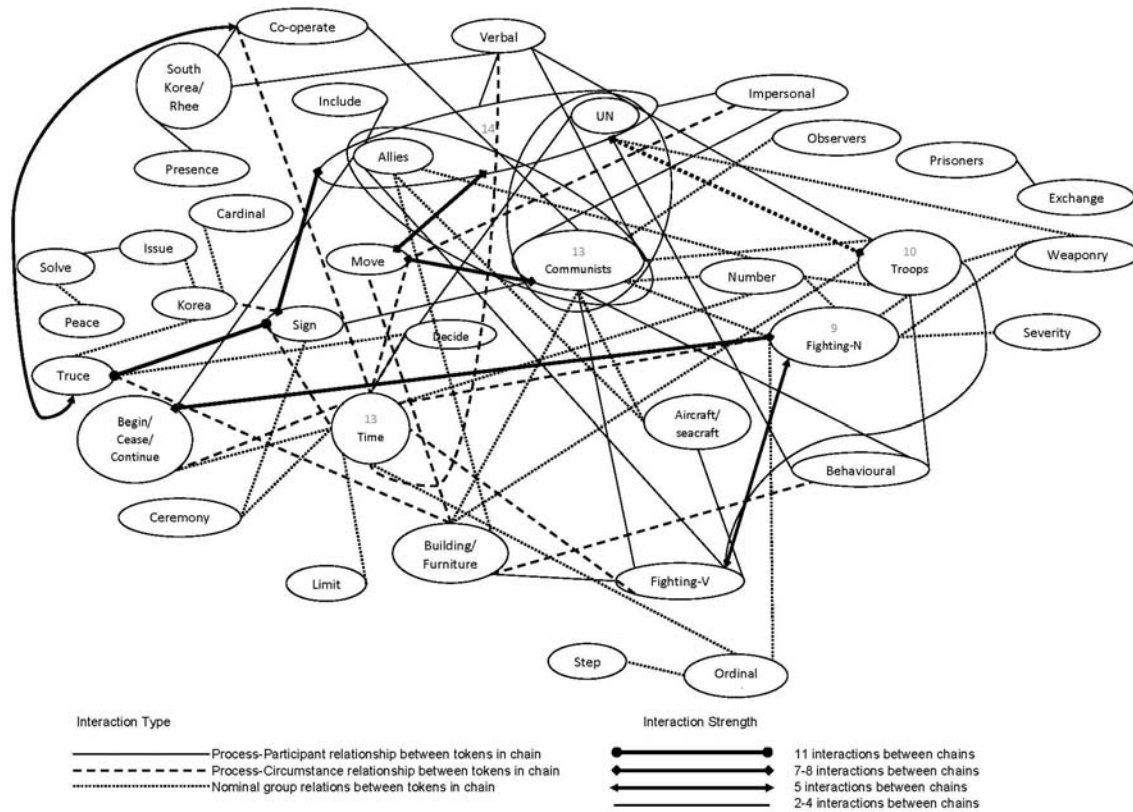


Figure 5 Chain interactions in the Korean War text

2.3 Iraq War Text

An overview of the Iraq War text's chain interactions and segmentation (11 segments) is given in Figure 6. The major chains in this text are the Participant chains: the combined Saddam/Iraqi Government/Baghdad chains, a chain relating to Iraqi civilians that also clearly contains a number of identity chains, and a chain relating to the US Military. There is also a strong Process chain related to movement through space. The shape of the chart suggests that a broad spectrum of ideas is introduced early in the text and then sustained by reintroducing and recycling them at various points in the text. Notably, the final segment contains no interacting chains, and is like ending a piece of music with a *coda* or in a completely different key from the rest of the piece.

