Abstract
Tracking the emergence of image nuclear news stories in Western broadsheet newspapers, in particular the *Sydney Morning Herald*, this paper investigates the evolution of the news story in the multimodal presentation of newsworthy events in today’s media - where photographs and words combine to create news stories. Through a semiotic analysis of the use of press photographs in Western broadsheet newspapers, this paper draws on image theory presented by Barthes (1977), and that of Kress and van Leeuwen (1994), the latter of which is greatly influenced by the theory of language as social semiotic as developed by Michael Halliday (1978). Rick Iedema, Susan Feez and Peter White (1994) introduced an orbital perspective on the news story genre by describing the nucleus^satellite relationship between headline, lead and lead development in the hard news story. This structure has also been variously described as the inverted pyramid structure (Bell, 1991; Conley, 2002), and the instalment method (Van Dijk, 1988). This paper argues that the orbital structured news story can have either a verbiage or image nucleus by tracing the genesis of the image nuclear news story since the 2000 redesign of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. It further argues that in an increasingly commercialised media where the boundaries between entertainment and journalism are being eroded, image is being used to soften the face of hard news through its careful selection and placement on predominantly hard news pages.

Introduction
Resistance to photography as a legitimate vehicle for objective news gathering has long been at the centre of criticism regarding the use of photographs in newspapers (Bicket and Packer, 2004). Early photographic images in the illustrated tabloids of the 1920s, for example, were viewed merely as design elements aimed at attracting the reader, rather than as potentially powerful instruments of news reporting (Bicket and Packer, 2004). Over time, however, we have witnessed a gradual shift towards a visual paradigm (Bolter, 1996) and now we regularly see both words and images combining in multimodal texts as a prominent means of conveying news. This is supported by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and by Dondis (1973, cited in Goodman, 1996: 42). The latter points out that:

> In the modern media… the visual dominates; the verbal augments. Print is not dead yet, nor will it ever be, but, nevertheless, our language-dominated culture has moved perceptibly towards the iconic (p.7).

The transition from prose to visual narrative is clearly illustrated in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, where the photograph is being empowered with the ability to tell the story itself. This newspaper regularly presents both disruptive and non-disruptive news stories as image nuclear news bites, with a dominant news photograph, a heading¹ above the image and a short caption either below or to the side of the image. Such stories appear to be told in the first

¹ I use the term ‘heading’ rather than ‘headline’ to distinguish between the more traditional use of headlines in verbiage nuclear news stories and the ‘headings’ in image nuclear news stories.
instance through the image and then the verbal text anchors (Barthes, 1977) the meaning in the image to a particular reading.

This paper investigates the role of such images in the telling of the news. In particular, I point out that there is a new and unique news story genre, the image nuclear news story, that has emerged in the *Sydney Morning Herald* since the 2000 redesign, and that its use on predominantly hard news pages is an ideological move by the *Sydney Morning Herald* to retain an ever dwindling readership. I have chosen to base my analysis in a systemic functional linguistic framework since the research conducted on the news story genre by Rick Iedema and his colleagues (1994) and that on image analysis by Gunter Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996) also uses a systemic model. It is my intention here to bring these two together in a very specific analysis of image/verbiage relations in the image nuclear news story.

**The Nuclear News Story**

To begin, let's first examine how nuclearity in the news story developed and then examine how press photography fits into this evolution. In Australian newspapers, early news stories remained faithful to the narrative and literary norms of the time with a poetic retelling of the events in the order in which they had occurred as shown in Figure 1. This story appeared on page 11 of the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1831, under the general heading of ‘Domestic Intelligence’. It reported on putting down a bacchanalian scene, where Sydney residents were discovered lying prostrate on the ground, supping at what was described as a ‘precious liquid’ from a barrel of rum that had burst open and had found its way through the gutter onto George Street.

