

Functional Grammar

‘An Innocent Thug?’

**An investigation into contrasting news reports using
Systemic Functional Grammar Analysis**

By Alan McCarthy

Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Systemic Functional Grammar Theory

2.2 Systemic Functional Grammar in Media Text Analysis

3.0 Introducing the Texts

3.1 Register

4.0 Text Analysis

4.1 Thematic Patterning

4.2.1 Section 1 - The Headlines

4.2.2 Section 2 - Barton as theme

4.2.3 Section 3 - Supporting voices

4.2.4 Section 4 - Supporting voices (Part 2)

4.2.5 Section 5 - Barton's actions vs Barton's opinion

4.2.6 Section 6 - Another viewpoint

5.0 Summary

6.0 Conclusion

Appendix 1 –Newspaper Articles

Appendix 2 - Newspaper Articles divided into paragraphs

1.0 Introduction

In contrast to traditional grammars that place importance on language form, Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) emphasizes how language is used to express meaning. '[SFG] is semantic (concerned with meaning) and functional (concerned with how the language is used)' (Bloor and Bloor, 1995:2), making it a popular tool to investigate how linguistic items and grammatical patterns are used to express different semantic values (White, 2000).

In this paper, the principles of SFG theory will be applied to a comparative study of the stylistic properties and communicative functionality of two newspaper articles, in an attempt to expose the values encoded in the text. The paper starts by providing a brief overview of SFG, then introduces the newspaper articles. Following this, the texts are divided into sections and a detailed analysis of each part is undertaken to highlight the similarities and differences in style, structure, approach and tone. Finally, the main results of this analysis are reviewed and the paper concluded.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Systemic Functional Grammar Theory

One of the principle ideas of SFG, that language functions according to context, can be traced back to the work of Malinowski in the 1920s, who while attempting to translate the written texts of the Melanesian islanders, realized that without knowledge of the cultural context and situation, meaningful translation was impossible. This idea was taken up by other researchers, but only came to prominence when it was incorporated into the work of J.R.Firth. Inspired by this concept, many of Firth's students went on to develop SFG, and it is one of these students, Michael Halliday, who is credited as the 'major architect' of SFG (Martin 2001:150).

Derewianka (2001:256) says, 'Halliday's approach has been to develop a model of grammar which provides a clear relationship between functions and grammatical systems'. Such an approach reflects Halliday's belief that, 'language is as it is because of its function in social structures' (Halliday, 1973:65 cited in Fairclough, 1992:26).

Butt (2000:29) says that SFG redefines traditional grammar to recognise that, ‘words have functions as well as class, and that how a word functions can tell us more than any description of words in terms of class can about the piece of language, where it occurs, the person who chose to use it in that function, and the culture that surrounds the person and the message’.

One of the key features of SFG is the way it divides language and organizes grammar according to three metafunctions (or macrofunctions of language). These functions are labelled as *experiential* or *ideational*; *interpersonal*, and *textual*. Firstly, the *experiential* metafunction relates to the way language is used to express our perception of the world, and explains how we use language to describe ‘doings’ and ‘happenings’. Secondly, the interpersonal metafunction conveys how language is used to interact with other people, and how language is used to express judgements and attitudes. Thirdly, the textual metafunction refers to how messages are organised in relation to other messages to create coherence and cohesion. While all three metafunctions act together to produce meaning, in SFG they each have their own grammatical system (White, 2001; Lock, 1996; Thompson, 1996; Derewieka, 2001).

2.2 Systemic Functional Grammar in Media Text Analysis

Text analysis is one area of linguistic investigation that has seen extensive application of SFG theory. In particular, supporters of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) have adopted SFG concepts to uncover bias and ideological representations contained within texts (Widdowson, 1998). In relation to news reports, Cotter (2001:425) says that reporters are ‘storytellers’, and Bell (1999:236) says, ‘Journalists do not write articles. They write stories’. This highlights how media reports are interpretive and may explain why they present such an interesting area for text analysis. In this paper, two newspaper articles will be analysed using SFG.

3.0 Introducing the Texts

The texts chosen for analysis are two newspaper articles from November 5th, 2008, involving an allegation of racial abuse by a well known British soccer player, Joey Barton of Newcastle United, on another well-known player, Gabriel Agbonlahor of

Aston Villa. One report appeared in the online edition of the UK's most popular tabloid newspaper *The Sun*, and the other is taken from the online edition of the British broadsheet *The Times*. *The Sun* report is shorter with 334 words, while *The Times* report contains 484 words. Despite containing fewer words, *The Sun* report is spread over 15 paragraphs, compared to 13 paragraphs for *The Times*. (Appendix 1 contains the original versions of both reports.)

3.1 Register

Both articles come from the field of 'news reporting', as is evident from the single sentence structure of most paragraphs, the use of an attention grabbing headline written in large bold script, and the frequent use of reporting verbs, 'say', 'report', 'add', 'insist' and so on. More specifically, the texts come from 'football news reporting', apparent through such specialized lexical items as 'midfielder', 'referee', 'forward' and 'the FA'.

The mode (or channel of communication) for both articles is written text, publicly available to anyone with access to the internet. However, unlike traditional newspaper reports that do not provide readers with a medium for immediate response, the existence of a message board connected to each story makes the 'online' mode more interactive than the paper edition. This means that readers can post a response to the story, and the newspaper staff can monitor public opinion.