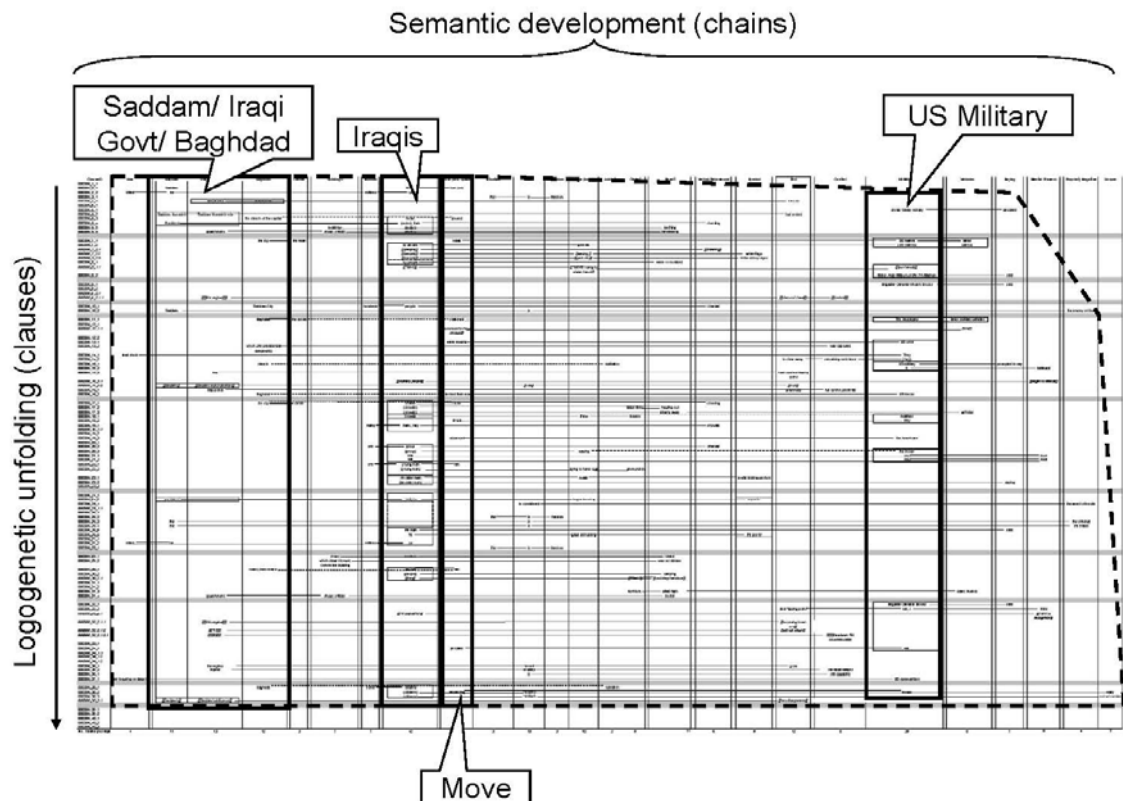


Figure 6 Overview of Iraq War text chain interactions

The Iraq War text chain interaction network (Figure 7) is more compact and economical than that of the other texts. The range of topics introduced is narrower and those topics are more sustained. The core chains are the US military, Iraqis, Iraqi Government, Move and Be chains. This shows that the text is centrally concerned with the movements of the US Military and Iraqi civilians, and with describing other aspects of the situation in relational terms. The process that brought about the end of war is realised through the End and Control chains in interaction with the Iraqi Govt chain, rather than through the semantics of surrender and truce. The end of war is construed as being about the Iraqi Government's loss of control, perhaps as a semantic consequence of the fact that this was not the end of the 'war' and that the absence of a legal declaration of war precluded a formal end to war anyway.