> On Tuesday evening, about the hour of eight o'clock, a luncheon of rum in the bonded store at the back of the Gazette Office burst, and the intoxicating stream found its way through the drain into St. George Street, the invigorating cry of 'grog ahoy' was immediately raised, and pots, pans, buckets, &c were put into instant requisition for saving the precious liquid, which by this time had obtained the constituency of pea soup; some who had not the convenience of utensils stretched themselves on mother earth and lapped up the beverage, until they became incapable of rising; others were staggering off in various directions scarcely capable of maintaining their equilibrium, and even a batch of children were seen quaffing the beverage with much gusto. A bacchanalian scene ensued, and the conservators of the peace were required to put it down.

**Figure 1: An early news story in the *Sydney Morning Herald***

(Iedema, Feez and White, 1994)

This was given the name chronological recount by Rick Iedema and his colleagues Susan Feez and Peter White (1994) in their research on Media Literacy which was part of the Write-it-right project in NSW. They called it Recount because it involved the retelling of the unfolding of a series of events and chronological because those events were told in the same order in which they had originally occurred (Refer to Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Events unfolding in time in first news story** (Iedema et al., 1994)
Recount relies on the audience having shared interests and shared values, which was still possible in 1830s Sydney since it had a relatively small population. This is evident in the text itself in that the street name or address for the Gazette Office is not given in the story. It is clearly assumed that everyone would have known where it is, and with such a small, close population it was highly likely that those reading the newspapers would have already known most of the details of this story before it even appeared in the newspaper.

Moreover, restrictions on the dissemination of the news to all sectors of society which began in the UK in 1712 and continued for 150 years, also affected newspapers produced in Australia. These were known as “Taxes on Knowledge” (Chalaby, 1998:11), and were designed to make pamphlets and newspapers too expensive for the large majority of people. However, in Australia, the last of these duties was repealed in 1861, and the first newspaper moguls were subsequently able to provide cheap mass circulation newspapers to everyone. The aim of newspapers became that of profit, circulation increased, a wider cross-section of the population started to access newspapers and a new unique news story genre began to emerge.

Initially, the first sentence of the story seemed to carry more responsibility in ‘predicting’ (Iedema, et al., 1994) or summarising the essence of the story, often viewed as the precursor to the lead paragraph we see in news stories today. Then, technological developments also influenced the manner in which the news was told. With the worldwide introduction of the telegraph during the nineteenth century, technical problems along with the expense of using such equipment left many editors with “yarns half spun” (Conley, 2002: 115) and soon journalists operating in the field were being told to “send us your best stuff first, otherwise it’s of no use to us” (Stephens, 1997, cited in Conley, 2002: 115). Thus, the notion of the lead as story in microcosm emerged, which along with the introduction of the headline to capture the attention of the audience enhanced the urgency of the story, making it appear current and therefore worthy of being read. Schudson (cited in Bell, 1991) described this transition from chronology to the lead as summary in American newspapers as one in which journalists were also transformed from being stenographers recording events to interpreters.

The role of the lead paragraph is seen as the means by which the significance of the story is established. Here, Bell (1998, cited in Bell and Garrett, 1998) suggests that rather than being guided by narrative norms, news stories are governed by the values of news discourse. They proclaim their news values and as such it is news values that take a story into the news. He goes on to suggest that the remainder of the story then elaborates upon the lead, filling in more and more details and moving from the most important information to the least important, sometimes moving towards other related information or towards the reasons behind a particular happening. Both Bell (1991) and Conley (2002) refer to this method of organising the text as the inverted pyramid, and suggest that since the story has been written in the order of importance it can easily be cut from the bottom up without requiring extensive editing to ensure that the intended meaning is still intact. Given the constraints of space in newspapers today and the pressure of meeting deadlines, this may be viewed as a particularly cost effective way of organising the text.