As might be expected when comparing a tabloid newspaper to a broadsheet, the tenors (or relationship between writer and reader) of the reports, while similar in many respects, do significantly differ in terms of lexicogrammatical selection. *The Sun* chooses more slang, colloquial and casual language (i.e. race row, thug, bust-up, ace, spat, f****g, and so on) to convey an informal 'local' feel. Fairclough (1995:194) comments on this interdiscursivity by saying, 'the Sun and similar newspapers, [are] a hybridization of public, written discourse and private, conversational discourse'. *The Times*, in contrast, chooses more standard forms that express a more distant and impersonal atmosphere.

4.0 Text Analysis

In this section, the two news reports will be analysed using SFG concepts to show how they construct a contrasting picture of events. The articles are divided into sub-sections according to thematic development, and each section is investigated separately. Due to limitations of space, only those examples that most clearly illustrate the intended viewpoint of the writers will be highlighted.

4.1 Thematic Patterning

One way writers make a text cohesive is through ‘thematic’ organisation (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). In the English language, the theme includes the lexical items (up to and including the first participant, process or circumstance) taking first position in the clause. These lexical items signal what the message will be about (White, 2000). Table 1. shows the thematic patterning for the chosen texts.

Table 1. Theme choices in the chosen texts.

* (P) refers to the paragraph and dotted lines (---) highlight the different sections of thematic development.

Section	The Sun	The Times
1 Headline	Barton...	Joey Barton...
2 Barton as theme	(P1) Soccer thug Joey Barton... (P2) The Newcastle United midfielder (P3) Barton...	(P1) Joey Barton... (P2) Barton ...
3 Supporting voices	(P4) Yesterday... (angry viewers) (P5) Viewer Guy Bradley... (P6) The restaurateur... (Guy Bradley)	(P3) The FA... (P4) We... (the FA) (P5) We...(the FA)
4 Supporting voices (Part 2)	(P7) Lip-reading expert Terry Ruane... (P8) Barton... (P9) The player...	(P6) Tim Webb... (P7) I... (Tim Webb) (P8) I... (Tim Webb)

	(P10) Barton...	
5 Barton's actions vs Barton's opinions	(P11) Just three weeks ago... (P12) He... (Barton) (P13) And it was his third match...	(P9) Yesterday...Barton (P10) I...(Barton) (P11) We... (P12) I...(Barton)
6 Another viewpoint	(14) A source at Villa... (15) The FA...	(P13) Barton....

Observing the thematic pattern reveals significant similarity in the organization of the texts. For example, sections 1 and 2 in both newspapers have Barton as the theme, and while other sections do not thematise the same participants, the type of participants chosen as theme are quite similar. For example, in sections 3 and 4, both newspapers turn to witnesses (making this section heavily focused around verbal projecting clauses). Overall, both reports follow a similar cohesive structure.

The rest of the analysis is now divided according to the sections shown in Table 1.

4.2.1 Section 1 – The Headlines

Identifying differences in the selection of lexical items and grammatical forms in each report, reveals a contrasting view of events. If the headlines are taken as an example, the different tone carried by the texts is immediately obvious.

The Sun **Barton in 'big lips' race row**

The Times **Joey Barton facing 'racial abuse' complaint**

The Sun article displays a more direct and sensational tone by reporting the incident as a 'race row'. The combination of 'race' and 'row' carries significant illocutionary force elevating the incident to status of a confrontation between two racial groups. *The Times* report in contrast, is much less provocative. It selects a formal and less extreme choice of lexical items and describes the event as a racial abuse 'complaint'. While 'racial abuse' would be considered a serious issue, attaching it to 'complaint' reduces its power. A 'complaint', unlike a 'row', does not convey any form of fight or confrontation.

When the experiential content is observed, the reports continue to portray a significantly different approach. *The Sun*, by employing the relational process ‘in’, places Barton firmly at the centre of the trouble. *The Times*, in contrast, positions Barton ‘facing’ a complaint. The adoption of the present continuous form is ambiguous, and could be interpreted to mean ‘is happening now’, or ‘is happening in the future’. If readers interpret it as the latter, the ‘complaint’ becomes unsubstantiated in the present reality.

Finally, while *The Sun* headline refers to the subject of the clause by his surname, ‘Barton’, *The Times* uses his full name, with the shortened form first name, ‘Joey’. Reah (1998:59) in her research into the language of newspapers says, ‘Naming is ... a very useful device in promoting a particular response from an audience.’ She goes on to propose that using the short form of a first name is sometimes used to suggest friendship. *The Times* report by employing this form, could be showing a more friendly approach to Barton than *The Sun*.

4.2.2 Section 2 - Barton as Theme

In section 2 of both reports, the tone is set for the whole article. *The Sun* vilifies Barton, while *The Times* distances Barton from wrongdoing.

Figure 1. *(The topical theme of each clause complex is underlined.)

<i>The Sun</i>	<i>The Times</i>
(Paragraph 1) <u>SOCCKER thug</u> <u>Joey Barton</u> was yesterday accused of calling a black player “big lips” during a bust-up.	(Paragraph 1) <u>Joey Barton</u> could face further disciplinary action after Aston Villa were reported to be considering making an official complaint to the FA after allegations the Newcastle United midfielder racially abused Gabriel Agbonlahor during the 2-0 victory at St James' Park on Monday night.