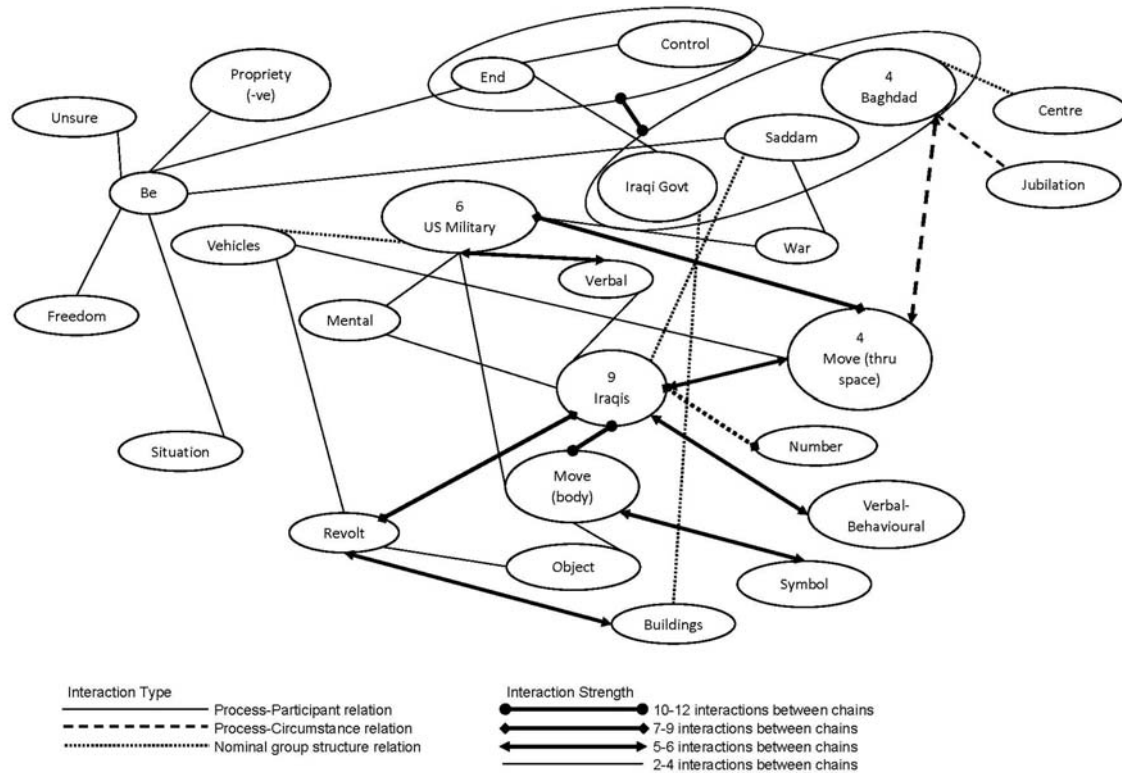


Figure 7 Chain interactions in the Iraq War text

3 Concluding Remarks

The analysis reveals similarities and differences in both texture and structure in the construal of field of discourse (what is being talked about) and how the story unfolds logogenetically. Texturally, the texts differ somewhat in the construal of field. The Boer War text has a more ‘global’ range of information (including South Africa, Europe, Australia, USA). The Korean War text presents a sustained dramatisation of the fighting and the signing ceremony, focusing on Korea. The Iraq War text has a tight focus on Baghdad and is a highly individuated account, representing the actions and opinions of the Iraqi ‘man on the street’. It has less semantic dispersion than the earlier texts, which introduce a wide range of topics independently of the ‘lead’ element.

Structurally, there is both consistency and variation between the three texts. In all three texts, the (non-function) words in the opening segments are almost all subsumed in chains, i.e. they are RTs. Furthermore, the chains involved in the opening segment of all three texts are resumed in later segments to become focal chains. So there is a high concentration of topical relevance in the opening segment of each text, and a strong sense of establishing the text’s semantic agenda. Moreover, the segments of all three texts involve localised narratives and reconstructions, and these are arranged in a non-sequential (i.e. achronological) order.

Let us consider the findings in relation to one of the most common proposals about the structure of news reports: the Lead ^ Lead Development proposal, which is used in both professional as well as academic (especially journalism studies) work (e.g. Friedlander & Lee, 2004; Schudson, 1982; see also Iedema et al., 1994). This model involves a Lead (1-2 sentences, summary of the story in 35 words or less) followed by a number of Lead Developments (paragraphs in order of decreasing importance) in an elaborative relationship. The findings offer some support for this model, since the texts all have a concentration of

relevant meanings in the initial segment, and the following segments proceed in extending, elaborating or enhancing relationships to the initial segment. This is particularly the case in the Iraq War text, where virtually the same chains are recycled in each segment throughout the text. The main shift is in the nature of the structural relations, whether univariate (all segments are equivalent units in the same kind of relationship to each other, and therefore could appear in any order) or multivariate (segments may be dependent on other segments for their interpretation, resulting in a logical sequence).

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