Brand Tone of Voice:
a linguistic analysis of brand positions[1]

Judy Delin

Abstract

This paper examines material from two companies, HSBC and Orange, to reveal how far the 'Tone of Voice' of these brands expresses their different brand positions. Four linguistic techniques are applied: (i) analysis of chains of reference; (ii) analysis of transitivity and participant roles within clauses; (iii) analysis of presupposition and assumption; and (iv) the analysis of features of tenor such as 'conversationalisation' and informal grammar. It is suggested that these approaches are useful in describing the links between language and brand position. Four research hypotheses are proposed: (i) brand strength, i.e. the strength of the reader's impression of the brand varies depending on the number and nature of referring expressions that relate to the brand; (ii) participant roles, i.e. the reader is influenced by the types of processes ascribed to the brand and its related concepts; (iii) assumption, i.e. presuppositions about reader lifestyles, beliefs and values affects engagement with a brand; and (iv) conversationalisation, i.e. greater frequencies of 'conversational' linguistic features influence readers' affinity with the brand and a willingness to associate the brand with 'human' qualities such as 'approachable'. The paper investigates linguistic markers that relate to these hypotheses in detail, but also proposes two further, as yet untested, hypotheses: (v) explicit evaluation, i.e. the impression of a brand is influenced by the linguistic markers of 'point of view' such as those identified within Appraisal Theory, and (vi) unusualness, i.e. there may be a correlation between low-frequency vocabulary items and collocations and readers' tendencies to associate with the brand qualities such as 'quirky' or 'fun'. The paper also presents a discussion of the use of linguistic techniques for commercial aims, which is a departure from the critical tradition in applied linguistics.

KEYWORDS: BRANDING, PARTICIPANT ROLES, TENOR, COHESION, CORPORATE LANGUAGE, COMMERCIAL TEXTS, DISCOURSE TECHNOLOGIES

Affiliation

Enterprise IG, London & University of Leeds

Correspondence: Judy Delin, Centre for Translation Studies, School of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of Leeds, LS2 9JT, UK.

email: j.delin@leeds.ac.uk

1   Introduction

This paper is about brands and the way they are expressed linguistically to potential consumers – the language that is used in everything from advertising to letters and forms. In the developing field of corporate 'Tone of Voice', in which specific language styles are created in an attempt to convey to a range of audiences the brand's 'personality', techniques from linguistics can be applied first to describe, and then to prescribe, the language of brands. The paper focuses on one channel for brand expression that service brands such as tele-communications companies and banks are using with the aim of attracting and informing customers: the leaflets that are distributed in branches and shops that describe new and existing services. These are but one channel that attempts to communicate a distinctive 'voice' for brands, but the research method described here is applicable to a large range of written genres.

The overall aim of this research has been to put in place the foundations for examining the relationship between the linguistic features of text and the characteristics of 'brand essence' that are in common use in the commercial world. For example, one company may wish to project its brand as *reliable*, *professional*, and *dynamic*, while another may wish to be *fun* and *easy*. It is the ultimate aim of the research programme of which this report forms a part to see which linguistic phenomena can reliably be connected to such qualities, and whether, once a company feels that these qualities have been 'written in' to their materials, they are consistently appreciated to be there by consumers. In this first exploratory study, rather than seek to work with specific brand qualities, I have used a more general idea of 'brand position' that locates brands within a framework, the Enterprise IG Brand Analytics continuum, which categorises brands as ranging from 'Tangible' to 'Intangible'. The aim, then, has been to see whether two very different brands – which Enterprise IG understand[2] to be located at either end of the continuum – do indeed show differences in their language. In order to detect whether such differences are present, I have used some ideas from mainstream linguistics and applied linguistics to analyse a small sample of language and firm up four hypotheses for further research.

In what follows, I first describe the data for the study, and describe the relationship between the language of these texts and other available resources for meaning-making, such as typography and graphics. I then go on to look more closely at the notion of brands and branding, and the relation-ship between brand and language in the commercial world. In Section 3, I present four linguistic approaches to the selected texts: chains of reference, participant roles, presupposition and assumption, and the features of tenor that are used to construct social relationships with readers. Finally, in Section

4, I discuss conclusions, and propose some further linguistic techniques that would also be of use for examining the relationships between brand position and linguistic expression.

1.1 Customer leaflets for service brands

This paper concentrates on the brochures and leaflets made available to existing and potential customers by service industries such as mobile phone companies and banks. They encompass descriptions of accounts, facilities, and services, and are available to pick up in shops and branches. As such, they are used both by potential customers choosing an account or provider, and by existing customers looking to extend their use of existing facilities or take out a new service, such as a different account, insurance, on-line banking, or loans.

The two companies I have selected to examine are the telecommunications provider Orange and the bank HSBC. These two brands were chosen because of their different 'brand positions': Orange positioning itself as an accessible, friendly, 'people' brand, and HSBC as a solid, reliable but more impersonal one. While the texts examined are derived from two different sectors, the genre of their introductory materials is similar.

The texts that were analysed were an extensive 20-page brochure from Orange describing its services, *What do you want to do*? and three shorter leaflets available from branches of HSBC: *Bank account*; *Accessible banking, whatever your needs* (about TV and PC banking); and *Starting your own business*. The sample of language is therefore a small one, but sufficient to generate hypotheses for further research on the relationship between language and brand positioning. My own work as a professional consultant in commercial 'Tone of Voice' has involved developing not just the copy for such documents, but the underlying strategy about how a company's language should in general reflect their chosen brand position. I have not, however, been involved in the development of either copy or strategy for any of the brands referred to in this paper.

I am not making any claims that these brochures and leaflets are privileged in terms of their power to establish brands in the minds of potential customers – they are just one of many types of document that companies use in an attempt to do so. It might be argued that leaflets and brochures are, in practice, ignored a lot more frequently than they are read or used. Apart from specific studies undertaken by individual companies, and as such subject to commercial confidentiality restrictions, there is no research available on the consumption of such information or on its impact. However, the increasing number of companies that devote time and attention to extending, refreshing, and rewriting such material indicates that they are felt to be commercially important, and that they are a valuable site for expressing brand positions. To

take two recent examples, in January 2006 the Chelsea Building Society, one of the top six in the UK, appointed a branding agency to undertake a review of its brand position and 'to give a more consistent look across the brand's print and digital collateral', aiming 'to give more cohesiveness to the brand, developing a literature system and reviewing material'[3]. The following week, *Design Week* reported that Argos, a catalogue retailer, had commissioned a consultancy to 'look at ways of interpreting the Argos brand across its entire portfolio of printed collateral, including point-of-sale items, in-store elements, catalogues and promotional literature … to develop more of a personality for the brand and create a cohesive tone of voice.'[4]

The genre of leaflets and brochures is a shifting one, and crosses the boundary between marketing and information. In fact, as Varey (2002: 4) suggests, there is no such clear boundary: 'One part of marketing communication is concerned with effectively and efficiently providing information about the business and the products to chosen customer groups'. Indeed, some definitions of advertising appear very similar. Vestergaard and Schroder (1985: 2) quote Harris and Seldon's (1962: 40) definition of advertising as 'a public notice designed to spread information with a view to promoting the sales of marketable goods and services.' This view would suggest similarities between advertising and marketing, to the extent that they would appear to share a commonality of purpose sufficient to classify them within the definition of the same genre, according to Swales' (1990: 58) definition of genre as 'a class of communicative events which share some set of communicative purposes.' However, as Cook (2001: 7) points out, 'genres often merge into each other and defy exact definition'.

There is, therefore, significant overlap between the documents described in this research and the genre of advertising, but this potentially adds to the power of the approach: if a branded language analysis and synthesis of its principles is sufficient to capture language choices in marketing materials, it may also be a fruitful approach to apply to advertising materials relating to the same brand. Many of the observations made about the language of advertising texts can provide pointers for the analysis of branded language (see for example, Cook, 2001; Myers, 1994; Vestergaard & Schroder, 1985; Goddard, 1998; Delin, 2000), since both have in common the desire to express a particular 'feeling' or 'personality' behind brand or product, to persuade potential customers to position themselves and the product in certain aspirational relationships (cf. Fairclough, 1989: 202ff), and to call people to action. In what follows, I will be looking in some detail at word, text and clause level phenomena that reveal both commonalities and differences between advertising and branch-level marketing materials. This, however, is not the primary aim of the research: what I am seeking to do is interrogate how specific brand

positions do, or could, influence language choices made by producers of such materials. The research reported here is intended as a starting-point for generating hypotheses about the links between brand position and language style and form, and as such has a wide application beyond the current data to all the written materials generated by service industries.

1.2 Language and multimodality

As van Leeuwen and Kress (1995: 25) have pointed out, 'All texts are multimodal.' While this paper focuses specifically on language, it is important to note that other modes of communication do play a role in creating the meaning of the kinds of texts that we will be looking at: in particular, images, typography, and layout. As Cook (2001: 4) points out in his discussion of the context of advertising, other modes such as pictures and paralanguage also play a role, as do the kinds of texts that readers perceive to be part of the same co-text (for example, the relationship between a leaflet, a TV ad, and a set of posters in a branch all relating to the same bank).

The leaflets and brochures analysed for this study contain images, diagrams, and tables. They are printed in colour and use a range of typefaces and typographical styles, including bold, italics, caps, and underlining. They are structured by headings and punctuated by quotations. All of these are not only important in creating the meaning, purpose and effect of the document, but are the most prominent means of communicating the identity of a brand (see for example, Floch, 2000, on the creation of brand visual identity, and Allen & Simmons, 2003, on the relationship of visual and verbal identity, among many others).