In paragraph one of *The Sun*, Barton is labelled a ‘thug’. This lexical choice carries significant force, equivalent to ‘violent man’ or ‘criminal’. The word ‘thug’ also carries considerable intertextual meaning and is currently used extensively in the media to describe gangs of youths who attack innocent bystanders. Its use to describe Barton is also intensified by the absence of the relational verb ‘is’, which effectively transforms the writer’s opinion into a fact or accepted state of affairs (Reah, 1998). Additionally, choosing to pre-modify the thematised head of the nominal group puts ‘thug’ in thematic position. Such positioning is usually reserved for given or known information (Fries, 1994:231), implying that the readers already know this information.

Or could the word ‘thug’ be positioned here to divert attention away from the projecting verbal process (accused) that immediately follows? By using ‘accused’ the whole incident suddenly becomes unproven. Interestingly, *The Sun* neglects to mention which agent is accusing Barton, for revealing the accuser could have significant impact upon the validity of the story, if this person/organization is considered lacking in authority or credibility. Van Leeuwen (1996:38) points out that, ‘representations include and exclude social actors to suit their interests and purposes in relation to the readers for whom they are intended’.

Further investigation into the experiential content of this paragraph reveals Barton is represented as a participant in a negative verbal process.

Barton	calling	a black player	“big lips	during a bust-up
Sayer	Process: Verbal	Receiver	Quoted	Circumstantial Adjunct

The Times article is quite different in its representation of Barton. In *The Times*, Barton is portrayed as a relatively neutral participant, and it seems that the writer, through their selection of lexical items and clause positioning, is trying to play down the events. In the first clause, Barton is linked to possible disciplinary action, but the use of a modal finite casts doubt on the likelihood of punishment.

Barton could face further disciplinary action

Subject	Modal Finite	Predicator	Adjunct
Mood Block		Residue	

An interpersonal analysis reveals that the application of the modal finite, ‘could’, changes the clause from a definite polarity to a possibility, as suggested by Butt (2000). This makes the whole clause uncertain, leaving the reader to wonder if Barton will face punishment or not.

The second clause of this clause complex uses the agentless projecting verbal process ‘reported to be’, to frame the message: ‘Aston Villa is considering making a complaint’. Thompson (1996) identifies how ‘*to infinite*’ reporting clauses are used to express uncertainty in the text. This used together with an agentless reporting verb, that is tagged onto an indeterminate mental process ‘consider’, helps to depict the event as unverified. Choosing such hedging devices could be interpreted as either a display of the writer’s non commitment, or covert support of Barton’s innocence.

Finally, in the third clause of this clause complex, Barton is explicitly linked to the racial abuse. This declaration accords with the viewpoint expressed in *The Sun*, that Barton is guilty of a criminal act. However, in *The Times* report, the entire clause is pre-modified by the lexical item ‘allegations’, which effectively reduces the happening to conjecture.

(...after allegations) **the Newcastle United midfielder racially abused Gabriel Agbonlahor**

Circumstantial Adjunct	Actor	Process: Material	Goal
---------------------------	-------	-------------------	------

In the next part (see Figure 2. below), both news reports supply ‘facts’ to support their contrasting view of Barton.

Figure 2. *(The topical theme of each clause complex is underlined.)

<i>The Sun</i>	<i>The Times</i>
(Paragraph 2) <u>The Newcastle United midfielder</u> — who vowed to be a “role model” after his jail release — was seen by millions	(Paragraph 2) <u>Barton</u> was cleared of any wrongdoing by Steve Bennett, the referee, for his part in the

on TV having a row with Aston Villa ace Gabriel Agbonlahor, 21.	clash with Agbonlahor, the England Under-21 forward, however it is thought that Villa are considering making a further complaint to the FA after Martin O'Neill and senior club officials examined television footage to see whether there was any substance to allegations of racism.
(Paragraph 3) <u>Barton</u> , 26, flicked the England under-21 player's lips during the spat on Monday night when Newcastle won 2-0.	

In paragraph 2 of *The Sun*, Barton continues to be portrayed negatively, in the form of an embedded elaborating dependent clause.

Barton (Ellipsis)	vowed	to be a "role model"	after his jail release
Sayer	Process: Mental	Quoted	Circumstantial adjunct

To 'vow' can be equated to making a solemn and binding promise (to God), and vowing to become a 'role model' suggests Barton is guilty of previous sinful acts. These suggestions combine to strengthen the idea that he has a chequered history, which is then revealed by the inclusion of the prepositional phrase 'after his jail release'.

If attention is then turned to the independent clause surrounding this, Barton's guilt becomes unquestionable.

Barton	was seen	by millions	on TV having a row with Aston Villa ace Gabriel Agbonlahor
Phenomenon	Process: Mental	Sensor	Circumstantial Adjunct

The millions of witnesses in the Sensor slot, act to eliminate any doubt that Barton might be innocent.

Another notable feature of this clause is the pre-modification of Gabriel Agbonlahor by the epithet 'ace'. This descriptive device stands in stark contrast to the way Barton is

introduced in the opening paragraph. It suggests the writer is deliberately setting up contrasting images of these participants.

