

## NEGOTIATING ALIGNMENT IN NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS: THE ROLE OF CONCUR-COUNTER PATTERNS

Ruth Breeze

### Abstract

Newspaper editorials are shaped by the need to negotiate alignment and rapport with a diverse readership. This is achieved partly through the resources of engagement (Martin and White 2005), that is, through the argumentative moves of disclaim, proclaim, entertain and attribute, by which dialogic relations with the reader are carefully modulated. One aspect of argumentation in editorials that has sometimes been overlooked is that of the concede-counter structure, by which the writer signals concurrence with the reader on a particular issue, only to counter this with a new argument that may wholly or partially refute the first one. Typically, leader writers signal this manoeuvre textually from the outset, indicating that they are setting up an argument in order to demolish it by means of specific lexical choices or patterns. Thus items such as “of course” or “naturally” are used to build up the first argument, with which the reader is understood to concur. This is generally followed by a turning point marked by “but”, “yet” or “though”, after which the counter-argument is presented. Corpus linguists have pointed out that the presence of this type of lexical patterning makes it possible to research argumentation in large volumes of text using corpus tools. This study contains an analysis of concede-counter patterns in a corpus consisting of all the editorials published in the *Guardian* newspaper in 2011. The distinctive patterns that emerge are described, with particular attention paid to patterns of alignment and disalignment that emerge, as well as the related use of concurrence in asides to the reader. The role of such patterns in structuring discourse is analysed, with a particular focus on their ideological dimension as a means of subtly aligning readers with a particular set of opinions.

**Keywords:** Editorials; Appraisal analysis; Discourse analysis; Concede-counter patterns; Adverbials.

### 1. Introduction

Newspaper editorials are known to use an extensive array of discursive resources which operate continuously through the text. They are shaped by the need for the writer to negotiate alignment and rapport with a particular readership, which in turn requires the writer to take a position with respect to other parties or voices (Le 2004). This is achieved by moderating the participation of different voices through the use of reported speech, and by opening and closing different lines of argument using a range of resources, which include modal verbs, reporting verbs, attribution, attitude markers, graduation, conjunctions and so on, and a variety of rhetorical strategies. Various analytical approaches have been used to describe and interpret the language of

editorials, including pragmatics (Dafouz 2008), genre analysis (Bolívar 1994), metadiscourse (Le 2004; Kuhl and Mojood 2014), discourse analysis (van Dijk 1996; Achugar 2004), and systemic functional linguistics (Ansary and Babaii 2005). One approach that offers the possibility of integrating several aspects of the editorial is that of Appraisal (Martin and White 2005), which is helpful in disentangling the dialogic mechanisms by which writers stake out their own position and nudge readers towards compliance. Such an approach, which focuses on the structure of argument without isolating it from the language it uses or the meaning it conveys, is potentially compatible with discourse-analytical interpretations (Amossy 2009). In editorials, argumentation, discourse and ideology overlap in complex ways, and the systematic use of particular carriers of information or argument structure offers scope for analysis on a more theoretical level, revealing the patterns such writers use to carve out a line of vision in the social world (Verschueren 2012).

Central among the aspects considered by Appraisal are the resources of engagement, which writers use to align themselves (and their readers) in relation to other voices (Martin and White 2005: 248-254). Dialogic relations are set up in which different positions are entertained, and then either left open or closed down, so that the line of argumentation is contracted down to the view to which the writer is committed. As part of this process, it is recognised that editorial writers typically manipulate the arguments in their texts through a combination of conjunctions (“while”, “although”, “but”, “at least”) and adverbials (“of course”, “surely”, and so on). These are used to examine different viewpoints and either accept or fend off possible counter-arguments, thereby guiding reader expectations along the lines preferred by the writer (Martin and White 2005: 253). The fact that counter-arguments are entertained before being closed down is important in itself, as a feature of the concessive dialectic of the newspaper editorial, because this mechanism functions to allay the suspicion that other viewpoints are being ignored (Martin and White 2005: 258).

In the complex argumentation of the newspaper editorial, emphatics and concessives play a leading role. According to Martin and White (2005: 255), the typical role of words such as “of course” or “naturally” in such texts is to reinforce positions that might otherwise be regarded as contentious by presenting them as material with which alignment is possible. In the Appraisal system, they are generally associated with the broad category of “proclaim”, that is, they are used to represent the proposition as “highly warrantable (compelling, valid, plausible, well-founded, generally agreed, reliable, etc.)” (Martin and White 2005: 98). However, within the “proclaim” category, it is notable that these authors group such items in the sub-category of “concur”, alongside words such as “admittedly” and phenomena such as rhetorical or “leading” questions:

“The category of ‘concur’ involves formulations which overtly announce the addresser as agreeing with, or having the same knowledge as, some projected dialogic partner. Typically, this dialogic partner is the text’s putative addressee. This relationship of concurrence is most often conveyed via such locutions as *of course*, *naturally*, *not surprisingly*, *admittedly* and *certainly*” (Martin and White 2005: 122).