In the inverted pyramid structure then, the story is written “with the facts arranged in order of importance” (Conley, 2002: 114). This suggests that
there is a hierarchy of news values that presents the news in order of importance. Conley further states that “there is no “conclusion” to a news story, only the least important paragraph” (2002: 114). However, news stories do often include some form of wrap up at the end of the story, for example a funeral date or court appearance date, which is not accounted for in the inverted pyramid structure, and which throws into question whether there is such an order of importance in the facts presented in news stories. Thus, a more appropriate generic structure is that of the orbital structure suggested by Iedema et al. (1994) when they describe the nucleus^satellite structure of the hard news story. This has been referred to by Van Dijk (1988) as the instalment method. According to these generic structures, the events introduced in the lead may be returned to one or more times in increasing detail throughout the lead development. Iedema et al. (1994) go further in their description of the lead development to suggest that these paragraphs are organised into satellites which, rather than being organised around their importance, are organised according to the kinds of information they present. Thus the satellites may elaborate by giving more details of the lead information. They may extend by adding other related information, or they may enhance by attempting to get at the causes of an event or issue. Figure 3 illustrates the nucleus^satellite structure.

![Figure 3: Nucleus^satellite structure of the Hard News Story (Iedema, et al., 1994)](image)

In this model the headline and the lead have a very close relationship with each other and together form the nucleus of the story. It is called a nucleus because this is the centre of the story around which all other information is organised. The information presented in the satellites has more to do with the nucleus than it does with the other satellites. The social purpose of the headline is to bring out the most salient aspect of the event (Iedema, et al., 1994). Its form is governed by space constraints, which allows content and urgency to combine in a form that is quite different to the rest of the story. It may leave out certain grammar words or use the verb in the timeless present to attract attention or signal the currency or recency of the event. Bell (1998, cited in Bell and Garrett, 1998) suggests that the headline is derived solely from the lead sentences and not from further down in the story and that the content of the lead serves to disambiguate the headline.
The Press Photograph
So where does the press photograph fit into this history? Illustrations and cartoons have been used in the newspaper since its inception. Cartoons have been used extensively in the media predominantly to satirise current events, which are usually political in nature. Portraiture was (and still is) used to identify those that were prominent news figures, although today they are often photographed in a much more active position within their particular situational context. The news photograph, however, came into being most prominently during the First World War, some thirty to forty years after the invention of the half-tone process, which allowed for the transfer of images onto newsprint. Becker (2004) surmises from this fact that it was not then the technology that established the conditions for the use of photographs in newspapers, rather it was a set of “cultural and political circumstances that established the patterns for a visual culture of journalism” (152). Thus, what the technology affords, the social takes advantage of.

However, it was the tabloid press of the 1920s that fully embraced photography in newspapers, using large, sensational photographs that usually revolved around the themes of violence, sex, scandal and accidents. Robert Taft labelled the reproduction of such photographs in the tabloids as “trite, trivial, superficial, tawdry, salacious, morbid or silly” (1938, cited in Becker, 1992:133). Thus the early press photograph earned its reputation as sensational journalism, making it increasingly difficult to view it as a credible medium for serious news reporting. During the interwar period, picture magazines established the genre of photo-reportage, or photo essay, and documentary photography began to be respected as a form of popular art, thus elevating the status of photojournalism to one which combined the formal structure of documentary photography with the notion of the photograph as possessing aesthetic value (Becker, 1992).

By the time of the Vietnam War during the 1970s, the lenses of both still and moving cameras were making audiences across the globe eyewitnesses to the atrocities of war. Some of the most memorable and terrifyingly authentic images to come out of that war were instrumental in swaying public opinion and fuelling antiwar protests around the world (Sontag, 2003). Since then, news reports have often been accompanied by photographs to the extent that it is now rare for lead stories in the newspapers not to have photographs with them. Such photographs stand in evidence of the events and issues happening around us. Many of them are very disturbing in nature, instances of the aftermath of disasters both natural and man-made, all too often depicting the mangled remains of our material world.