In paragraph 3 of *The Sun*, a detailed account of the ‘race row’ is provided.

Barton **flicked** **the England under-21 player’s lips**

Actor	Process: Material	Goal
-------	-------------------	------

Once again, Barton is represented as the actor in a negative material process.

While *The Sun* appears to be building a case against Barton, *The Times* starts paragraph 2 of its report, with a passive material process reporting his innocence.

Barton **was cleared** **of any wrongdoing** **by Steve Bennett, the referee**

Goal	Process: Material	Circumstantial Adjunct	Agent
------	-------------------	------------------------	-------

In this clause, the use of a passive form allows Barton to retain theme position, and by identifying the agent, classified as ‘referee’, the clause is given credibility.

4.2.3 Section 3 - Supporting voices

In this section of the reports, projecting verbal processes become prominent, as witnesses are brought in to support previous claims. *The Sun* presents the viewpoint of the general public, while *The Times* turns to the more official source, the Football Association (FA).

Figure 3. *(The topical theme of each clause complex is underlined.)

<i>The Sun</i>	<i>The Times</i>
(Paragraph 4) <u>Yesterday angry viewers</u> accused him of racially abusing Agbonlahor.	(Paragraph 3) <u>The FA</u> say they are aware of the reports, but that the matter will only be pursued if Villa lodge a complaint.
(Paragraph 5) <u>Viewer Guy Bradley</u> , 37, was outraged after watching a different	(Paragraph 4) "We are aware of the rumours circulating and have had a number of calls on the

camera angle of the bust-up on Setanta's Football Matters.	subject, but it is difficult to comment any further on something that has no further substance to it," an FA spokesman said.
(Paragraph 6) <u>The restaurateur</u> , of Beaconsfield, Bucks, said: "You can see Barton saying something and it looks like he's saying 'big lips'. If this is true I think he should be out of the game for good."	(Paragraph 5) " <u>We</u> take seriously any allegations of racist abuse and will obviously act accordingly if we receive any official complaint from Aston Villa."

Paragraph 4 of *The Sun*, reveals that it was 'angry viewers' who accused Barton of the racial abuse. Using the epithet 'angry', to describe this nominal group, adds weight to the viewer's accusations, and suggests that Barton's actions must have been serious. In addition, it is reported that one viewer, Guy Bradley, wasn't just angry, he was 'outraged'. This lexical choice further dramatizes the event and supports the suggestion that Barton's actions were very bad indeed. At this point, the circumstantial adjunct that backgrounds the outrage, 'after watching a different camera angle' is introduced. It suggests that the incident could have been missed by some TV viewers watching the match, viewers who reading this article, might have until now disagreed with the tone of the report. *The Sun* then reminds the readership of the seriousness of the event one more time, by applying the same lexical item 'bust-up' as the first paragraph. Finally, in paragraph 6, the 'outraged viewer' is pre-modified by the classifier 'restaurateur', which serves to improve his credibility as a newsworthy voice for the direct quotation that follows.

In the corresponding section of *The Times* report, an official source is used to add credibility to *The Times* implicit suggestion that this event is not newsworthy.

The FA say they are 'aware of the reports / rumours				
Sayer	Process: Verbal (projecting	Sensor	Process: Mental	Phenomenon

By using the verb 'aware' the FA shows it has knowledge of the event. This lexical choice does however carry a non-committal tone, which is intensified when joined by 'reports' and 'rumours', both of which represent unsubstantiated testimony. The use

of such lexical items also gives the impression that the FA has no first hand knowledge of the events, which is unlikely considering the incident was broadcast on TV. Later in the paragraph, the FA refer to the event as ‘the matter’ and ‘something that has no further substance’. Such a vague response by an authoritative organisation fits nicely with the tone of the *The Times* article, and continues to support the idea that incident has not been proven.

4.2.4 Section 4 - Supporting voices (Part 2)

In this next section, both articles add new voices to support their claims. *The Sun* turns to a lip-reading expert, while *The Times* provides the view of Gabriel Agbonlahor’s agent.

Figure 4. *(The topical theme of each clause complex is underlined.)

<i>The Sun</i>	<i>The Times</i>
(Paragraph 7) <u>Lip-reading expert Terry Ruane</u> added: “Agbonlahor makes a face seemingly by thrusting his bottom lip at Barton, as if to suggest Barton is behaving like a baby.	(Paragraph 6) <u>Tim Webb, Agbonlahor's agent,</u> confirmed Villa were investigating the matter, but said the player had not mentioned any further complaint against Barton.
(Paragraph 8) <u>Barton</u> slaps his face around the lip and says, ‘Pack it in, f*****g lip’.	(Paragraph 7) "I have not spoken to Gabby," Webb said. "It was a day off for him on Tuesday because he has such a hectic schedule with Villa and his mobile has been turned off.
(Paragraph 9) <u>The player</u> points to Barton and looks away in amazement.	(Paragraph 8) "I am aware that Villa are looking into the situation."
(Paragraph 10) “ <u>Barton</u> walks off saying, ‘F**k it’, then moves his finger round his mouth appearing to say, ‘F**k your big lips’.” After the match Barton insisted: “We shook hands after the game and that’s the way it is. It was all about nothing.”	