There is as yet no theory extant that is able to articulate the connection between a particular brand position and the multiplicity of visual and graphical resources that brand designers choose to express it. This is a fascinating area that is likely to benefit a great deal from the combined perspectives of researchers and practitioners working on advertising (cf. for example Cook, 2001, who makes extensive comment on both visual and verbal elements), on typography (e.g. McLean, 1980; Walker, 2001), on information design (e.g. Mijksenaar, 1997; Joshi, 2003), on the relationship between documents, information, layout, and typography (e.g. Waller, 1987; Delin et al., 2002) and, of course, on language and semiotics in multimodal documents and environments (e.g. Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). In addition, some useful recent work has focused on the visual images used in corporate contexts (see Koller, 2004).

While not debating the importance of the multimodal communicative resources employed in documents I have studied, the purpose of the current research has been to generate hypotheses that attempt to relate language in

particular to specific brand positions. In some cases, I make reference to the use of colour and typography, but it is beyond the scope and intent of the current work to go further into the operation and significance of modes of meaning-making beyond the linguistic. It is the aim of the study presented here to address in particular how brand values are communicated linguistically, with a view to situating such research in the wider semiotic context.

2   Brands and brand Tone of Voice

2.1 What is a brand?

According to Varey (2002: 152), a brand 'is differentiated from a commodity by having associated with it, as an integral part of the total offering, values that are significant to the consumer and buyer.' These values offer a larger perception of worth, and therefore a higher profit margin, than the unbranded commodity would have done. De Chernatony (1993) suggests some of the elements that appear to consumers to add this value, including trust that the product will do what it says, assistance in recalling and evaluating the commodity easily by using the brand as a shorthand, and the symbolic role that the brand plays in building the identity of the buyer and appearing to help them achieve a desirable self-image.

Many writers on brand agree, however, that creating these perceptions of brand value in the minds of consumers is not at all straightforward. As Varey (2002: 154) suggests, meanings and uses of a brand cannot be fixed by the provider. Jeremy Bullmore of WPP Group[5] describes the process of mental brand-building as somewhat disorganised: 'People build brands as birds build nests: from the scraps and straws they chance upon' (Bullmore, 2001: 5). On this view, brands are personal: a network of concepts and associations derived from all kinds of thoughts and encounters, from things that the brand owner seeks to convey (such as through advertising and packaging) to what is read about brands in the media or heard from friends. The network of concepts that constitute one individual's version of a brand may be anywhere from entirely absent – if they have never heard of the brand – through semi-developed on the basis of a few encounters, to highly intricate and developed, as is the case, for many, with 'superbrands' such as McDonald's and Coca-Cola, or old faithfuls such as Marmite and Fairy Liquid (a dish-washing liquid) in the UK.

The importance of the 'scraps and straws' view of brands is that, as Bullmore has said elsewhere, 'every brand encounter counts' (Bullmore, 2000). This means that both good and bad experiences contribute to an individual notion of a brand. While brand owners may strive to influence these encounters,

they cannot keep control of them all. This is why, on Bullmore's view, brands are out of control: they are what people make of them. For this reason, he stresses the importance of '… recognizing that every corporate action, every corporate decision, every corporate communication will be seen as a clue – as one of those all important scraps and straws from which people build brands' (Bullmore, 2001: 5).

We can derive from this discussion a perception of brands not as static objects, but as sets of qualities that a provider seeks to project and which are interpreted by potential consumers both dynamically and partially. The appreciation is dynamic because it changes constantly and varies a great deal between consumers, and partial because the match between the intended values and the actual values perceived is not complete. Brand communications – visual, verbal, and physical – are avenues through which providers can attempt to express intended qualities, but consumers' encounters with the different channels through which brands are communicated, the attention they pay them, and the meanings they attribute to them are not under the control of the provider.

2.2 Product and service brands

Much of the attention that has been paid to brands in the branding literature involves product brands such as Nike, Adidas, Coca-Cola, IBM, and Apple (see for example, the collection of essays by Floch, 2000, on 'industrial semiotics'). This paper, by contrast, focuses on service brands such as banking and insurance, mobile (cell) phone and other telecommunications brands, and domestic energy (gas, electricity) brands. As branding guru Wally Olins (2003: 75) points out: 'Product brands are about products. Service brands are about people.' The reason that service brands are potentially of more interest to linguists is that the experience of the brand is almost completely constituted in acts of communication. As Rob Waller and I have argued elsewhere (Waller & Delin, 2003), while the experience of a product is constituted substantially in other activities, such as the drinking of the drink or the wearing of the shoes, the experience of a service lies in the kinds of interaction that the consumer has with its human representatives – in using the bank, in making the insurance claim, in ordering the delivery. This relationship is not only constituted in face-to-face, telephone and internet encounters, but in documents such as the bills, letters, statements, brochures, and forms that remotely enact the relationship between the consumer and the brand. This means that the communications surrounding service brands are an important site for their expression.

2.3 Brand values and brand position

All kinds of brands, whether product or service, have in common the fact that they are developed to achieve a particular brand position: to appeal to a particular audience for a particular purpose. To this end, most brands – at least to their owners – are motivated by some explicit statement of their position: a set of characteristics, traits, or behaviours that expresses what is unique or distinctive about the brand. Table 1 shows the brand values for TXU Energi[6], an electricity company trading in the UK until 2003, when it was merged with Powergen. Table 2 gives the brand values of Orange, the global mobile telecommunications company.

TXU Energi values	Elaboration
Straight Talking	They know what they are talking about, speak my language, get to the point and make things happen.
Energy Experts Plus	Whatever they do you can trust TXU to get it right and they make it all so easy.
Switched On	They're a bright group of people who use their expertise for my benefit.
Customer Champion	TXU goes the extra mile for me. They know what I need and deliver it in the way that I want it.

Table 1: TXU Energi brand values

Orange values	Elaboration
Honest	We are always open and honest. We say what we do and we do what we say. We have nothing to hide and we behave responsibly.
Straightforward	For us, clarity comes through simplicity. We recognise that we are people communicating with other people. We are always direct and easy to understand.
Friendly	We enjoy working and succeeding together by building close relationships. While we have a sense of purpose, we also have a sense of humour. We consider the needs both of our customers and of each other.
Refreshing	We constantly look to do things differently and in a better way. We give colour to all that we do. We are ready to push the boundaries and take risks.
Dynamic	We want to make a difference to people's lives. Our optimism is contagious. We are passionate about what we do and we have confidence in ourselves.

Table 2: Orange brand values

Other brand values that occur frequently in service brands are *human*, *approachable*, *warm*, *clear*, *friendly*, *professional*, *expert*, and *committed*. Less frequently present are *fun*, *courageous*, *vital*, *agile*, and *passionate*. Not all brand values are adjectives (see TXU's, above) and not all are single words. Some are mixtures of different grammatical categories: for example, First Direct (a UK online bank) has *respect*, *right first time*, *responsive*, *contribution*, *openness*, and *kaizen* (this last being a Japanese word meaning 'continuous improvement'). The idea of values such as all these is that they govern everything the brand does – not just in communications, but in the way it operates all of its business processes.

 As an example of the way branding agencies seek to describe, analyse and reposition the brands they work with, Figure 1 shows a diagram of Enterprise IG's 'Brand Analytics' framework, which is used by the agency to locate brands along a continuum stretching from 'tangible' on the left to 'intangible' on the right (for an overview of this and other descriptive tools in current use by agencies, see Michel and Ettenson, 2005).

Tangible	←			→	Intangible
What you have	**What you do**	**How you do it**	**Who you are**		**Why you do it**
infrastructure	products and services	approach and process	people and values		purpose, mission, cause

Figure 1: Enterprise IG's 'Brand Analytics' continuum

Tangible brands are those whose offer to customers is focused on their own infrastructure – for a phone company, this could be the coverage of its mobile network; for a bank, it could be the number of branches and ATMs they have. It is clear that this is a very different offer from one at the 'intangible' end of the scale, in which the brand's position is based on a 'mission'. For example, a phone company could attempt to communicate that they are 'passionate about keeping people in touch with each other'; or a bank could try to express a desire to help customers 'achieve their dreams'. In terms of brand values, brands towards the right of the scale may have more abstract values such as 'love' and 'passion', while brands on the left of the scale may have more concrete values such as reliability, accessibility, and ease of use. In fact, in their analysis of the brand

language of Nordea Bank and Bang and Olufsen, Henriksen et al. (2004) have replaced 'Tangible' with 'Concrete' and 'Intangible' with 'Abstract'.

Brand positioning and brand values are typically contained within a definitive statement of the brand, a 'brand handbook'. This is likely to have been produced either by the brand owning company itself, or by a brand consultancy (well-known examples in the UK are Interbrand, Enterprise IG, Futurebrand, and Wolff Olins). The brand handbook is the definitive resource for making sure the brand 'stays put' in terms of how its employees and agencies develop all branded communications, including packaging and advertising. As well as describing the main traits of the brand, the handbook usually defines the visual elements of the brand in detail: permissible typefaces and when to use different families, sizes, weights, and styles of type, how the logo should look, what colours should be used and in which combinations, how images (photography, line drawings) should be selected and used, and design guidelines for how to produce the kinds of documents that the brand uses most often, such as posters, brochures, and so on.