Yet despite its ability to offer subjective judgement of an event, the press photograph has struggled to be recognised as a means of communication. It is often viewed as being less demanding on the viewer than language (Iedema et al., 1994). The press photograph appears to literally reproduce an event as it actually happened, to stand as testimony to the truth and hence is seen as an objective observer of an event, simply recording what really happened. Barthes (1977) describes the characteristic tense of the news photograph as the historic instantaneous. He then goes on to state, however, that the choice of this moment over that, this person rather than that person, this angle rather than another angle, and ultimately this photograph rather than that one to represent a particular event, is a highly ideological procedure. Thus, the photograph appears to suppress its selective/interpretive/ideological function (Barthes, 1977), hidden behind the
veneer of objective news reporting. This can be very clearly illustrated in the reporting of the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein, in Iraq on April 9th 2003. In Western media outlets, the tight camera angles suggested that thousands of people were there to witness this monumental event. Indeed, the London Evening Standard newspaper’s front page photograph showing thousands of jubilant demonstrators was subsequently shown to be a fake, a result of poorly executed digital manipulation. However, footage of a very small crowd at the same event shown on the Arabic-language television station Al Jazeera painted quite a different picture. Thus, Stuart Hall (cited in Cohen and Young, 1981) suggests that the press photograph must subject itself not only to exploitation at the level of formal news values but also to their subsequent interpretive coding according to the major ideological themes of society, which the newspaper professes to articulate.

The relationship between the press photograph and its caption has also been theorised to the extent that the caption is said to anchor the meaning of the image to that intended by the newspaper. Roland Barthes (1997) suggests that all images are polysemous, a “floating chain of signifieds” (39). Through the addition of the linguistic message, the meaning can be fixed to one that not only identifies elements of the depicted scene in the image but also allows us to interpret those meanings through the connotations in the symbolic message. Once again this points towards an ideological stance in which some meanings are allowed to proliferate while others are suppressed. Extensive research by Gunter Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996), published in their book Reading Images: a grammar of visual design, offers valuable insights as to the meaning potential of the visual. However, they move away from Barthes’ position, rejecting the notion that images are too polysemous and that language has to come to the rescue, and suggest that Barthes misses an important point in that the visual component of a text is an independently organised and structured message, connected with the verbal text, but not dependent on it.

However, given this description of the appearance of press photography we now need to determine its position in the functional structure of the multimodal news story. Iedema et al. (1994) place the press photograph in the satellites, illustrating and elaborating upon the content of the story, acting as evidence of what has been fully explored and explained in the paragraphs/verbiage. For some theorists this may be an adequate description of its role in verbiage nuclear news stories but what happens when the image is seen to take on a nuclear role in the news story? The remainder of this paper will seek to distinguish image nuclear news stories from the more common verbiage nuclear news stories and explore the image verbiage relations in such stories in Australian broadsheet newspapers and in particular, the Sydney Morning Herald.

Image Nuclear News Story
Since the 2000 redesign of the Sydney Morning Herald (hereafter SMH), there has been a noticeable increase in the use of somewhat autonomous images. Initially, this did not appear to be any different from the filler pictures newspapers commonly use when space permits. Such photographs are what might be termed soft news images, rather than hard news images. They usually contain limited news value, if any at all, and would generally reflect or confirm the established social order, and be selected more for their aesthetic qualities; the caption accompanying such photographs rarely moves beyond identifying the represented participants, and possibly the occasion.
By 2003, however, there had been a significant shift in the format of such stories and it was no longer just the soft news stories that were treated in this manner. The addition of a heading also signified a change in the relationship between the image and its accompanying verbiage. This can be best explained through an example. Consider the following news stories reporting a somewhat destabilising event concerning the havoc caused by Hurricane Ivan in the Caribbean in September 2004. The story appeared in both the *Australian* and the *SMH* on the same day. Their respective treatment of the event, however, is remarkably different.

The story exemplified in Figure 4 from the *Australian* is a fairly typical verbiage nuclear hard news story. There is no denying that the photograph used is a salient image. It takes up two thirds of the page in the newspaper and clearly dominates the verbiage it accompanies. It depicts the damage caused by Hurricane Ivan in St George’s, Grenada. The scale of the devastation is clear and hints at what is to come for the people of Cuba, the next island in the path of this storm. A much smaller photograph depicts Dr Castro examining meteorological charts. The large photograph has virtually no relevance to the current story, apart from exemplifying what destruction this ‘monster’ is capable of, which may help galvanise people into taking the necessary precautions being recommended by the President of Cuba. Beyond this there appears to be little reason for including the photograph of the boats. There is no mention of Grenada anywhere in the news story or elaboration on the 34 people that were killed there. It could have easily been left out without affecting the meaning in the story. So what does it add by being included? It may make us more worried for the people of Cuba, if this is the kind of destruction the hurricane has already caused. It may also make us empathise with the people of Grenada. Thus it may be working on an emotional level, which is not explicitly stated in the verbiage.