After representing the view of the common man in the previous section, *The Sun* now turns to an ‘expert’ who provides a step-by-step account of the event. Van Dijk (2001:357) referring to the work of Nesler et al (1993) says, ‘recipients tend to accept beliefs, knowledge, and opinion (unless they are inconsistent with their personal beliefs and experiences) through discourse from what they see as authoritative, trustworthy, or credible sources, such as scholars, experts, professionals, or reliable media’. It makes sense that after presenting the voice of the viewer, *The Sun* would now want to provide a more credible witness. Interestingly, the lip-reading expert’s words are projected through the verbal process ‘added’, which in some sense implicitly qualifies the previous speaker’s comments as equal. *The Sun*’s lip reading expert is quoted as saying:

“Barton slaps his face around the lip and says ‘Pack it in, f***g lip”**

Actor	Process: Material	Circumstantial Adjunct	Conjunctive Adjunct	Process: Verbal	Quoted
-------	----------------------	---------------------------	------------------------	--------------------	--------

Barton is then quoted as saying ‘F**k it’ and F**k your big lips’. Tannen (1986 cited in Thompson 1996:512) says that using direct quotes helps the hearer to better visualize the event, and so this negative representation of Barton as an abusive and foul mouthed individual reported through the words of an expert, helps to justify the use of ‘thug’ in the opening paragraph and the continued disapproval of Barton.

The expert is however, not completely one-sided in his opinions, and suggests that Agbonlahor may have provoked Barton to slap him.

“Agbonlahor makes a face seemingly by thrusting his bottom lip at Barton”

Actor	Process: Material	Circumstantial Adjunct	Goal
-------	-------------------	------------------------	------

Despite this, it is soon revealed that Agbonlahor’s provocation might have been justified, and motivated by Barton’s immature behaviour.

‘Barton is behaving like a baby

Behaver	Process: Behavioural	Behaviour
---------	----------------------	-----------

This section of *The Sun*'s report ends with a quotation from Barton. It is the only place in the entire report where Barton is given a voice. His voice is however, projected through the verbal process, 'insist', a lexical choice suggesting repeated and persistent denials. While this does not imply guilt, it does suggest that Barton is well aware of the seriousness of the accusations.

The Times report, like *The Sun*, uses an additional witness to support its position. This is mainly achieved through a quotation by Agbonlahor's agent Tim Webb, who now is given the thematic positioning. Webb is indirectly quoted as saying his client, Agbonlahor, had not mentioned any complaint against Barton. This admission from the person who was supposedly racially attacked, adds additional support to the general viewpoint being expressed by *The Times*. Furthermore, the report is projected through the relatively weak verbal process, 'mention'. This lexical choice is usually reserved for discourse that is not particularly newsworthy. For example, its use in a sentence like, 'Did John mention that your house burnt down this morning?' would seem unusual, whereas, 'Did John mention that I can't make it to the party?' would be appropriate. By choosing this reporting verb, the writer is implicitly suggesting the alleged 'racial abuse' is not newsworthy.

4.2.5 Section 5 - Barton's actions vs Barton's opinion

Figure 4. *(The topical theme of each clause complex is underlined.)

<i>The Sun</i>	<i>The Times</i>
(Paragraph 11) <u>Just weeks ago</u> Barton claimed he would become "a shining beacon for kids" like David Beckham.	(Paragraph 9) <u>Yesterday</u> , Barton claimed that he had been the victim of a witch-hunt fuelled by his reputation after television pictures captured him pushing his hand into the face of Agbonlahor, an exchange missed by Bennett.
(Paragraph 12) <u>He</u> was released from jail in the summer after serving 74 days of a six-month sentence for a drunken assault on a teenager in Liverpool.	(Paragraph 10) <u>Barton</u> was adamant that he did nothing wrong and that the incident has been blown out of proportion because of his reputation.

(Paragraph 13) <u>And it was just his third match</u> after an FA ban for assaulting former teammate Ousmane Dabo, 31.	(Paragraph 11) “I thought it was a foul against me, their lad barged me in the back,” Barton said. “He was going on and all I said to him was to be quiet and let his feet do the talking. That was it.
	(Paragraph 12) “ <u>We</u> shook hands after the game. It was all about nothing and people are making a mountain out of a molehill. With the referee, linesmen and their assistant around and all the television cameras, you know you can't raise your hands these days and at no stage have I done that. I'm going home with a clear conscience.”

After giving Barton a chance to state his side of the story, *The Sun* quickly reverts to criticizing him. This is done by highlighting his previous misdeeds, which act as a reminder of information presented earlier in the report. In paragraph 11, it is reported that Barton wants to change his behaviour.

Just three weeks ago Barton claimed he would become “a shining beacon for kids.				
Circumstantial Adjunct	Sayer	Process: Verbal	Behavioural	Behaviour
Theme (marked)	Rheme			

By choosing the marked theme, ‘three weeks ago’, and pre-modifying it with ‘just’, the writer emphasises the proximity of this promise to the racial abuse incident. In addition, choosing the reporting verb, ‘claim’, implies disbelief that Barton could have promised such a thing, then behaved so badly, so soon afterwards. In addition, the choice of words, ‘a shining beacon’, carries a very similar semantic value as ‘role model’, and therefore supplies a textual reference to the opening paragraph. By repeating this information, it acts to reinforce the perception that Barton is of weak moral fortitude. Other textual references contained in these closing paragraphs also serve to remind the reader, that not only has Barton served time in jail, but that he has been suspended from football due to his bad behaviour.