2.4 Brand Tone of Voice

The idea of brand Tone of Voice has surfaced relatively recently as a means of communicating the distinctive nature of a brand.[7] The aim of a brand Tone of Voice is to make sure that the values, personality, or essence of the brand is uppermost in every situation in which people come into contact with the brand's language. The term 'Tone of Voice' has come to be used commercially to refer to the language styles or registers that a company uses to express a distinctive personality or set of values that will differentiate its brands from those of competitors. Somewhat confusingly, 'Tone of Voice' is becoming established as the term of choice to refer mainly to written language, although it may also be applied to speech. Other terms, such as *verbal identity*, *brand language* and *language identity* are also regularly used.

Most service companies perceive the most important set of contacts or 'touchpoints' to be those that customers see and hear: phone calls, face-to-face encounters, letters, bills, statements, brochures, marketing materials such as leaflets, web sites and other interfaces such as phone menus, forms, packaging, instructions, and all forms of advertising. However, many are also interested in internal communications – those that take place between staff, or between staff and others who are not end-consumers, such as retailers, organisations to whom work is outsourced, and other company stakeholders. The idea here is that what is done internally will affect external perceptions, and staff who are fully engaged with the brand can be expected to adopt 'brand behaviours' as routine.

It is worth noting that the aim of a Tone of Voice is not just to sell things. This is obviously so if it is used across a wide range of non-selling communi-

cations. In fact, the adoption of Tone of Voice is being investigated not just by commercial companies, but by charities and public sector bodies such as government departments. The aim of the Tone of Voice is to engage people with messages – perhaps about products and services they may wish to buy, but also about benefits and services that they are invited to take part in or claim, such as pensions, tax credits, or advice, health services and screenings, safety information, and more. Tone of Voice differences can influence the most mundane of communications such as forms, as the following examples from the Tone of Voice guidelines for a government department show:

Don't use	**Do use**
apportioned accordingly	*worked out accordingly*
expected confinement	*the date your baby is due*
bona fide	*genuine*
undertake to	*agree to*
at such time as	*when*
commence	*start*

Extensive 'jargon busters' such as these are frequently found in guidelines on corporate Tone of Voice, particularly for applications such as forms, letters, and information leaflets. It is important to note, though, that avoiding jargon or over-formal language is not all there is to a Tone of Voice. For this particular government department, consumer research that I undertook as part of a commercial contract[8] showed that many people were perfectly happy with some of the more technical language that was normally used in relation to the subject matter – which meant that some 'plain' or 'clear' English terms were seen as over-simple and possibly patronising. People preferred *complete* to *fill in*, *receive* to *get*, *consecutive* to *in a row*, *inform* and *state* to *tell*, and *deduct* to *take off* or *take away*. What was apparent was that they did not wish to see obvious 'work-arounds' in over-simple language to replace what was already understandable, and attitude research to the language revealed that they thought the simplest terms were just too friendly for a government agency – and therefore came across as false. For the same reason, consumers did not want to see contractions such as *you're* and *we'll*, and preferred *please call us* to *give us a ring*. They liked *you are likely to be entitled to a further amount*, but found *you can get more money* actually offensive, because they felt that they were being addressed as if they were not only childish, but greedy. Given the nature of the 'brand personality' in this case, people preferred language that was 'direct, but not too chatty', 'direct and accessible, but still business-like', and 'not too pally'.

It is important to note, therefore, that the development of a Tone of Voice is not the same enterprise as writing in Plain English, the logical conclusion of which is that all brands sound the same. Because Tone of Voice is aimed at

communicating a personality that is accessible and liked by consumers, the clarity of the language chosen is not the only concern.

3   Linguistic analysis of brand positions

In this section, I apply some linguistic frameworks with a view to elucidating how far the language of the two brands is different, and whether this communicates each position as more 'tangible' or more 'intangible'.

There are many possible analytical frameworks to apply, but I have selected four which have already borne fruit as a means of analysis of other genres and which appeared intuitively likely to reveal something of interest in the documents of study. These are:

1.   Chains of reference, examining how references to the brand and closely associated elements are made throughout the text (cf. Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Prince, 1981; Cook, 2001);

2.   Participant roles, examining how the brand, its services, providers and audiences are 'positioned' in relation to one another through the grammar of the clause (cf. Halliday, 1994; Thompson, 1996; Fairclough, 1989; Clark, 1992; Delin, 2000);

3.   Presupposition and assumption, looking further at how audiences are positioned in relationship to the brand through the kinds of implicit assumptions that are made about participants (cf. Vestergaard & Schroder, 1985; Fairclough, 1989; Delin, 2000; Cook, 2001);

4.   Tenor, looking at how social relationships are assumed or constructed through the texts by means of markers of social distance such as formality or informality (cf. Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Myers, 1994; Goodman & Graddol, 1996; Fairclough, 1992);

In what follows, we will look at these approaches in turn, showing what each reveals about the way language is being used by Orange and HSBC and its possible relationship with the position of each brand.

3.1 Chains of reference

The first linguistic tool examines chains of reference in the text to see how the brand and concepts related to it are evoked and kept activated in the mind of the hearer/reader. The examination of chains of reference has long been a foundational means of description of text cohesion (see in particular Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Halliday, 1994: 310) and has also been discussed by Cook (2001: 151) in relation to advertising texts.

What is important for the current purposes is not so much that texts are cohesive, but that the appreciation of this cohesion depends on the ability of the reader to retrieve the relationship between semantically-underspecified referring expressions such as pronouns, and definite referring expressions which assume shared knowledge, with concepts that are currently activated in short-term memory. This analysis looks at how brand concepts are referred to, activated, or allowed to decay, by the choice of different types of referring expressions.

The key elements in this process are the noun phrases in the text, whose content and form can serve either to strongly evoke a brand (which is the concept we are interested in), reinforce it, or not evoke it at all. I developed the categories shown in Table 3 for application to branding from seminal frameworks in the linguistics and psychology literature (e.g. Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Prince, 1981; Gundel, Hedberg & Zacharski, 1993). The table shows seven different relations that can hold between a noun phrase and a brand concept, and predicts how strongly the brand will be evoked as a result. I have also included some features of graphical identity, including fonts, colours, and logos, where it appears that they are being used significantly to evoke the brand.

| Link	Definition	Example	Evokes brand?
Repetition	Repeating the full reference to the brand	Orange… Orange HSBC… HSBC	Strongly evokes
Partial repetition	A phrase contains a reference to the brand, but refers to something other than the brand concept	Orange… the Orange Service Promise HSBC… HSBC branches	Strongly evokes
Co-reference	Where a concept is reinforced by referring to it again, but not using a full descriptive NP	Orange… we HSBC… with us	Strongly evokes[9]
Brand elements	Where a link is created by language or visuals recognisably special to the brand	Special terms such as Orange TalkShare; Distinctive font Brand colour Logo	Strongly evokes
Possessive inferrables	Where a link is created by referring to something that the brand has, does, or has given to the customer, using a possessive NP	Orange… our network Your phone HSBC… our branches Your account	Evokes
General inferrables	Where a link is created by referring to something that things of this type (e.g. banks, telecomms companies in general) have or do	Orange… the network HSBC… branches	Does not evoke

Link	Definition	Example	Evokes brand?
Other NPs	Referring to other things relevant to the topic, but not related to the brand	Your current address Your laptop	Does not evoke

Table 3: Forms of referring expression and brand evocation

Figures 2 and 3 give an illustration of the way in which Orange and HSBC use referring expressions to reinforce the brand – a technique Fairclough (1989: 28) refers to in the context of advertising as 'building the image' of the product (see also Delin, 2000: 130ff on the use of language in advertising to reinforce product image).

Orange has branded all its services by explicitly repeating its name, so these strongly evoke the brand through partial repetition (*Orange Internet*, *Orange Answer Fax*). It also repeats the brand name in the context of things belonging to the user, so that instead of possessive inferrables (*your phone*) it upgrades them to co-references (*your Orange phone*).

Figure 2: Evoking Orange brand
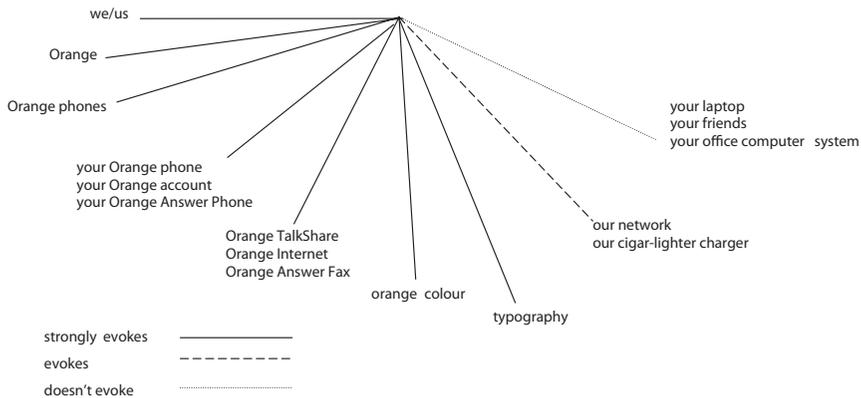
The Orange texts use brand keywords to 'claim' ordinary territory and brand it: for example through the creation of proper nouns with capitalisation:

Orange (from N, the fruit, or Adj, the colour)
Orange International Text Messaging
Orange Multi Media services

Brand elements are therefore created out of phrases that could otherwise just be possessive inferrables (*our text messaging service*) or general inferrables (*text messaging*). Orange also brands strongly through colour and typography.

Figure 2 shows that the range of techniques of brand reinforcement can include significant 'upgrading' of what would otherwise be ordinary 'life-world' language (cf. Habermas, 1984) to co-referential or brand element phrases. The 'specialness' of these services when related to Orange is therefore constantly reinforced through a range of means of evoking the brand name and its related concepts.