By examining how the nucleus of this news story has been written we can begin to understand the news value justifying the inclusion of this story in the newspaper. As can be seen in Figure 5, the headline makes use of the timeless present in the process ‘prepares’, it is telegraphic, and uses the intensified lexical item ‘monster’. The lead serves to disambiguate the
headline by providing more details about what form those preparations were to take, which island is being talked about and what the ‘monster’ actually is. Castro’s grilling of meteorologists is captured in the small photograph and the damage previously caused by the monster in the larger image. One may only assume that the 34 deaths mentioned in the caption to the larger image are among the 60 mentioned in the lead paragraph. There is no further mention of any deaths in the remainder of the story. In fact, the story is focused more around the verbal declarations coming from Castro and his officials. Dr Castro’s urging of his people to be prepared for the worst is returned to several times during the story. Therefore, the angle of the story is focused more on an issue emanating from an event, rather than the event itself.

**Figure 5: Nucleus analysis of Hard News Story**

If we now turn to the same event as it was reported in the SMH (Figure 6), we are met with quite a different approach to this story. Figure 6 (overleaf) is an example of an image nuclear news story, with the generic structure also labelled. Immediately we can see that the heading ‘It’s spraytime on the waterfront’ is quite differently formatted. It is a complete clause. It contains metaphor and is playful. Reference to the 1954 movie ‘On the Waterfront’ combines with the substitution of spray for play in the nominal group ‘playtime’ and both resonate through to the photograph of young men playing in the spray on the harbour front in Havana. Thus what is metaphorised in the headline is then concretised in the tangible instant that is the photograph. Apart from exemplifying the power of the seas (which could easily be witnessed on any windy day), there is no hint of danger in this photograph. The play then continues into the beginning of the caption with what was predicted to be the worst storm to hit Cuba since 1924 described in the prosodic tail\(^2\) as ‘Wet and windy…’, and then goes on to identify the represented participants and their actions with ‘a group of young Cubans have fun among the spray from huge waves whipped up by Hurricane Ivan as they batter Havana’s waterfront…’. This disambiguates both the metaphors in the heading and the reading of the photograph. The rest of the caption then moves into the news behind the selection of this story for publication.

Martin (2001) raises the question of whether images can function in a similar way to imagery by establishing an evaluative orientation to the text. If we apply this notion to image nuclear stories, the photograph may be functioning as an evaluative Theme, not in the sense of Given information,\(^2\)

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\(^2\) The prosodic tail is echoic of the play set up between the heading and the image, and therefore relates more closely to the nucleus, rather than to the remainder of the caption.
but in the sense of being an Interpersonal Theme in the same way that comment Adjuncts encode a speaker’s disposition towards the message. Further, there is a distinct shift in register from the softer and more playful lexical choices of ‘spraytime’, ‘have fun’ and the alliterative ‘Wet and windy’ to the more destabilising language choices typical of hard news in ‘batter’, ‘full fury’, ‘cutting a devastating path’ and ‘deaths in its wake’. From this one may conclude that the traumatic events motivating the selection of this story for publication are accommodated within the evaluative stance of the nucleus, with its playful angle on this story and the choice of an aesthetically pleasing image. Thus, while the image used in the Australian seems to reinforce the urgency, danger, or need to prepare for the coming storm, the SMH seems to subvert any similar news values with this very playful take on the story.