In contrast to *The Sun*, that introduced an eyewitness account of the abuse in paragraph 3, *The Times* waits until paragraph 9 to do this. It reports how, ‘television pictures captured him (Barton) pushing his hand into the face of Agbonlahor’. This representation of events carries a significantly softer tone than *The Sun*’s, ‘Barton slaps his face’ or ‘Barton flicked his lips’, and is in keeping with *The Times* softer tone in general.

Barton is then allotted three paragraphs to communicate his viewpoint. This is significantly more space than was allocated by *The Sun*. In *The Times* report, Barton defends himself by saying,

“their lad barged me in the back”		
Actor	Process: Material	Circumstantial adjunct

By giving Barton a voice, Agbonlahor is suddenly thrust into an actor position carrying a negative connotation. This never happens in *The Sun* report. The choice of words is also interesting. ‘Barged’ implies rude, brutish behaviour by an unthoughtful and aggressive person. Barton also accuses Agbonlahor of ‘going on’. This suggests Agbonlahor might be prone to complaining and therefore someone that the general public shouldn’t be too sympathetic towards. Finally, Barton points out how they shook hands after the game, suggesting there was no bad feelings, and therefore no case to be answered.

4.2.6 Section 6 - Another viewpoint

Both reports finish by presenting information that could be considered a retreat from the one-sided viewpoints they displayed throughout the reports. *The Sun*, finishes by supplying the viewpoint of the referee, in the existential process ‘there was no case to answer’, and *The Times*, in contrast, provides information about Barton’s previous ‘training ground attack’.

The reason why both writers choose to conclude their reports in this manner is unclear, but one explanation might be that they are hedging their viewpoint at the last moment in an attempt to appear unbiased.

5.0 Summary

Overall, the report in *The Sun* seems to convey a more sensational, judgemental and provocative tone throughout, and appears to garner support (from its readership) for the reprimanding of Joey Barton. In contrast, the report in *The Times* is more non-judgemental, and perhaps even supportive of Barton's innocence.

In both articles, Barton is the main character and his actions are the main focal point. In terms of experiential content, *The Sun* places him in the 'actor' position of material processes like 'slap' and 'flicked'; that carry a negative quality, while *The Times* representation reports him 'pushing' and 'racially abusing', although the latter is surrounded by 'allegations', 'rumors', and 'reports' that suggest it is all untrue. In terms of verbal processes, *The Sun* has Barton associated with 'vow', 'insist' and 'claim', and his reported quotes are often obscene and too rude to publish in full form 'f**k'. Such representations are not positive. Furthermore, he is only permitted to express his view of events one time in the text. In contrast, *The Times* gives Barton a considerable amount of space to defend himself, which he uses to protest his innocence and pass some blame to Agbonlahor, all of which is done without the obscenities reported in *The Sun*.

At the interpersonal level, *The Sun* is careful to avoid language that might cast doubt on their authority as 'fact' provider. The only modal construction of note, is contained in a quote by an outraged viewer who believes Barton should be expelled from football. One might argue that this viewpoint is actually reflecting the view of the writer. Unlike *The Sun*, *The Times* use modal constructions in a few instances to undermine the legitimacy of the allegations against Barton.

When lexical choices of *The Sun* are considered, Barton is portrayed negatively, as a 'thug' and a 'jailbird', involved in a 'race row', 'bust-up' and 'spat'. In *The Times* he

remains unmodified as Barton or Joey Barton and is never in any greater trouble than facing a complaint.

In terms of textual content, *The Sun* uses thematic ordering to build an increasingly strong case against Barton, by introducing other participants who agree he is guilty of a crime. Frequent references to his bad behaviour and jail time also combine to demonise him further. In *The Times* the opposite is true. Barton is presented as someone caught in a confusing web of allegations, all of which are likely untrue.

6.0 Conclusion

Based on this investigation, it is clear that news making is a ‘highly interpretive’ process (Fairclough 2003), and that text analysis of news reports using SFG can reveal the ideological stance of the writer. However, any findings need to be balanced against the inherent bias of the researcher, as Widdowson (1998:137) points out, ‘if you know the provenance of a particular text (the *Sun* newspaper, for example) you will...position yourself accordingly and be primed to find confirmation of your own prejudice’.

Appendix 1: Newspaper Articles

From Times Online

November 5, 2008

Joey Barton facing 'racial abuse' complaint

Ben Smith

Joey Barton could face further disciplinary action after Aston Villa were reported to be considering making an official complaint to the FA after allegations the Newcastle United midfielder racially abused Gabriel Agbonlahor during the 2-0 victory at St James' Park on Monday night.

Barton was cleared of any wrongdoing by Steve Bennett, the referee, for his part in the clash with Agbonlahor, the England Under-21 forward, however it is thought that Villa are considering making a further complaint to the FA after Martin O'Neill and senior club officials examined television footage to see whether there was any substance to allegations of racism.