By comparison, HSBC is a more reticent brand. In one 22-page brochure, HSBC is mentioned only ten times, and none of these references are in the main body text: as part of the logo on the front of the leaflet, twice in images, once in its address on the cover of the leaflet, four times in regulatory statements, and twice in URLs[10]. The identity is not strongly reinforced by typography, with the choice of the neutral Times and Univers as fonts. There is some reinforcement of the brand colour (the use of red for titles and bullet points).

Where Orange services are branded by mentioning the brand name, the HSBC brand does not appear in the names of its own 'special services'. Spacing and typography have been used to make service names different from ordinary language, but these do not strongly evoke HSBC. Typography and spacing are not used sufficiently consistently, either, to make 'special services' seem like any kind of set.

Service*Plus*	no space, both elements capitalised, italics on second element
Talk Direct	space, both elements capitalised, no italics on either element
Typetalk	no space, first element capitalised, no italics on either element

Concepts and elements that are ascribed to the user are not branded, so possessive inferrables (*your Basic Bank Account*) are used, for example, rather than co-referential phrases (*your HSBC account*). In addition to these few possessive inferrables that do weakly evoke brand, however, there is a much larger group of general NPs, often also possessives, that refer to things that could be had from any bank (*your account*, *your branch*). I have grouped these (perhaps controversially) as non-evoking general NPs, because the concepts they refer to could relate to any company providing similar services. The result is a set of much weaker referential evocations of the brand. These are illustrated in Figure 3.
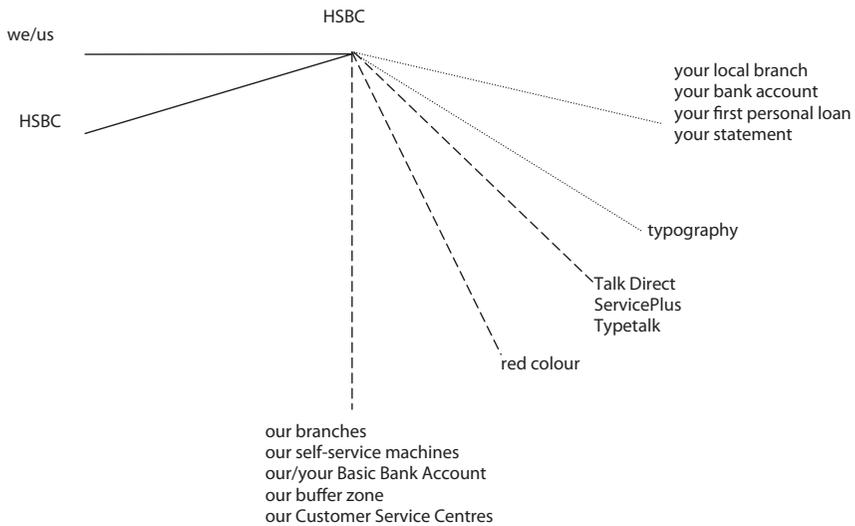
```
                              HSBC
we/us                                            your local branch
                                                 your bank account
                                                 your first personal loan
HSBC                                             your statement


                                                    typography


                                              Talk Direct
                                              ServicePlus
                                              Typetalk


                                      red colour


           our branches
           our self-service machines
           our/your Basic Bank Account
           our buffer zone
           our Customer Service Centres
```

Figure 3: Evoking HSBC brand

Interestingly, the language used by Orange serves to *transform* its brand identity through use of chains of reference. Through co-reference by pronouns, the brand becomes identified with the company as a group of people:

> *Orange covers… And you don't have to take our word for it.*
> *The Orange Network Performance Promise means that if we ever lose your call…*

Orange literature gives the impression that there is no machinery involved in managing telephone calls, as the network is also run by 'we' or the brand:

> *if we ever lose your call in mid conversation, we will…*
> *we keep you connected*

This means that chains of reference can alternate between the brand, the people, and the telephone system and its handsets and treat them all as co-referring:

> *Orange… we… our network… the Orange Network Performance Promise… if we lose your call…*

Once identity is achieved between the brand, network, handset, and people, connecting customers with this is straightforward, through possessives:

> *call from your Orange phone*
> *your call*

or through explicit assertion of the relationship:

> *Orange Global Travel Services is your one-stop travel service*

The only other actor present in the text apart from Orange and the customer is Wildfire, a voice recognition 'virtual personal assistant'. This service is explicitly personified with 'she': distinct from Orange, but working for them:

> *She can help you make calls, take and sort messages and store*
> *contact details…*

HSBC, by contrast, uses simple chains of reference that do not repeat the bank's name. The bank establishes itself at the outset as a kind of global topic by minimal use of its name. To make sense of the text, the reader has to assume the global referent of HSBC when encountering expressions such as the following pronouns (underlined):

> <u>*we*</u>
> <u>*our*</u> *special services*
> *all* <u>*our*</u> *customers*
> *Let* <u>*us*</u> *help you*
> <u>*our*</u> *branches*

Lack of repetition of the name assumes that the brand concept is at a very high level of activation in the reader's consciousness. This could be quite a powerful position: it forces the reader to adopt the attitude that no other possible referent (Barclays bank, for example) can be intended. Less charitably, it is an assumption that may not be warranted – and is not well salvaged by visual evidence such as colour, layout, and typography. It is possible, therefore, that the reader could forget which bank they were reading about halfway through the document, or at least be left with a very weak impression of the brand.

This analysis showed that the differences in referring expression usages between the companies are marked. The highly noticeable presence of Orange as a brand, and the highly developed way in which it constantly re-evokes the brand in its language, is in keeping with a 'Who we are' position on the brand continuum. HSBC's lack of presence indicates that it does not currently occupy a 'Who we are' position, but this is negative evidence, rather than positive evidence for any other positioning.

If HSBC's position is deliberately sought, the background nature of the brand (a 'supportive presence' rather than the 'you're on our team' position adopted by Orange) could account for its reticence in using its name. While there is a general assumption that all brand texts would represent attempts to 'push' the brand name, it is a known strategy in branding that this would not suit every

brand position. Brands seeking a more subliminal presence might be better reinforced by typography, layout, image, and colour.

This preliminary survey of referring expressions suggests that further systematic research would be useful in revealing the relationship between patterns of lexical cohesion and brand position. We can suggest, then, our first hypothesis, testable with consumers:

> **Hypothesis 1: Brand strength**. The strength of the reader's impression of the brand will vary depending on the number and strength of referring expressions that activate the brand or brand-related concepts.

Testing this hypothesis will, of course, require a clear notion of what 'strength of impression' might be in cognitive terms, and how to measure it.

3.2 Participant roles

The second technique for correlating language use with brand position is the analysis of participant roles and the processes they are associated with in clauses. What kinds of processes is the brand associated with, particularly as agent or doer? What kinds of roles are left to or ascribed to readers? What other participants are there in the processes reported in the text?

This kind of study is related to what Fairclough (1989: 202) has called 'building relations' between the producer/advertiser and the consumer, 'building images' of products (in our case, brands), and 'building consumers' themselves by associating them with ideal 'subject positions' in which they might be likely to accept or reject the product and their relationship with it. We can capture its manifestation in language through applying the framework for looking at clause structure offered by Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday, 1994: 101ff). This framework categorises verbs (known in the framework as *processes*) not through their form, but through their meaning, so that we can look at the effect certain kinds of verbs have on the meaning of the text.

The technique of looking at process types and their doers and done-tos has been used successfully to analyse bias in newspaper reporting (Fowler et al., 1979), in the apportioning of blame in the reporting of crime of domestic violence (Clark, 1992), and in an analysis of presumption of innocence or guilt in the Tracey Andrews 'road rage' murder (Delin, 2000: 28ff). Vestergaard and Schroder (1985: 27ff) have a useful discussion of the application of a similar approach to an advertising text. A clear introduction to the categories of analysis (a useful supplement to Halliday) is given by Thompson (1996: 78ff).

We can start our analysis with mental processes – those processes that are concerned with mental states. Because mental processes are only available to

animate objects, we would expect these to be associated closely with 'personi-fied' brands – i.e. those that are aimed at the rightmost, least tangible, position on the Brand Analytics continuum. However, it does not seem from this that Orange as a brand occupies this position: in the document examined, Orange actually gives itself only two mental processes:

> *Orange believes…*
> *We know…*

Apart from these, Orange does not then have any other thoughts or feelings, at least as a brand. There is no *we think*, *we feel* and so on. These might be expected from a brand on a mission. Interestingly, though, while the brand itself is not projected as having a rich mental life, its handsets and services are:

> *your Orange phonebook remembers your numbers for you*
> *Wildfire… learns about how you want her to help*

When it comes to doing, most Orange sentences in my sample have the cus-tomer as doer. Orange is not a doer in many clauses at all: in fact, its services and handsets are doers more than the brand itself is. The following represents a brief survey of the clauses in Orange's customer guide 'What do you want to do?'. Table 4 below summarises the kinds of processes that Orange customers are involved in.