Such markers are thus used to emphasise what is constructed as the possible common ground shared by writer and reader. Martin and White consider that such concurring formulations are dialogic in that they present the writer as conducting a dialogue with the reader. However, these authors believe that they are generally also contractive: They present the shared belief or opinion as being universally or very widely held, and therefore “have the effect of excluding any dialogistic alternatives from the ongoing colloquy in that they position any who would advance such an alternative as at odds with what is purportedly generally agreed upon or known” (Martin and White 2005: 124). In many cases, “of course” is used in an editorial to establish a particular position as being taken for granted as part of the world knowledge that the writer shares with the (projected) readers (Martin and White 2005: 12).

Nonetheless, as Martin and White themselves concede (2005: 124), the function of “concur” is greatly complicated in argumentative texts by a phenomenon that they label “countering”. In this, the writer’s voice first appears as agreeing with the projected reader, but then steps back and rejects what was just presented as a consensual view. These paired rhetorical moves are standard in texts such as editorials, and tend to follow a stylized pattern. Typically, a “concession” is made, followed by a “counter move”. The concession may be made grudgingly, using “admittedly”, or “I concede that”, or it may be made confidently, using items signalling concurrence, such as “of course”, “naturally” or “obviously”. In such concede-counter manoeuvres, the writer constructs a reader who is presumed to be resistant in some sense to the writer’s primary position (Martin and White 2005: 125), the degree of supposed resistance being reflected in the graduation of the concession. This type of manoeuvre falls into the pattern characterised by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) as a “rhetorical pair”, and may reflect contrasts of various different kinds. In general, however, as Martin and White state (2005: 125), “the pairings occur as the writer bids to win the reader over”, that is, they are used particularly where the writer anticipates some degree of disagreement on the reader’s part, and the lexical choices reflect the degree of resistance envisaged.

All of this means that the position regarding locutions such as “of course”, “obviously” and “naturally” is of necessity ambivalent. On the one hand, they are classically used to establish common ground with the reader, and in many cases this is their only purpose. They are thus contractive and used to pronounce or endorse a view that is constructed as shared ground. On the other hand, this very feature means that they have a special role in the dialogic process of argumentation, since they specifically lend themselves to the building up of a position that is later to be countered in some way. In this sense, they allow the writer to entertain a position in the short-term, with a view to countering it or contradicting it in some way, which means that they contribute to the long-term pattern of contraction.

Such structures have been an obvious focus of attention for rhetoricians (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969), who examine their role in constructing a persuasive argument, and for linguists interested in rhetorical structure theory (Mann and Taboada 2010; Taboada and Gómez-González 2012), who consider the way the “nucleus” stressed using the adverbial is foregrounded, and the “satellite” qualified by the contrastive is relegated to a secondary position. In the field of corpus linguistics, some attention has also been paid to the special role of certain resources of this kind. Morley (2006: 266) draws attention to what he terms the “Aunt Sallie” effect of certain constructions such as “in itself”, “in the past”, or “in theory”, which trigger off counter

arguments later in the text: A proposition is deliberately set up by the writer in order to be demolished at a later time. This mechanism has some parallels with the type of structure researched by Hunston (2001: 25), who draws attention to the function of certain combinations such as “may not be a (...) but” as mechanisms for indicating that some other option is going to be introduced at a later point. The elements identified by corpus linguistics are undoubtedly of a rather disparate nature, but they have certain important common ground: They all trigger later counter-arguments, they are all concessive, and they are all evaluative, in that one option (usually the second) is considered more relevant in some sense than the other. Such expressions provide links within the discourse and create cohesion, but also constitute a form of lexical patterning (Hunston 2001; Hoey 2005), providing a link between lexis and grammar, and between lexis and text. In Morley’s view (2006: 280), further corpus studies are needed to show how certain items stereotypically “trigger evaluation in the form of counter arguments and thus help to pilot us through the rhetoric of the text”. Arguably, the patterns involving sentence adverbials and contrastives discussed above often fulfil just such organisational and evaluative functions within the editorial. Yet little is known about the extent to which these patterns are typical in this genre, about their interactions with other evaluative aspects of the text, or about their ideological significance. This study aims to contribute to our increasing understanding of the language of newspaper editorials and the intersection between argument structure, discourse and ideology in editorials.