The FA say they are aware of the reports, but that the matter will only be pursued if Villa lodge a complaint.

"We are aware of the rumours circulating and have had a number of calls on the subject, but it is difficult to comment any further on something that has no further substance to it," an FA spokesman said.

"We take seriously any allegations of racist abuse and will obviously act accordingly if we receive any official complaint from Aston Villa."

Tim Webb, Agbonlahor's agent, confirmed Villa were investigating the matter, but said the player had not mentioned any further complaint against Barton.

"I have not spoken to Gabby," Webb said. "It was a day off for him on Tuesday because he has such a hectic schedule with Villa and his mobile has been turned off."

"I am aware that Villa are looking into the situation."

Yesterday, Barton claimed that he had been the victim of a witch-hunt fuelled by his reputation after television pictures captured him pushing his hand into the face of Agbonlahor, an exchange missed by Bennett.

Barton was adamant that he did nothing wrong and that the incident has been blown out of proportion because of his reputation.

"I thought it was a foul against me, their lad barged me in the back," Barton said. "He was going on and all I said to him was to be quiet and let his feet do the talking. That was it."

"We shook hands after the game. It was all about nothing and people are making a mountain out of a molehill. With the referee, linesmen and their assistant around and all the television cameras, you know you can't raise your hands these days and at no stage have I done that. I'm going home with a clear conscience."

Barton returned to action only last week after serving six games of a 12-match ban for a training-ground attack on Ousmane Dabo, his former Manchester City team-mate. The remaining six games of that punishment were suspended, but would be triggered by any further disciplinary misdemeanours. Graham Poll, the former referee working as a television pundit, claimed that Barton's actions on Monday were worthy of a red card, but Bennett did not concur. (484 words)



Barton in 'big lips' race row

By ROBIN PERRIE

and DAVID WILLETTS

Published: 05 Nov 2008

SOCCER thug Joey Barton was yesterday accused of calling a black player “big lips” during a bust-up.

The Newcastle United midfielder — who vowed to be a “role model” after his jail release — was seen by millions on TV having a row with Aston Villa ace Gabriel Agbonlahor, 21.

Barton, 26, flicked the England under-21 player’s lips during the spat on Monday night when Newcastle won 2-0.

Yesterday angry viewers accused him of racially abusing Agbonlahor.

Viewer Guy Bradley, 37, was outraged after watching a different camera angle of the bust-up on Setanta’s Football Matters.

The restaurateur, of Beaconsfield, Bucks, said: “You can see Barton saying something and it looks like he’s saying ‘big lips’. If this is true I think he should be out of the game for good.”

Lip-reading expert Terry Ruane added: “Agbonlahor makes a face seemingly by thrusting his bottom lip at Barton, as if to suggest Barton is behaving like a baby.

Barton slaps his face around the lip and says, ‘Pack it in, f*****g lip’.

The player points to Barton and looks away in amazement.

“Barton walks off saying, ‘F**k it’, then moves his finger round his mouth appearing to say, ‘F**k your big lips’.” After the match Barton insisted: “We shook hands after the game and that’s the way it is. It was all about nothing.”

Just weeks ago Barton claimed he would become “a shining beacon for kids” like David Beckham.

He was released from jail in the summer after serving 74 days of a six-month sentence for a drunken assault on a teenager in Liverpool.

And it was just his third match after an FA ban for assaulting former teammate Ousmane Dabo, 31.

A source at Villa confirmed the club was studying extra footage of the incident. The FA said referee Steve Bennett, who missed the incident, decided against a red card after considering footage, and there was no case to answer.

r.perrie@the-sun.co.uk

(334 words)

Appendix 2 Newspaper Articles divided into paragraphs

Paragraph	The Sun	The Times
Title	Barton in 'big lips' race row	Joey Barton facing 'racial abuse' complaint
1	SOCCKER thug Joey Barton was yesterday accused of calling a black player “big lips” during a bust-up.	Joey Barton could face further disciplinary action after Aston Villa were reported to be considering making an official complaint to the FA after allegations the Newcastle United midfielder racially abused Gabriel Agbonlahor during the 2-0 victory at St James' Park on Monday night.
2	The Newcastle United midfielder — who vowed to be a “role model” after his jail release — was seen by millions on TV having a row with Aston Villa ace Gabriel Agbonlahor, 21.	Barton was cleared of any wrongdoing by Steve Bennett, the referee, for his part in the clash with Agbonlahor, the England Under-21 forward, however it is thought that Villa are considering making a further complaint to the FA after Martin O'Neill and senior club officials examined television footage to see whether there was any substance to allegations of racism.
3	Barton, 26, flicked the England under-21 player's lips during the spat on Monday night when Newcastle won 2-0.	The FA say they are aware of the reports, but that the matter will only be pursued if Villa lodge a complaint.
4	Yesterday angry viewers accused him of racially abusing	"We are aware of the rumours circulating and have had a number of calls on the subject, but it is