Process type	Material: action verbs	Mental: thinking verbs	Verbal: saying verbs	Relational: being and connecting verbs
Orange customers	get through to people call back find another provider call enter (names) save (to memory) get the message listen to messages return (call) listen record (a greeting) change (greeting) select	take someone's word for something* need to* need to track down worry* forget	respond	have (a phone) rely on* be connected

* asterisked processes = negatives

Table 4: Processes ascribed to Orange customers

Customers are given practical action verbs (material processes), which appear to convey that they can get on with what they have a phone for. The following material processes (underlined) all have customer as doer:

> you can <u>access</u> the information you want via text messaging..
> if you're <u>planning</u> a last minute weekend away…
> you can <u>keep up</u> with what's going on…
> you can <u>access</u> Orange WAP services…

Customers are not apparently expected to interact much with Orange (there is only one verbal process – *respond* – which links the customer to Orange). Customers' mental processes are mostly couched in terms of things Orange is trying to prevent: many of the processes are negatives, such as 'you won't need to'. All the negatives in Table 4 (e.g. *You won't have to worry about…* represent Orange, or one of its services, preventing things that the customer would not want, such as *With the Orange Answerphone service, you won't have to…*). Negative processes are marked in Table 4 with asterisks.

The processes that the Orange texts ascribe to the brand itself are summarised in Table 5. As I noted above, the Orange brand does not appear as doer of many material processes: it is doer in only four of the clauses looked at. Neither is the brand a big thinker: only two examples of mental processes were found in a long brochure: *We believe that no other UK digital mobile network can match us on service…* and *Orange knows the major cities of the world inside out*. The Orange brand is mainly associated with processes that state its relationship to its customers, and imply for it a helpful disposition. This means that, grammatically, Orange is a subject (doer) in a few clauses, but most often appears in a subordinate clause or phrase and with the customer as the subject of the main clause. Orange is therefore backgrounded as a doer, while the customer is the active party. The company, instead, is providing services that are at the customer's elbow for them to use to do what they want to, and while appearing to have an overseeing, caring role.

Process type	Material: action verbs	Mental: thinking verbs	Verbal: saying verbs	Relational: being and connecting verbs	Behavioural: having some disposition
Orange	lose (your call)* credit give text	believe know	offer	keep (you connected) cover be here take care of	keep our promises waiting to help

Table 5: Processes ascribed to the Orange brand

Orange's subordinate role comes out as a range of facilitating relationships arranged around the main clause. These relationships are usefully described rhetorically. Using the terms for the moment of Mann and Thompson's (1987) Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST), we find Orange appearing in clauses or phrases expressing the relation of circumstance:

> _When you register for Orange Internet…you'll find_

as means:

> _With Orange Mail you can access your personal email account_
> _check out the comedy, theatre, and gig listings with SceneOne._

as destination:

> _popular tunes that you can download to your Orange phone_

and as enablement:

> _Orange Multi Media Services can also help you to find your way…_

While the customer has agency of the 'main' action – even if it is not in every case syntactically the main clause – these examples show the Orange brand placed in a range of facilitative relationships with the things that customers might want to do.

   While Orange as a brand is not always directly foregrounded, the services Orange offers are an important protagonist in clause structure. Table 6 shows the kinds of processes ascribed to brand-evoking services such as _the Orange Network Performance Promise_, _our Customer Services Team_, _your Orange phone-book_, _Orange Directory Enquiries_, _Caller id_, _Line 2_, _our fixed rates_, _Orange Answer Phone_, _Orange Multi Media Services_, and _Orange International Text Messaging_.

Process type	Material: action verbs	Mental: thinking verbs	Verbal: saying verbs	Relational: being and connecting verbs	Behavioural: having some disposition
Orange service	store show give	remember	keep in touch	mean take care of allow enable help have	be waiting

Table 6: Processes ascribed to Orange services

While most of the processes that Orange services take part in are relational rather than material, there are many more clauses that have the Orange service as a protagonist doing and relating than there are clauses that have Orange itself in this position. Doing and relating is therefore heavily loaded onto the services, rather than the brand directly. We have seen the strong evoking link between the services and the brand already, so evocation of the brand is not weakened by placing the services rather than the brand itself in this position. However, Orange services are positioned as key delegates enacting relationships with customers. They therefore act as the bridge that builds the relationship, linguistically and conceptually, between the Orange brand and its customers.

Turning now to the processes ascribed to HSBC customers (Table 7), there is no great difference in material processes: as with Orange, customers are expected to do things associated with their account. Across the whole spread of other processes, however, the onus is on the customer to be agentive in the operation of their accounts. While Orange was reassuring that customers *would not have to take someone's word for something*, *would not need to*, *would not have to worry*, *would not have to rely on*, and could *respond*, *be connected*, *have*, and *forget*, HSBC customers need to *see* and *call in*, *complete*, *pay*, *apply*, *request*, *arrange*, *agree*, and *set up*. There is a sense that vigilance is required on the customer's part (*control* (*money*), *review*, *check*).

The processes associated with HSBC as doer (Table 8) appear to be mainly regulatory in nature. There are no relational processes in the sample looked at, where Orange used these processes to set up a caring relationship with the customer. Likewise, HSBC's only disposition is that it *needs to see* (as in check) an alternative form of identification when customers are opening an account, while Orange is *keeping promises* and *waiting to help*.

Process type	Material: action verbs	Mental: thinking verbs	Verbal: saying verbs	Relational: being and connecting verbs	Behavioural: having some disposition
HSBC Customers	see call in complete pay get apply withdraw print transfer use	think review check	tell call phone request arrange order speak	control	take advantage find it hard to beat agree need to set up

Table 7: Processes ascribed to HSBC customers

Process type	Material: action verbs	Mental: thinking verbs	Verbal: saying verbs	Relational: being and connecting verbs	Behavioural: having some disposition
HSBC	pay resolve use will not charge	verify monitor check	promise offer reserve the right contact advise		need to see

Table 8: Processes ascribed to the HSBC brand

The services HSBC offers are predominantly described in terms of what the customer can do. However, in the context of banking communication, the verbs through which this is communicated (*may*, *let*, *can*) are notoriously ambiguous between expressing possibility and expressing permission. While it may be the intention to express a realm of possibility, the permission reading is also available, and is perhaps more prominent when the reader knows that the 'voice' is that of a bank: [11]

> *Our Instant Access Savings Account lets you pay in money…*
> *With 24-hour access via our self-service machines you can…*
> *Telephone banking…you can control*

Looking at the analysis of the HSBC brochures, it may appear that there is in fact a shortage of doers – the bank is not offering to do much, but neither are its services. So how is the bulk of the language made up? The answer to this riddle lies in the grammar of the sentences HSBC is using: many of the clauses are imperatives addressed to the customer:

> *Phone us on 0800 130 130*
> *Complete and return your application form to us*
> *Take advantage of our special fee-free credit card and introductory interest rate offer*
> *Ask any branch for a leaflet*

There are also many clauses that are passive in nature, if not in grammar, of the form (*some service*) *is available*. There are also many real passives:

> *Details will be shown on the cash machine screen*
> *Cash can be withdrawn*

These do not show who is doing the showing or withdrawing. There is also a great deal of listing and use of non-clause grammar, so that nobody is doer, or other participants are left vague:

Cash withdrawals with no penalty.
Quarterly account statements.
Supported by our hassle-free account opening guarantee.

The balance between different clause types comes out heavily in favour of directives with the customer as doer. The text, then, is predominantly telling the customer what to do.

In contrast, Orange uses two kinds of sentence prominently: structures that list virtues of the product, and structures that go into more detail to tell the customer how to do things. The basic informative sentence 'frame' is given in Table 9.

Circumstance	Enablement	Clause kernel	Purpose	Means
When you register for x service	we'll even help you			with an x from Orange
when you're doing x	you can (even)	do x	so that (advantage)	with Orange's x
	you'll be able to			with your Orange x

Table 9: Orange informative sentence frame

Everything in this structure except the clause kernel is grammatically optional. However, in the actual text, there is always an element included that shows the benefit to the customer, either a purpose or enablement element. This means that the resulting statement is a declarative sentence (*We'll even help you to set up an extra line, so that you can take social and business calls on separate numbers*) rather than an imperative (*Set up an extra line*).

When the customer has to be asked to do an action, the general action sentence structure is that given in Table 10. The request to do something is nearly always minimised by some statement about how simple it is, and there is frequently some statement of the benefit to the customer.

Minimiser	Action	Result
simply	do x (and (then) do y)	your result will happen.
just		Orange x service makes this easy.
all you have to do is		then/so you can do x.

Table 10: Orange directive sentence frame

Orange language, therefore, serves to create a link between customer and desired services, by positioning those services as enabling desired action. When customers are asked to do something, it is described as simple and advantageous. HSBC language, on the other hand, places the customer in the position of responsible doer, and the bank as allower of those deeds. The brand is not constructed as apparently offering to reciprocate, and the benefits offered to readers are often those of withholding penalties (*we will not charge*) rather than positive advantages. It is a Tone of Voice that constructs a paternalistic, legislative and withholding/allowing position for the brand, which this analysis suggests is likely to create social distance between the brand and its customers.

This short analysis also gives rise to a testable hypothesis for further research which should reveal more about the way brands are constructed in relation to services, customers, and other participants in the world of the text. If we assume that this kind of textual construction does indeed have an effect on readers, we can suggest that the effect might influence both perceptions of the brand, and perceptions of the self in relation to the brand. This proposal, then, is captured in Hypothesis 2:

> **Hypothesis 2: Participant roles**. The reader's impression of the brand will be influenced by the type of processes ascribed to the brand and its related concepts. Further, the reader's construction of their own self-image will be influenced by the types of processes ascribed to them in the text. Finally, the reader's understanding of their own relationship with the brand and its associated concepts will be influenced by the way all these participants are positioned by association with processes within particular kinds of sentence frame.

The difficulty in testing this hypothesis lies primarily in what we mean by readers being 'influenced by' the construction of them in the text. While this remains vague, this approach does fit within a tradition of research that assumes that linguistic means of construction of readers and hearers do influence the

construction of mental worlds – the 'relational values' (cf. Fairclough, 1989: 179) that are created through lexical and grammatical choices.