## 2. Corpus and method

The present study examines the role of certainty adverbials in concurrence/concession-counteracting structures in a corpus of newspaper editorials consisting of all the leaders from the Guardian newspaper published in 2011. The corpus comprises over 1,000 editorials (usually three per day), amounting to approximately 600,000 words uploaded in SketchEngine. The study focuses first on adverbs of certainty, including those in thematic position and those placed in mid-sentence, and then centres on those which are used in combination with a contrastive such as “but” or “however”.

A list of adverbials of certainty was compiled from Simon-Vandenberg and Aijmer (2007): “obviously”, “certainly”, “clearly”, “definitely”, “evidently”, “of course”, “naturally”, “plainly”, “surely”, “undeniably”, “undoubtedly”, “unquestionably”, “without doubt”. The original list also included evidential adverbs implying a degree of uncertainty, such as “apparently” and “seemingly”. However, although these were fairly frequent, they were found not to occur in this concede-concur pattern in our corpus, and so they were excluded from this study. “Without doubt”, though an adverbial of certainty, was also excluded because it did not occur in this corpus.

Once the candidates had been chosen, a quick search was conducted using the SketchEngine filter function ( $\pm 20$ ) to detect co-occurrence of “but”, “however”, “yet”, and “though”. This proved interesting but inconclusive, because it was found that a significant proportion of co-occurrences did not indicate the presence of contrastive or concede-counter structures. Moreover, an examination of the non-filtered concordance lines revealed the presence of some concede-counter structures not marked by the

presence of these contrastives: Resources such as “instead”, “in fact”, “really” or “the trouble is” were also occasionally used to counter the proposition qualified by the adverbial. In the end, every concordance line containing one of the candidate adverbials was read and analysed in its immediate context in order to establish whether it was part of a concede-counter or contrastive structure.

Adverbial of certainty	Frequency / million	Raw frequency	Raw frequency in contrastive structures
Of course	251.5	151	79
Certainly	221.5	133	43
Surely	209.8	126	20
Clearly	108.2	65	19
Undoubtedly	64.9	39	15
Naturally	30	18	7
Obviously	38.3	23	4
Plainly	40	24	4
Evidently	11.7	7	3
Undeniably	5	3	2
Definitely	13.3	8	1
Unquestionably	8.3	5	1

Table 1. Adverbials of certainty in editorials corpus: Normalised frequency, real frequency (in 600,000 tokens), and frequency in concede-counter structures.

### 3. Patterns

In the most frequent combination of certainty adverbial with contrastive found in this corpus, the locution used to signal concurrence (“obviously”, “of course”) is placed in theme position. In other cases, it is placed later in the sentence, but still has the function of modifying the whole proposition to some degree. The use of such sentence adverbials in these examples appears to prime the reader to expect one of two things. Either, the certainty marker reinforces the writer’s main point, and the contrastive that follows usually introduces a statement of fact that runs counter to the writer’s opinion. Or the certainty adverbial is used to authorise certain views which the writer is going to consider, then reject. In the former case, the pattern that emerges might be termed “concur – disalign”, because the main function is to build common ground with the reader in order to reject a contrary position. In the latter case, the pattern may be termed “concede – align”. Here, the certainty adverbial heralds the start of a secondary proposition that is offered, along the lines of the “Aunt Sallie” discussed above, as a way of making a concession to an alternative view before finally countering it with a stronger proposition. The analysis of concession clauses in terms of nucleus and satellite (Mann and Taboada 2010, see above) works well for the second type of relationship, but does not offer such a coherent explanation of the first type identified here.

As we shall see, this second possibility is a surprisingly frequent pattern in this corpus, particularly in the case of “of course” (over half the instances were associated with a concede-counter pattern) and “certainly” (almost one third). However, it should

also be noted that the force of the concession-rejection can vary considerably, often in consonance with the writer's attitude towards each part. In what follows, we shall look first at examples of simple concurrence, then examine the various different concur/concede-counter patterns, before moving on to discuss the ideological dimensions of these structures in the appeal to doxa and the consolidation of a body of unquestioned opinion.

### 3.1. *Simple concurrence*

Although our main focus in this paper is on concede-concur patterns, it must be pointed out that adverbials of certainty are often used simply to suggest that a partner in dialogue, or in the case of a text, the inscribed reader, will share the same attitude to the proposition explained. Martin and White (2005: 122) classify this use of words like "certainly" as examples of "concur" because they construe a reader who shares the same view. They are thus dialogic in a broad sense, but they do not enact a dialogue with some putative partner in the way that is the case in the concede-counter structures that we shall consider below. This is an important point, for it is because these expressions often do convey a strong assumption of concurrence with the reader that they can be used effectively in the rhetorical strategy of constructing an argument only to knock it down.