Figure 6: Generic structure of image nuclear news story in the Sydney Morning Herald, 14/9/2004, p.11

In another example from 9th March 2005, we can again see a playful heading used along with an impressive image of a young Palestinian man (refer to Figure 7). The heading “Caught in the throws of revolt” plays with a common idiom ‘in the throes of’ by misspelling the word ‘throes’. This links directly with the sling shot the young man has just used to throw a stone at Israeli border police. This image also challenges the way we usually view confrontations between Israel and Palestine, quite often bloody affairs involving soldiers and massed demonstrators. The news story behind this image is then revealed in the caption in that Palestinians and Israeli soldiers have clashed over the construction of the new security barrier between these two states. Again, I would contend that the nucleus of the heading and image sets up an evaluative stance that is quite at odds with the news value of this story.

One final example in Figure 8 again demonstrates how the clever use of words in the heading combines with an impressive image to set up a particular way of reading the text which is subsequently subverted by the verbiage in the caption. Initially, one can read the heading "Watching their backs" at a literal level, as that is what the officer appears to be doing to the three soldiers in the image. The first clause in the caption also reinforces such a reading. However, we usually associate the phrase ‘watch your back’ with the notion of being careful, particularly when you are in unfamiliar territory or in a dangerous situation. Here, the second clause refers to this more usual meaning by stating that the Chinese government has “just approved a 12.6 per cent increase in the military budget”. The reader is then required to reappraise this story in light of such information and to surmise whether it is the Chinese who are ‘watching their backs’ or if other nations need to take note of such a move and start to watch their own backs more carefully.

Figure 8: Image nuclear news story, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18/3/2005, p.13
These examples illustrate a major shift in recent times in how newspapers like the *Sydney Morning Herald* choose to inform readers of the major happenings in the world. It could be seen as trivialising the news by some, or as distancing us from the destabilising events happening in other parts of the world. Such stories have become commonplace in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and during the last two to three years there may have been up to five or six in each day’s publication. However, they now appear to have stabilised somewhat in their distribution across the newspaper, most often appearing in the world news section. This may also be significant in that it is often easier to trivialise the actions of ‘others’, rather than ourselves.

**Conclusion**

It is my conclusion that the photograph in such stories forms a nuclear role with the heading that sets up an evaluative stance that is based predominantly in the playful. The caption works initially to concretise both the image and any metaphors used in the heading, before moving onto providing the more serious news value and justification of the story.

I believe that the inclusion of such stories in the newspaper has been a meaningful choice made by the *Herald* which may help retain its readership. Australian newspapers are commercial products. They are dependent on advertising revenue generated through circulation figures. Competition from electronic forms of the media will continue to influence the print media. As a result, they have to find new ways of attracting readers and preventing them from switching to other forms of the media. Some may describe the inclusion of image nuclear news stories as a tabloidisation of the news, sensationalising rather than serious. It must be admitted that they do tend to rely on the playfulness that is principally generated in word-games in the heading, regardless of whether the story, or even the image itself, is ultimately destabilising in nature. It is interesting that Frank Devine, who writes for the *Australian*, has described the *Sydney Morning Herald* since its 2000 redesign as a “stretched tabloid with oceans of white space on every page so as not to confuse the reader with too many words” (cited in Conley, 2002:30). Newspapers may be starting to feel the impact that the Internet is having upon the dissemination of the news, and this method of presenting the news, in short, sharp, witty image news bites could be one way in which the *Sydney Morning Herald* is responding to the challenge of the new media market.

Overall, the image nuclear news story may be viewed as softening the experience of reading the newspaper. It guides readers on a more palatable journey through the news pages, ultimately leading them to the editorial pages towards the back of the paper where the newspaper’s own ideology is revealed most explicitly to its readers. The *Sydney Morning Herald*’s ideal reader is from the AB market (tertiary educated middle class), thus the humour and word games established in the play in the nucleus will challenge such readers and stimulate them to reach that ‘higher-level’ comedy which is particularly reminiscent of British humour (conversation with the *Herald*). This is the type of reader the newspaper is most eager to retain. That the newspaper chooses to play with news events that are ultimately destabilising in nature, however, raises ideological questions that may prove difficult to answer.
References
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