3.3 Presupposition and assumption

As Vestergaard and Schroder (1985: 24) note, presupposition is 'an extremely frequent feature' of advertising texts. Also in relation to advertising, Cook (2001: 178) suggests that 'any text must make assumptions about the knowledge of its readers, and it is sometimes very informative to spell out exactly what this may be.' While this process can lead to the infinite expansion of a text, both Cook (2001) and Fairclough (1989: 78ff) concur that it is 'what is omitted in discourse, the gaps within it, which constitute the shared ideology of the participants' (Cook, 2001: 179). As with all texts, the use of presupposition and assumption can be a convenient means of recruiting genuine shared knowledge as an aid to economy of explanation. However, texts can also use these resources to attribute to readers apparent 'shared knowledge' that is in fact newly constructed in the process of interpretation.

To see how this 'shared knowledge' is constructed, we can look first at what is explicitly asserted in the texts. The HSBC texts make claims for the bank's coverage and size, which would suggest its placement in the 'what we have' area of the Brand Analytics continuum:

> …*one of the world's largest banking and financial services organisations with more than 6,500 offices in 78 countries and territories*

> *we offer 1,700 branches in the UK, and in-store branches at some Morrison's supermarkets*

However, the Orange literature also makes similar claims for coverage of the brand:

> *Orange now covers over 99% of the UK population*
> *more transmitters than any other UK network*

Earlier, we looked in at the kinds of 'brand elements' that were associated with Orange: these were mainly characterised in terms of Orange services with explicit branding (*the Orange Answer Phone*, for example). We saw then that the HSBC name was not used in this way, with possessive inferrables (*our service, your self-service machines*) appearing instead. This means that the services are not securely tied to the brand, as this was only weakly established at the outset, while the Orange texts positioned the Orange brand, its network, and its services as interchangeable.

The crucial point here is the means of introduction of the services: HSBC texts refer to them using possessives without introducing them earlier (not *we have a service… our service* but simply *our service*). What *the* and *our* have in common is that they are both presuppositional: they both linguistically presuppose, require, or force the reader to infer the existence of their referents without these things having been introduced beforehand. In the case of Orange, however, these things are presupposed as belonging to the Orange brand, which has been positioned as belonging equally to the customer and the company. As a result, there is a sense of shared ownership of these referents. HSBC language, on the other hand, introduces many services for the first time using possessives that describe the services as belonging to the brand alone. This, together with the position of authority it has constructed, may encourage customers to feel that they can take advantage of these services only if HSBC lets them.

Table 11 summarises HSBC's presupposed services, etc. in terms of the brand continuum. There is a strong concentration of what is presupposed about the brand in the central area of the continuum: products and services, and approaches and processes.

Infrastructure	Products and services	Approaches and processes	Intangibles
our self-service machines	our service(s) our Instant Access Savings account our Individual Service Review our Bank Account our Cardholder Payment Protection Insurance our 24-hour automated telephone banking service our Basic Bank Account our Telephone, TV or Internet banking our special fee-free credit-card interest rate offer the services of the HSBC group	our hassle-free account opening guarantee our buffer zone our unauthorised overdraft fee our personal terms and conditions our paid-up capital and reserves our security	our discretion

Table 11: Presuppositions about what HSBC has

It is also interesting to look at the assumptions that texts from both companies make about their customers. Both, understandably, make assumptions that their customers have things that have to do with banking and phoning

(*your cards*, *repayments*, *account balance*, and *your calls*, *phone*, *user guide*, for example). Beyond this, HSBC texts make assumptions that may be linked to customers' lifestyles: *your needs*, *future plans*, *spare cash*, *friends and family*, for example. Orange texts presuppose that its customers have a home, an office, they are *on the move*, they have *groups of friends*, they *forget to take their phone* with them, they *get some exciting news*, they *want to have some fun*, they *need to call from abroad*, they want to know *the state of the football scores*, and many more. Arguably, Orange lifestyle presuppositions construct a subject position that is more young, fun, and exciting than that constructed for consumers in the HSBC texts.

Going beyond presupposition, Orange uses implicature, a weaker form of assumption that nevertheless still presents facts as uncontroversial. In the examples below, *again* and *any more* give rise to implicatures that the situation has happened before:

> You need never forget a birthday or miss an important email message ever *again*.
> You won't need to rely on your old paper address book – or your memory – *any more*.

The Orange texts also assert beliefs on the part of the customer: in the brochure, the following are given as the customer's 'voice':

> I want to stay in touch
> I want to get through to people
> I want technology that helps me
> I want to be able to call abroad

They suggest scenarios to appeal to the customer as familiar:

> You've just finished a tough day at work and fancy checking what's on at the local cinema.
> Your child is feeling ill and you want to know where to find the nearest late-night chemist.

These are lifestyle suppositions which suggest a 'knower' with detailed understanding of the personal circumstances of the customers. There is no such knower implied in the HSBC texts, as their suppositions are of the most neutral kind.

The kinds of presuppositions that appear in the HSBC texts suggest that HSBC occupies a central position on the brand continuum: while there are infrastructure claims, there is an emphasis on products and services. The introduction of services as through possessive pronouns (*our*) rather than to the brand (*HSBC's*) excludes customers from ownership of them. While

many of the products and services mentioned in the HSBC texts are positive, the approaches and processes it mentions have a negative tone (*security*, *fees*, *terms and conditions*) that refer to the bank protecting itself rather than offering advantages to the consumer. While the Orange texts assume attractive lifestyles for its customers (busy, with friends, popular), HSBC texts assume little more than that their readers need to go to a bank. This may be in keeping with a brand position that is not closely associated with the 'who we are' location on the continuum – the implication being that if HSBC is not presenting itself as a group of people, then they cannot know customers personally.

This survey of an initial sample suggests a third hypothesis for further research:

> **Hypothesis 3: Assumption**. The closeness of readers' engagement with a brand relies on the predominance of textual assumptions and presuppositions that are either (a) accurate about those readers' lifestyles and beliefs or (b) represent attractive extensions of those lifestyles and beliefs.

In fact, the decision about what kinds of lifestyles and beliefs to assume, and whether to 'stretch' those to aspirations about desired lifestyles, may itself be dependent on the brand position a company is seeking to adopt. A factual, 'tangible' position may rely more on accurate understandings of customers' current needs and lifestyles, while an 'intangible' position may seek more frequently to project apparent beliefs that are not accurate, but which readers might like to aspire to.

3.4 Constructing social relations: tenor

The fourth and final analytical approach applied in this research was to look at the way in which social relationships in general were constructed between brands and potential customers through the medium of the texts. This involves the use of constructions of authority positions, which have been described by Fairclough (1989: 182), in his discussion of political speeches, as existing in tension with claims for solidarity with an audience. In addition, there has been much comment on the mixing of 'everyday language' with more public, institutional genres of discourse in a range of contexts: Fairclough (1992: 217) refers to the 'appropriation of conversation by institutions', while Goodman (1996: 141ff), following Fairclough (1994), describes extensively the way in which 'informalization' and 'conversationalization' of language is used to create an impression of social closeness, even in institutional, public texts. Conversely, as Fowler (1991: 128) suggests, the use of formal, impersonal language forms serves to construct and reinforce hierarchical relationships of power, in which

greater social distance is created and maintained between the 'voice' of the text and its readers.

Analysing Orange and HSBC texts exposes differences in the way the language 'voice' allows each to construct social relationships with readers. We have seen something of this in the kinds of position that each company constructs for its customers, and in how much they seem to know about customer lifestyles. There are other determinants of social relations, some implicit and some explicit.

HSBC texts, as we have seen, construct a position of authority for the brand in that they do not hesitate to mention statutory and legal obligations and expectations, and the bank's right to refuse services to the customer. In fact, the first body text of one new accounts brochure mentions just such a right in the first few lines:

> **£50 Buffer Zone**
>
> *Although our buffer zone is not a right to go overdrawn, should your account dip into the red by £50 at our discretion, we will not charge you our unauthorised borrowing fee.*

In fact, terms and conditions, regulatory statements, and other boilerplate appear throughout the HSBC documents, reinforcing the position that the bank gives (or withholds) permission for the customer to use its services. Some of the bank's actions are given as concessions: *we will not charge you our unauthorised borrowing fee*, for example. Likewise, attempts to state what the customer is entitled to might reflect negatively on the bank: on opening an account, the customer is reassured that HSBC will *pay you £10 every time we get it wrong*. The final phrase presupposes that there will be such cases, and more than one for each customer.

This material solidly reinforces HSBC as relatively powerful and the customer as relatively powerless. I would suggest that the inclusion of legal elements such as this then constrains the coherent positions that the language 'voice' can occupy: it is difficult to then be informal and friendly. However, HSBC does attempt some 'conversationalization' through informal language use, such as by using clause fragments instead of full clauses:

> *Easy to open. Simple to understand. Easy to manage.*
> *To help you keep track of your money.*

In the context of regulatory statements, however, any conversational, informal position can come across as inauthentic and false.

The Orange texts use informal grammar quite consistently. Sentences can begin with conjunctions:

And you don't have to take our word for it.

Informal, conversational clause structure, contractions, and informal punctuation such as dashes are common in the Orange texts:

It happens. Phones get lost…
don't, won't, you're, can't

If you need to contact someone abroad, a friend on holiday or a relative
    living outside the UK – it makes perfect sense to call from your Orange
    phone.

To further reinforce the effect of conversation, the text mimics question-answer structures across two speakers:

I want to get through to people (with photo of person)
With Orange you will.