The following example, *of course* construes an audience who share the writer's assumptions about attacking Iran. The strong negative graduation used is possible because this common ground is presumed to exist:

1. An attack on Iran would *of course* be madness. It really is time to drop the pretence that Iran can be deflected from its nuclear path.

In this instance, the reader is roped into the writer's assessment of the situation. Moreover, in the second proposition the writer also reinforces a different claim, using "really" to knock down any potential resistance or disbelief. As Diani notes (2008: 316), although "really" plays a number of different roles and often gives rise to some ambiguity, one of its major functions appears to be to confirm the veracity of what is being said, or the writer's commitment to it. The force of "really" in this example is not only to intensify, but also, importantly, to signal that the writer him/herself takes responsibility for this claim: In other words, here, "really" turns a simple pronouncement into an instance of "proclaim: Pronounce" (Martin and White 2005: 127). This sequence builds a strong line of argument: The two propositions, taken together, adopt a stance against other voices that supposedly advocate attacking Iran, or hold that Iran can be dissuaded from developing its nuclear capacity, which are not openly acknowledged here. Moreover, the alignment achieved within the system of engagement is reinforced by implied concurrence, and by the resources of graduation, represented here by lexical choices (madness, pretence) that scale up the level of intensity and raise the sense of commitment. The use of these resources is thus contractive, in that it represents the proposition as a shared belief, and tends to close down any alternative ideas on this subject and exclude dissident voices (Martin and White 2005: 124).

Of the adverbials identified as marking some kind of concurrence, we found that *surely*, in particular, has a particular persuasive force in this corpus. This word has a slightly different resonance from *obviously*, *of course*, and so on, and does not fit so easily into the category of concurrence. It is often used to invite agreement, sometimes in a playful sense, as in (2).

2. The original Engels would have been delighted by it all, and would *surely* have used his winnings to keep his friend Marx in fresh funds.

However, it also sometimes appears to be employed to persuade the reader of something that he/she might not immediately accept. This matches with the conversational use of “surely” when the speaker knows that he/she is taking a risk, but believes that his/her argument is grounded on reason and that he/she has a reasonable chance of persuading the reader (Simon-Vandenberg and Aijmer 2007: 137).

3. Other royals, too, are *surely* deserving of recognition.

This tallies with the special status of *surely* in argument as a “fighting word”, described by Simon-Vandenberg and Aijmer (2007: 137). It is notable that the strongly persuasive “but surely” identified by these authors is also relatively frequent in our corpus (though it does not reach the 33% frequency found in their corpus, which contains a large proportion of spoken language). The following example is typical of the persuasive use of “surely” to disarm opposition.

4. But the time has *surely* come to recognise that the Egyptian army's military, political and social role needs to be reduced, not expanded.

In fact, although *surely* does co-occur with contrastives, most of the examples belong to the category illustrated by example 4 (the adverbial is used to intensify the proposition that depends on the the contrastive, so that both work together to align the reader), and it is relatively unusual to find *surely* in the kind of concede-counter patterns analysed below.

### 3.2. *Concurring, conceding and countering*

Although instances where the adverbial is used simply to invoke concurrence are fairly common, as Table 1 shows, a large proportion of the certainty adverbials in the present corpus are associated with some form of countering.

The dominant pattern encountered in the present corpus was that in which the concession came first, headed by an adverbial of certainty, followed almost immediately by the counter-statement which includes a contrastive that is usually headed by “but”, but may occasionally be marked by items such as “though” or “however”. The example below illustrates the most typical pattern: A statement headed by “of course”, which expresses a view that is presented as uncontroversial, followed by a second statement fronted with “but”, which challenges or develops the first in some way. We may note

that the first proposition is examined, recognised as legitimate, and then set aside in favour of the second part, which leads the discourse forward.

5. *Of course*, to be part of an ever-extending family has difficulties, *but* interdependency is a prize asset. It lies at the very heart of a good and flourishing society.

The examples of this concede-counter type in these editorials tend to fall into patterns that are predictable in various ways. In what follows, we shall look at the main types of concede-counter structure found in this corpus, classifying them in terms of positive-negative polarity, and examining their function in the rhetorical structure of the text.