	Agbonlahor.	difficult to comment any further on something that has no further substance to it," an FA spokesman said.
5	Viewer Guy Bradley, 37, was outraged after watching a different camera angle of the bust-up on Setanta's Football Matters.	"We take seriously any allegations of racist abuse and will obviously act accordingly if we receive any official complaint from Aston Villa."
6	The restaurateur, of Beaconsfield, Bucks, said: "You can see Barton saying something and it looks like he's saying 'big lips'. If this is true I think he should be out of the game for good."	Tim Webb, Agbonlahor's agent, confirmed Villa were investigating the matter, but said the player had not mentioned any further complaint against Barton.
7	Lip-reading expert Terry Ruane added: "Agbonlahor makes a face seemingly by thrusting his bottom lip at Barton, as if to suggest Barton is behaving like a baby."	"I have not spoken to Gabby," Webb said. "It was a day off for him on Tuesday because he has such a hectic schedule with Villa and his mobile has been turned off."
8	Barton slaps his face around the lip and says, 'Pack it in, f*****g lip'.	"I am aware that Villa are looking into the situation."
9	The player points to Barton and looks away in amazement.	Yesterday, Barton claimed that he had been the victim of a witch-hunt fuelled by his reputation after television pictures captured him pushing his hand into the face of Agbonlahor, an exchange missed by Bennett.
10	"Barton walks off saying, 'F**k it', then moves his finger round his mouth appearing to say, 'F**k your big lips'." After the match Barton insisted: "We shook hands after the game and that's the way it is. It was all about nothing."	Barton was adamant that he did nothing wrong and that the incident has been blown out of proportion because of his reputation.
11	Just weeks ago Barton claimed he would become "a shining beacon for kids" like David Beckham.	"I thought it was a foul against me, their lad barged me in the back," Barton said. "He was going on and all I said to him was to be quiet and let his feet do the talking. That

		was it.
12	He was released from jail in the summer after serving 74 days of a six-month sentence for a drunken assault on a teenager in Liverpool.	“We shook hands after the game. It was all about nothing and people are making a mountain out of a molehill. With the referee, linesmen and their assistant around and all the television cameras, you know you can't raise your hands these days and at no stage have I done that. I'm going home with a clear conscience.”
13	And it was just his third match after an FA ban for assaulting former teammate Ousmane Dabo, 31.	Barton returned to action only last week after serving six games of a 12-match ban for a training-ground attack on Ousmane Dabo, his former Manchester City teammate. The remaining six games of that punishment were suspended, but would be triggered by any further disciplinary misdemeanours. Graham Poll, the former referee working as a television pundit, claimed that Barton's actions on Monday were worthy of a red card, but Bennett did not concur.
14	A source at Villa confirmed the club was studying extra footage of the incident.	
15	The FA said referee Steve Bennett, who missed the incident, decided against a red card after considering footage, and there was no case to answer.	

Reference List

- Bell, A “News stories as narratives”. In Jaworski, A and Coupland, N (1999) **A Discourse Reader**. Routledge.
- Bloor and Bloor (1995) **The Functional Analysis of English- A Hallidayan Approach**. Arnold.]
- Butt et al (2000) **Using Functional Grammar- An Explorer’s Guide** 2nd Ed
National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, Macquarie University
- Cotter, C. “Discourse and Media” In Schiffrin, D et al (2001) ***The Handbook of Discourse Analysis***. Blackwell Publishing.
- Derewianka, B “Pedagogical Grammars: Their Role in English Language Teaching.” In Burns, A and Coffin, C (2001) **Analysing English in a Global Context**. London and New York. Routledge.
- Fairclough, N (1992) **Discourse and Social Change**. Blackwell Publishing.
- Fairclough, N (1995) **Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language**. London and New York. Longman
- Fairclough, N “Linguistic and Intertextual Analysis within Discourse Analysis”. In Jaworski, A and Coupland, N (1999) **A Discourse Reader**. Routledge.
- Fairclough, N (2003) **Analysing Discourse – Textual analysis for social research**. Routledge.
- Fries, P.H “On Theme, Rheme and discourse goals” In Coulthard, M (1994) In **Advances in Written Text Analysis**. Routledge.
- Halliday, M.A.K and Hasan, R (1976) **Cohesion in English**. London and New York. Longman.
- Lock, G (1996) **Functional English Grammar- An introduction for second language teachers**. Cambridge University Press
- Martin, J.R “Language, Register and Genre.” In Burns, A and Coffin, C (2001) **Analysing English in a Global Context**. London and New York. Routledge.
- Martin, J, R “Cohesion and Texture” In Schiffrin, D et al (2001) ***The Handbook of Discourse Analysis***. Blackwell Publishing.
- Reah, D (1998) **The Language of Newspapers**. Routledge.
- Thompson, G (1996) **Introducing Functional Grammar**. 2nd Ed. Hodder Arnold

Thompson, G (1996) Voices in the Text: Discourse Perspectives on language Reports. *Applied Linguistics* 17/4 501-526

Van Leeuwen, T 'The representation of social actors' In Caldas-Coulthard, C.A and Coulthard, M (1996) **Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis**. London and New York. Routledge.

Van Dijk, T.A. "Critical Discourse Analysis" In Schiffrin, D et al (2001) *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Blackwell Publishing.

White, P.R..R. (2000) **Functional Grammar**. The Centre for English Language Studies The University of Birmingham

Widdowson, H.G (1998) Review Article: The Theory and Practice of Critical Discourse Analysis. *Applied Linguistics* 19/1 136-151

Widdowson, H.G (2007) **Discourse Analysis**. Oxford University Press.