The texts use rhetorical questioning to simulate understanding of a problem that a customer might have:

Unexpected meeting? Orange can reserve an office suite for you…
Home from home? You'll want our international apartment reservation
    service.
A few days to spare? We can even charter a yacht for you.

Orange language uses well-known phrases and sayings that might occur in everyday speech:

whether it's time for morning coffee or afternoon tea
write home about it
keep your finger on the pulse
seven days a week
when you're a stranger in a strange town
peace of mind
home from home

There is also language play, using figures from poetic and oratorical language, such as alliteration:

So if you need directions in Dublin, a room in Rotterdam…or haute cuisine
    in Harare
be it Birmingham or Bali

Another rhetorical device (this time in the classical, rather than the RST sense) is the use of the 'rule of three' when creating lists, such as lists of benefits:

> *for emergencies, the office or when you're travelling.*
> *within each zone, day and night, seven days a week.*
> *offering city guides, executive services and international emergency*
>   *assistance across the globe*
> *we can direct you to a local pharmacy, medical centre or hospital*

Orange sentences vastly favour conjunction (*and*, *or*, and much more rarely *but*) over subordination. This, coupled with the fact that the preferred sentence length rarely goes beyond two clauses, means that sentences often begin with connectives:

> *Then you can schedule text message reminders…*
> *And because Answer Fax can receive multiple faxes…*
> *So, if you are on a Talk Plan from Talk 150 upwards…*

This adds to the impression of simplicity and informality, and more closely mimics the style of conversation. HSBC grammar ranges from the list-like:

> *Alternatively, you can:*
> *phone us on 0800…*
> *email us…*

to longer sentences with conditionals and circumstances:

> *If you choose not to hold your account at a particular branch, you can…*
> *Before we can complete your application we will need to see…*
> *When you open your account by phone or by sending in your application*
>   *form, you can…*

These sentences tend to be structurally more complex than Orange sentences and less apparently like speech. Finally, about a third of HSBC's sentences in this sample consist of recognisably 'legal' text, much more formal in nature than conversational English. Legal text tends not to use pronouns, for example, and tends not to break sentences where speakers might:

> *Payments under the Scheme are limited to 90% of the depositor's total*
>   *deposits subject to a maximum payment to any one depositor of*
>   *£18,000…*
> *Most deposits denominated in Sterling and other European Economic*
>   *Area currencies and euro made with offices of us within the European*
>   *Economic Area are covered.*

By contrast, the Orange texts use conversational devices, word play, and informal grammar and vocabulary to create the sense of a close relationship with readers. The presence of conversational features in the Orange texts, and their

relative absence in the HSBC texts, do seem to suggest that Orange is seeking a more personal, 'who we are' position for the Orange brand than HSBC.

This brief overview allows us to suggest a fourth hypothesis for further research, which allows us to bring in some specific brand qualities that may be associated with close social relationships.

> **Hypothesis 4: Conversationalization**. The greater the frequency of 'conversational' linguistic features and their written correlates in a brand text, the more socially close the reader will feel to the brand, and the more likely they will be to associate the brand with 'human' brand qualities such as 'warm' and 'approachable'.

Testing such a hypothesis would require careful control of the content of texts and perhaps presenting consumers with different versions to rate for 'humanness'.

3.5 Orange and HSBC brand positions

The analysis reported in this paper does seem to support the view that Orange and HSBC language establishes them in different positions on the Brand Analytics continuum. Orange language positions its brand as offering services, help and support, and being in close connection with its customers' lifestyles. The texts strongly associate the Orange name with its services, and those services as belonging to the consumer. This creates a chain that encourages the consumer to have ownership of what Orange offers, rather than Orange owning the services itself. While the Orange brand aspires to occupying the rightmost intangible position on the continuum, however, its language does not completely support this. The texts do not explicitly foreground its values and people, do not make claims for its staff, and do not repeat any set of beliefs about what it stands for. The language simply positions the brand as a supportive presence that does not differentiate between people, phones, and services – all are interchangeable. Inanimate and ethereal services are personified, sharing the human qualities of the company and the brand. For Orange, it is as if phones *are* people. This places the customer, who has his or her hand on her phone most of the time, in physical proximity with the brand identity and values. Orange does not therefore need to talk explicitly about its employees, having successfully turned services into people. The brand speaks informally, even conversationally, perhaps much as customers might do to their friends on the phone.

The HSBC texts position the company as a provider of services that enjoys a large infrastructure. The infrastructure and services clearly belong to HSBC, but it allows its customers to use them subject to certain conditions being met. The language does not suppose any particular qualities about consumer lifestyles beyond that the customer wants the services to be accessible. It claims posses-

sion of the services it offers without branding them explicitly, and it is not clear from the presentation how extensive or limited the list of services is. It is up to HSBC to offer or withdraw services from its customers at any time. It does not expect a close relationship with customers as it has a regulatory obligation over them, but at times can talk to them quite casually. Although positioning on the Brand Analytics continuum cannot be done precisely, HSBC's language seems to suggest a products and services emphasis – rather than an infrastructure claim, which would place it in the leftmost position – but its positioning of services in relation to consumers is completely different from Orange's in that consumers are not at liberty to call these services their own. This is perhaps a difference between the two brands that the Brand Analytics continuum has not the delicacy to reflect.

We have also seen that language analysis can detect whether the positions that are being constructed for brand consumers are attractive and appropriate. Orange heavily constructs its consumers as young, busy, and popular, and itself as helping them do what such people need to do. The assumptions HSBC has about customers are either neutral or negative – such as the assumption that they may want to go into the red without authorisation, or the assertion that the bank cannot take only one form of identification (presumably in case customers are lying about who they are) to open an account. Its own position is one of checking up on them before allowing them to take advantage of its services. It is not in dispute that banks need to operate such procedures, but the careful management of Tone of Voice is about how foregrounded and how well counterbalanced these messages are.

4   Discussion and conclusion

There are some important points to note about the methodology of this small study, and of future, larger ones. Companies may not be using language that suits their brand position on the continuum, and so it cannot be assumed that any existing text is a perfect example – or a perfect test of the theory that language can predict and reflect brand position. However, linguistic analysis can expose shortcomings, and can act as useful means of triangulation, testing other means of auditing brand position.

We should also bear in mind that any sample of language might be untypical. Companies produce large amounts of language, written and spoken. We know that language varies between genres and registers and so it would be odd to assume that a company's whole language output, given that the document types and purposes are different, will offer a consistent result. A company's brand positioning may also be deliberately inconsistent throughout its output. It may

be part of brand positioning to reflect genre and register in different ways. Different brands output different genres of texts, and the pattern of genres that are chosen are part of the brand's communication identity. This means that we may not always be able to find texts that are comparable between brands.

However, I hope it is clear, even given these provisos, that the application of some well known language frameworks – chains of reference, transitivity analysis, presupposition, features of tenor being but four – can add to our insights about how brands communicate and position themselves, deliberately or otherwise. What I have not done so far is to attempt to link brands to distinct brand values, such as *warm*, *expert*, and *friendly*. Neither have I shown that particular language features appearing in the brand Tone of Voice will have a predictable effect on readers in general (or readers of certain kinds). That is, it is not possible to say as yet whether deliberate use of, say, certain participant roles or features of tenor will prompt readers to feel that the brand is communicating the values that the brand owners hope it is. It is crucial that consumer research on the hypotheses outlined above actually tests whether different language choices are having the effects that we intuitively think they might.

The four linguistic approaches outlined above represent only a small sample of the possible ways in which linguistic theory can be used to interrogate the linguistic construction of brand position. While there is not the room in this paper to go into the interesting area of Appraisal Theory (see for example, Iedema et al., 1994; Christie & Martin, 1997; White, 1998; Macken-Horarik & Martin, 2003, inter alia), the kinds of features identified within the Theory (which might be more appropriately termed a *model*, or an extension of the various networks within a systemic grammar) are suggested to be those that show the writer's or speaker's point of view or evaluation of the content of what they are saying. This is likely to be a feature of branded texts, and if so, it will have a role to play in developing a notion of *authorial presence* (or brand presence?) to readers and hearers. That is, if the brand (or author, or narrator) of the text is constructed as having a point of view, it is likely that they may come across as being more (or less) certain, human, authoritative, and so on – some of which features may relate closely to the brand values identified earlier on in this paper. This view can be stated as Hypothesis 5:

> **Hypothesis 5: Explicit evaluation**. The reader's/hearer's impression of the brand will be influenced by linguistic markers of the brand's 'point of view' such as those identified within Appraisal Theory.

The weasel word here is 'impression' – we would of course need to find a way of identifying what an 'impression' is, and how it might vary, in order to test with groups of consumers.

Another possible way of identifying textual characteristics with brand values is through the lexicon, and through collocation studies. We know from literary stylistics (cf. Carter, 1982; Carter & Nash, 1990; Carter & Simpson, 1989, for example) that poetic effects are often created through the use of unusual lexis and unusual collocation. While the nature of the data examined for the study reported above did not really reveal much in the way of unusual lexis, there are many branded texts (such as the advertising and marketing copy referred to in Section 2, for example) that do offer more lexical potential. In relation to such texts, then, Hypothesis 6 seems to be a reasonable assumption:

Hypothesis 6: Unusualness. The higher the number of low-frequency vocabulary items and collocations that occur in the brand text, the more likely the reader/hearer will be to associate the brand with 'unusual' brand qualities such as 'quirky' or 'fun'.

Testing Hypothesis 6 will clearly involve using a large-scale corpus, either of the language in general or, ideally, of the language of brands from a similar sector, to benchmark the frequency and collocational patterns of the terms of interest.