### 3.2.1. *Alignment through concede-counter*

In most of these examples from editorials, the certainty adverbial is used to qualify the first statement, which is then countered in the second part. In terms of appraisal theory, these examples begin with a proclaim/disclaim, which is given the force of concurrence by the use of locutions such as “obviously” or “of course”: The gist seems to be that this is a legitimate opinion, which many people would share. However, the examples end with a denial, proclamation or attribution that tends to close down the line of argumentation, and which has the force of countering what has gone before. The process of reader alignment is thus adjusted along the lines the writer wishes to take. The following examples (6 to 8) illustrate the way in which the editorial writer uses this structure to make a concession to other viewpoints or interpretations, before presenting his/her own, more definitive, view of the issue. In these cases, as in many of the examples in this corpus, it seems that the concession acknowledges a truism, a platitude, something that is part of received wisdom which the writer wishes to acknowledge as partially true, but then set aside in order to reorientate the discussion along slightly different lines. It is thus closer to Martin and White’s description of an “affirming concurrence” than a “conceding concurrence” (2005: 125). In their view, the type of “affirming concurrence” introduced by certainty adverbials like “of course” indicates a relatively high degree of commitment to the conceded proposition. By contrast, the use of an adverbial expressing reluctance, such as “admittedly”, indicates a “conceding concurrence” which reduces the level of writer commitment considerably. By implication, by using a strong certainty adverbial in the constructions under examination here, the writer is asking the reader to accept that the first argument is insufficient, and that the writer’s own explanation is more satisfactory.

6. *Of course*, precise figuring in case after case isn't possible. A more general conclusion, *though*, is inescapable.

7. *Of course* racism is not restricted to football (see yesterday's image of a stony-faced Tiger Woods shaking hands with his former caddy, recently overheard making racist jibes about his ex-boss). *But* the global reach of football means that the standards it demands can play a critical role in making and keeping it unacceptable.



8. *Obviously* no one can be sure what lies ahead, *but* Mr Balls must be right to say that the signs are sufficiently worrying that any prudent chancellor would be trying to establish a buffer against a further downturn.

In the instances set out above, we can see that the second half of these structures gains force because other possible viewpoints – which in each case are exceedingly obvious – have been held up for scrutiny, acknowledged as valid though incomplete, and then superseded by the writer’s own argument. Rhetoricians have long known the importance of addressing a universal audience, composed of all people whom the speaker considers “reasonable”, while simultaneously centring on a particular audience comprising the group of people whom the speaker aims to persuade (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969). In cases like 7 and 8, it is almost as though the writer is predicting the “common sense” response (of course you cannot be sure of the future), acknowledging that it contains some truth, and then reorientating the argument towards a more complex answer (there are some things that we do know about the future, and we are going to look at them now). The secondary proposition introduced as an “affirming concurrence” is thus characteristically presented here as *doxa*, received wisdom, and its value is at least partly preventive, used to pre-empt a facile interpretation of the situation.

In these cases, the persuasive power of acknowledging a common-sense view before advancing a more original one is clear. The nucleus holds some potential contradiction or complication, and by stating it, the writer is exposing him/herself to a greater risk. Received wisdom cannot be directly refuted, but in these instances we, the sophisticated readers, can understand that things are actually sometimes more complex. Some examples enact dialogue in an even more specific way. The following example enacts a dialogue between “what people say”, and the more informed view that the leader writer is advancing.

9. *Of course*, scoff the critics, people who are in trouble with the police don't like them. *But* it is one thing to say that people with previous convictions “don't like the police”, and quite another to find, as our research did, that the hatred is so strongly felt that many of our interviewees said it motivated them to riot, even where they did not have a record. This is borne out by Home Office figures.

In the next example, the same type of dialogic structure is used to present the voice of received opinion and, at the same time, discredit it.

10. *Of course*, lessons must be learned, agreements forged – and all such diplomatic jazz. *But*, as the warm fug in conference rooms turns to icy cold, can everyone involved be clear what is really happening here?

As Martin and White (2005: 121) point out, countering of this kind is generally aligning rather than disaligning, because it construes the writer as sharing a particular axiological paradigm with the reader. If, of course, the reader does not actually share this paradigm, then the writer would be taking a risk – but when editorials are written for a particular readership, this risk is probably mitigated, since the likelihood of being able to draw on shared paradigms is fairly high. It could be argued that for the left-leaning educated

readership of the Guardian, this strategy for bringing about alignment is an effective one, since it appeals to the critical person's desire to see beyond the doxa and challenge received opinion. Such a strategy might be less appropriate in a newspaper with a more popular readership.

On the other hand, this type of rejection-to-acceptance pattern of alignment by which the reader is coaxed through concurrence on received wisdom or acknowledgement of critical voices, to a partial rejection or reformulation of that wisdom, and on to the writer's final position, is only one of the possibilities offered by concur-counter structures. In many instances, a similar structure along the lines of "of course...but" appears to operate in the opposite direction, moving from what is accepted or acceptable, to what is really happening.

### 3.2.2. *Disalignment through concur - counter*

In a substantial proportion of instances the nature of the alignment achieved through the concede-counter pair is reversed: The structure begins with a positive proclamation reinforced by concurrence, and is followed by a negatively weighted counter-statement. Here, the first proposition is presented as true concurrence, as an affirmation of what all right-thinking people believe, in a way that differs from the conceding concurrence explained above, because here it has the writer's whole-hearted endorsement (Martin and White 2005: 125). The second part of the pair generally represents what is really happening, which (viewed from the perspective of the first) is negatively evaluated. In these cases, the second proposition is undermined by the force of the first.

11. Egypt *obviously* needs another authority under which it can manage the transition, *but* the failure of the main political parties to agree on one, let alone participate in it, has been the problem from day one.

In some cases, repetition of certainty adverbials is used to build reader alignment with a particular interpretation, which is then brought into a shock collision with the true state of affairs. In the following example, the writer expresses his/her commitment directly on the level of judgement (Martin and White 2005: 35), and lexical intensification is prominent as a means for fostering reader alignment.

12. *Of course* it is right, as the Homicide Review Advisory Group argued yesterday, that not all murders are the same – just compare a serial predator with an assailant in a pub fight gone wrong. *Of course* it follows that judges should be free to sentence in the light of the facts. *And of course* it is daft that their hands remain somewhat tied by a mandatory life sentence introduced in a deal to abolish hanging nearly 50 years ago. Within hours, *however*, No 10 and Labour alike demonstrated they were incapable of digesting these truths.

Here, the resource of concurrence, intensified through repetition, is used to align the reader strongly in the direction chosen by the writer. This gives the ending greater impact as a criticism of the political establishment. Since the reader has been assumed to concur with the three judgements headed by "of course", the reader is already

positioned to condemn the state of affairs set out in the final sentence. It should be noted that this example differs from those in the previous section in that the concurrence is not concessive, and the countering runs in the opposite direction in terms of reader alignment. In the previous section, the pattern was: Concede to other opinions, then counter with the writer's own opinion, thereby aligning the reader with the writer's opinion. In the examples considered here, the pattern is: Concur with the reader on the writer's opinion, and then counter with a proposition that is not in line with the writer's opinion, thereby disaligning the reader with the last proposition. As a rhetorical strategy, this evidently has something in common with the denial which knocks down reader expectations (Martin and White, 2005, 119), and is particularly effective as a way of voicing criticism.

It is noteworthy that this pattern tends to occur frequently in political commentary: The concurrence is positive, denoting the "sensible" consensus about what is right. The counter-statement, on the other hand, is negatively charged, indicating what the government, or politicians in general, fail to perceive or do. The following examples illustrate the same dialogic move in a rather different way: First, strong concurrence on the way things should be; then, a presentation of the grim reality.

13. This asks the public whether it agrees with a series of banal statements: among them should ministers protect nationally important landscapes, and should charities be allowed to care for trees? The answers, *of course*, are yes – *but* yesterday's proposals for the Forestry Commission's future fall well short of guaranteeing that its good work will continue.

14. That has been demonstrated *clearly* enough in North Africa and *yet* the west struggles to apply the lesson to the Arabian Peninsula.

### 3.2.3. Patterns of discursive realignment

Other examples fall into somewhat different patterns that are harder to classify using a strictly oppositional interpretation. In these cases, the apparent contrast suggested by the combination of a certainty adverbial with a contrastive linker seems simply to mark a discursive change of direction rather than a direct denial. In these examples, the contrastive heralds in a proposition that limits or extends the previous one in some way. In example 15, the statement enjoying the writer's unmitigated support is backed up by concurrence, while the counter-statement contains a limitation of some kind.

15. One day on from the 11/11/11 Armistice anniversary (...) and a day before Remembrance Sunday, it must *of course* be reaffirmed that the care of the injured and the memory of the fallen deserve funds and minutes of silence. (...) *But* there's the point – it should be a choice. It is no sort of tribute to end up with poppies paraded reluctantly, rather than worn with pride.

The second part does not always serve to establish a limitation. The following examples show how the "of course-but" structure can actually be used to extend the

argumentation, rather than to counter or restrict it, by moving into more surprising territory.

16. It helped, *of course*, that Rattigan learned about dramatic structure by studying the Greeks at school. *But* the centenary revivals have forced us to recognise the real truth about Rattigan: that behind the quietly oblique dialogue lies a profound understanding of the human heart and an awareness of the illogicality of love.

17. There were the looks, *of course*, and a few performances you can't argue with – Gentleman Prefer Blondes and Some Like it Hot. *But* more than anything, it's the character thing.