These six hypotheses do not exhaust the language features potentially applicable to describing how brand positions are constructed through the medium of language. There are several other fields of study which may well yield ways of tracing the links between language form, brand values, and the perception of brand 'personality' by readers. For example, we know from research in psychology[12] that personality traits are known to affect, and be realised by, linguistic behaviour (e.g. Dewaele, 2002; Pennebaker & King, 1999; Gill, 2003), although the kinds of personality trait that psychologists are interested in – such as extroversion and aggression – are not always those that brand owners would require a text to communicate. Linguistic patterns have been found to relate to personal qualities such as sociability, anxiety and other emotions, the intention to deceive, and even the state of the writer's/speaker's physical or psychological health (e.g. Gill & Oberlander, 2003; Newman et al., 2003; Hancock et al., 2003; Graybeal et al., 2002; Hemenover, 2003; Oxman et al., 1988; Campbell & Pennebaker, 2003). It will also be relevant to try to relate the kinds of qualities that appear in branding to the current theories of personality, such as the 'Big Five' Theory (cf. Goldberg, 1993; John, 1990) and the Five Factor Model (cf. McRae & Costa, 1997).

4.1 Commercial uses of linguistic techniques

The application of linguistic frameworks to commercial texts has not been without controversy, and the use of this research to work with commercial

clients to further their aims in business goes against the traditional application of these methods.

The development of linguistic analysis of advertising and media such as newspaper reporting has been to some extent – and certainly was in its inception – intended to expose the practices of organisations that in some ways seek to manipulate, or even deceive, the general public. For example, the outer cover of Fairclough's (1989) *Language and Power* describes the book as 'about how language functions in maintaining and changing power relations in modern society, about ways of analysing language which can reveal these processes, and about how people can become more conscious of them and more able to resist and change them.' Cook (2001: 208) presents a review of academic attitudes to advertising and the ways in which these attitudes have shaped research. Concentrating on the work of Geis (1982) and Williamson (1978) as examples, Cook (2001: 210) suggests that the ideological position represented in such work is that 'the senders of ads are villains, intent on deception; the recipients are uneducated, vulnerable, and easily deceived; the observers are superior to both, and unaffected by the text, because they can decode it.' However, Cook also points out that, as ads have become more mainstream, and 'there is something more to them than mere commercial activity' (ibid: 214), there is less problematising of them in the more recent academic literature and more apparent acceptance that they are but one genre worthy of scholarly attention. While the assumption that linguistic analysis should necessarily be a means of fighting against the ubiquity, morals, economics or politics underlying the production of a genre of text has apparently become less strong, there is little so far that takes the opposite view: that linguistics could actually be applied to *help* advertisers – or the brand owners behind them – to create texts that do a particular job, and to understand better how texts might communicate in certain ways. The perspective taken in this paper represents such a view – that the insights available from within linguistics can, and should, be made available to a commercial audience, who seek to improve their understanding of the language upon which their businesses depend.

Attention to the language that companies used in areas outside creative copywriting tasks such as advertising really began with the widespread adoption of 'Plain English' or 'Clear English' initiatives in the 1980s, which were mainly intended to help customers understand important communications such as forms, letters, and the terms and conditions of credit cards and mortgages. At the same time, as Cameron (2000) reports, the language used in call centres was also receiving prescriptive attention, with mixed results. Neither of these initiatives had behind them any linguistic underpinning that we might recognise

as coming from academic research in the field. The development of 'branded language' or 'Tone of Voice' is a much more recent phenomenon, developing only perhaps since 2000, and only two agencies in the UK, Enterprise IG and Linguistic Landscapes, have applied to it any techniques, approaches, or knowledge from linguistics.

Fairclough (1989: 211–23 et seq) has characterised the use of explicit language knowledge to produce specific effects as a 'technologization of discourse', in which 'everyday' orders of discourse become increasingly regulated by researchers, designers, and trainers, and that the resulting styles of discourse 'simulate' elements of private discourse in the public sphere (Fairclough, 1992: 215ff). It is important to note that few of the genres through which brands are communicated are easily describable as 'everyday' in the sense that they are the site of personal identity work for the individuals and groups that produce them, with the exception of spontaneous speech (e.g. face-to-face and telephone interactions). While the notion of 'discourse technologist' can imply a negative view of the use of language knowledge in commercial contexts and to serve commercial aims, there are positive benefits to the presence of knowledgeable practitioners who use linguistic insights to improve the coherence, consistency, brevity, clarity, appropriateness and interest – and therefore the effectiveness – of the communications that companies use. Research informed by knowledge about language can, for example, find out the specific request forms that customers prefer when they are being asked to do something, or find out whether the 'Plain Language' that is being used is in fact over-simple and condescending for some customer groups. It seems clear that knowledgeable practitioners working in commercial contexts can be influential in providing linguistically-enlightened advice – such as counselling against the use of call centre scripting – when it is otherwise doubtful that companies would ever come into contact with, let alone be influenced by, academic views on the subject.

This is not to say that the application of linguistic theory in commercial contexts is without its practical problems. Applying linguistics to commercial communications still needs to be further developed if companies and organisations are to feel fully comfortable with it. Such development will need to overcome at least the following challenges:

1. Using linguistics potentially adds a costly and time-consuming step to the process of understanding a brand's communication needs and current patterns, which is something that could conceivably be done 'by eye', using a linguist, copywriter, or other language-aware professional who would simply read or listen to communications to gain a

general impression. The linguistic approach will undoubtedly produce an analysis at a level of detail that the client company will rarely want to see.

2. Even when a satisfactory linguistic description of a desired Tone of Voice has been completed, it is difficult to express it in terms that the people who need to use it will understand. This is because few of the adult working population in the UK have any background in grammar and related concepts. While my own experience has shown it to be possible to discuss passives and reflexive verbs with the branding team of a Spanish bank, I have not encountered a British client with such a well-developed understanding of grammar. Interestingly, design specialists have their own technical vocabulary, and are happy to talk about reverse blocks, half-tones, picas, and call-outs, but communications specialists in the industry appear content to manage without a metalanguage at any similar level of specificity.

However, if these challenges can be overcome, there are also advantages that can be gained from the application of linguistic frameworks in the planning and production of commercial texts. Firstly, systematic linguistic analysis exposes patterns that are not casually visible 'by eye', and can yield genuinely new insights into the ways commercial texts work. Secondly, because branding is based on the idea that brands need to be distinctive from one another, it is surely important to brand owners to have some reliable way of describing what is distinctive about a brand's language. Linguistic analysis provides for an explicit description of language patterns, and hence for such an explicit statement, in place of the rather vaguer statements currently extant. Thirdly, an explicit, linguistically-sound understanding of a language style is both potentially communicable for training and information within the company, and usable for detecting (and planning) shifts in the brand's language across time. Fourthly, experience suggests that companies are often grateful for evidence, rather than just opinion, about the best language to use to communicate their brands – to settle internal arguments about what is, and what is not, 'on brand', if nothing else. Finally, it is important for any organisation with global aspirations to think about how its communications might work in other languages. Explicit statements about Tone of Voice in the source language can help translators to see what kind of 'feel' they might need to create in communications in target languages. Ideally, a Tone of Voice would be worked out independently for each language of application, and specified at a level of linguistic detail that enabled translators to use it for guidance on their written style.

Notes

1   I am grateful to several people, linguists and others, who have helped refine the framework reported here, particularly those who have helped apply it to commercial branded texts. Thanks in particular to John Bateman in Bremen, Susana Murcia-Bielsa in Madrid, and David Lewis of Enterprise IG Information Design. I would also like to thank four anonymous reviewers for their detailed and most helpful comments on a first draft of the paper.

2   Personal communication, Enterprise IG internal presentation, 2001.

3   *Design Week*, 26 January 2006, page 6: 'Building Society strategy by Lloyd Northover'.

4   *Design Week*, 2 February 2006, page 4: 'The Core tries to instil personality into Argos brand'.

5   WPP is a group of more than 125 communications services companies (including, but not limited to, marketing, advertising, branding, and media) in 106 countries, employing over 91,000 people worldwide. Key office details and contacts can be found from the WPP Group company directory at www.wpp.com/directory.

6   TXU Energi's brand values are no longer available on-line, due to its merger with Powergen (now E.ON) in the UK. Orange brand values are available on the Orange web site. http://www.orange.com/English/aboutorange9/philoso-phyandvalue2.asp?bhcp=1.

7   See for example http://www.brandchannel.com/features_effect.asp?pf_id=281 for a description of brand Tone of Voice from the branding agency Interbrand.

8   Research undertaken by Enterprise IG Information Design in 2003 with 120 users of a government service, involving detailed language questionnaires and interviewing of both department staff and the public. The research is, however, subject to confidentiality.

9   Although the brand is not explicitly named in this case, this kind of referential link only works when the concept that is being re-specified is active in short-term memory. This accounts for its categorisation of 'strong evocation' – it can only be successfully used when the concept *is* strongly evoked.

10 Interestingly, BT Cellnet has three explicit mentions in running text. They offer a free dedicated phone to HSBC customers. BT Cellnet is therefore the only brand name mentioned in body text.

11 Stubbs (1996) discusses a judge's use of these forms in a courtroom and a jury's likely interpretations of them: *you may think that…* for example, is interpreted as *I am allowing you to think that…* rather than *you might think that…* because of the jury's assumptions about the authority of the judge and their uncertainty about their own role and rights.

12 I am grateful to Alastair Gill for introducing me to this literature.

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