Here, the more obvious aspects of the topic are presented as incontrovertible by applying “of course”, while “but” ushers in the writer’s own original point – which in no sense contradicts, but rather extends the ideas that have been presented. In such cases, we might feel that the concede-counter structure in editorials sometimes has a function in redirecting discourse reminiscent of a looser, more conversational form of argumentation. Taboada and Gómez-González (2012: 30) discuss the special role of concessive clauses, such as those introduced by “but”, in informal conversation, where they are often employed to correct potential misunderstandings, or simply to manage the discourse and move fluidly from one topic to another. The above examples suggest that editorial writers, too, draw on the vaguer type of relations established by “but” and similar linking devices in conversation, in order to lead from the more obvious to the more original aspects of their theme.

#### 3.2.4. *Embedded concessions*

Although most of the instances of certainty adverbials in proximity to countering devices in this corpus tend to follow one of the above patterns, a substantial number of examples belong to a fourth category, that of the embedded concession. In this case, the concession is generally abbreviated, and functions as a kind of “conversational aside” in which the writer simulates a brief confidential remark that acknowledges a (supposed) reader reaction, before explaining why that reaction is not entirely appropriate. In this sense, these examples function as a variation on the theme of the concede-counter alignment structure identified above.

The following two examples present a statement that creates dialogic contraction, then a position in which the writer grants a concession with which the reader is invited to concur, and finally a third idea in which the writer presents an alternative position, which is expansive in (18) and contractive in (19). The concurrence effected through use of the locutions of certainty is thus an interim move, a brief aside to the reader, as the writer proceeds from one stage to the next:

18. The riots were simply a matter of crime and disorder – serious, *of course*, *but* something that could be tackled through expanding existing initiatives on problem families and gang culture.

In example (18), the first idea is proclaimed, then mitigated and evaluated through concession. Finally a solution is entertained. In the following example (19), there is also a threefold structure: The first idea is proclaimed and given full authorial support (proclaim: Pronounce); the second point is acknowledged to be more difficult; while the final part presents the alternative position as a knock-down argument.

19. Economically, yes; politically, it is *undoubtedly* much harder. *But* the alternative remains a break-up of the euro.

The quasi-conversational style of argumentation is particularly apparent in the following short “asides” which invoke reader alignment in a particularly informal, interactive manner (20, 21).

20. Britain indeed is an island fortress. Except *of course* it is not – *but* the failure to exclude those who should not come in, nor to deport them subsequently, has little to do with the officers of the Border Agency.

21. Was David Cameron happy with his forestry policy? He wasn't; and now he has ditched it. Immediately headline writers all over the land reached for the time-honoured formula: government U-turn. It was, *of course*, *but* the phrase gives no hint of the elegant sweep with which the prime minister, in one fluid motion, disarmed the opposition and sliced off his environment secretary at the knees.

The force of these “asides” can be seen to be that of nodding to the reader and acknowledging a typical response attributed to him/her, but always as a prelude to making some new assertion that will carry the line of argument into new territory.

### **3.3. Ideological dimensions of concurring-counteracting patterns**

So far, we have reviewed the typical patterns that emerge in this corpus of newspaper editorials. However, we have not considered the role that these may have in the ideological dimension of the text. Following Amossy (2009) and Verschueren (2012), we understand that argumentation is a fundamental dimension of discourse. Although the techniques used by a writer (such as the concede-counter structures under discussion here) do not have an intrinsic value in themselves, they do play a role, helping to “give the mind a certain orientation, to make certain schemes of interpretation prevail” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969: 198). Moreover, as Amossy emphasises (2009), not only are such structures deliberately chosen, but they are used in combination with other features (e.g. lexical choices) that are themselves deployed intentionally to influence readers: “There are no neutral terms, as there is no neutral style” (2009: 315), because the structures, vocabulary and style used in any given case combine to align the reader in different ways.

In the corpus analysed here, it is possible to perceive the role of concede/concounter structures in building and consolidating what we might term the ideological dimension of the text. In Amossy’s explanation of the relationship between

argumentation and discourse analysis (2009: 317), she states that “what is reasonable and plausible is always co-constructed by men and women engaging in verbal exchange, and it is the dynamism of this co-construction realised in natural language and in a communicative framework that has to be analysed”. In these editorials, the argumentation often proceeds through a kind of simulated dialogue – and although all writing may be ultimately be dialogic (Bakhtin 1978), it is fair to assume that dialogue that is vocalised as openly as this has a particular significance.

In order to examine the ideological dimension of the structures considered here, let us first consider the canonical cases described above. In the case of alignment through concede-counter, one possible scenario can be illustrated by the following example:

22. Chancellors of the exchequer are entitled to holidays *of course*, but Mr Osborne's absence unfortunately provides the perfect metaphor for the lack of political leadership this week.

The ideological dimension of this is clear: The writer is admitting an alternative interpretation, i.e., making a concession to those who, in a spirit of fair-mindedness, might wish to defend the chancellor’s leisure plans, before pointing to the reason why it was actually not a good idea for the chancellor to be on holiday at that particular time. Marking the first proposition with “of course” is a way of acknowledging the admissibility of this idea, and showing that the writer is prepared to make concessions to the chancellor’s rights as a human being. The extent to which this is tinged with irony is debatable.

In the next example (23), the writer again concedes a point to those who think otherwise (in this case, supporters of the Conservative party, and the election campaign organised around the theme of “broken Britain”), and then moves in swiftly to counter their view with a stronger opinion that is likely to be more acceptable to the *Guardian*’s readers, who are not noted for their support of the Conservative party.

23. *Of course* more could be done and there are pressing needs to be addressed. *But* it is nonsense to pretend everything is broken.

In other cases, the concur-disalign pattern is used to highlight a contrast within the text that brings out a political point. Here, again, lexical choices (“in extremis”, “the difference between life and death” contrasted with “no sense of crisis”) combine with the argument structure to highlight the writer’s point.

24. And for all the slogans about putting patients first, we report today on signs that many waiting times are creeping up. For patients, *of course*, delayed diagnostics can, in extremis, make the difference between life and death. *But* as other gales blew through Westminster's corridors last week, there was no sense of crisis in committee room 10, where MPs were quietly reconsidering the detail of Andrew Lansley's rewritten health and social care bill.

In all these cases, the statement qualified by the certainty adverbial serves rhetorically as a point of contrast for what comes next. The adverbial itself either modifies this by

endowing that statement with some respectability – this is a statement which reasonable people might agree with – or it reinforces in order to give greater impact to the contradiction that follows. However, in some instances, rather more is understood. The implicatures that arise out of these examples vary, but some have a strong ideological focus. Consider example 25, in which the reader is asked to concur with the notion that Barroso does not face voters directly. In fact, this is not the issue at stake. Readers know that Barroso is not directly elected, but the point is not that. The point is the implicature that underlies this statement: Barroso, British readers understand, is immune from the normal checks and balances of democracy - he can say these things because he is not answerable to the electorate. The contrast lies precisely in the fact that Merkel is.

25. José Manuel Barroso, spoke yesterday. In place of soft soap about muddling through, he said this was the EU's gravest crisis, which only fresh integration could solve. Mr Barroso does not, *of course*, face voters directly, *but* Angela Merkel now looks as if she just might follow his federalist lead. A better-designed single currency might have allowed Greece to default within the euro, and take the consequences.

Perhaps the most interesting point about the way these structures convey ideology is precisely this: In an example like 25, the underlying assumptions on which these propositions are built are not spelled out. We are thus looking at an example in which the missing element of the argument (decision-makers who are not accountable to an electorate are dangerous) is simply taken for granted. As Amossy points out (2009: 318), the tacit premise in an argument (which she terms the “enthymeme”), which is habitually left out, may heavily influence the kind of reasoning that goes on in real socio-historical frameworks. In this case, the readers’ assumptions concerning the lack of accountability in the EU leadership constitute just such an unstated premise.

Some of the instances in this corpus are still more ideologically loaded. In example 26, by using *of course* to highlight what was not said, the writer sharpens his/her criticism of the chancellor of the exchequer by suggesting that it is commonly acknowledged that the chancellor would be very reluctant to admit that a “Plan B” was needed, in other words, that his previous policies were wrong. An implication of dishonesty thus compounds an implication of incompetence.

26. The final, and most interesting, thing about what the chancellor said was the faint hint that he just might be starting to understand that solving this will require a Plan B. *Of course*, he did not put it that way, *instead* floating the concept of “credit easing”, which had economists scratching their heads.

By using phrases such as “faint hint” and “might just be starting to understand”, the writer effectively underlines what he/she sees as the chancellor’s imperviousness to reason. Moreover, since the reader’s complicity is then engaged by using *of course* with an unhedged statement, the assumption that this politician is unlikely to tell the truth about his own failings is subtly brought across to the reader on the level of doxa, as a received opinion which is unlikely to be challenged. The force of concurrence here serves to engage the reader in a damning criticism of the chancellor’s honesty and intelligence, without spelling out the premises on which this is based.

#### 4. Conclusions

The above analysis has illustrated how patterns involving concession/concurrence and countering are important for our understanding of the ideological dimension of newspaper editorials. In this context, we understand ideology in a rather loose sense as an abstract system of evaluative beliefs, typically shared by a social group, which underlies their attitudes about a range of issues (van Dijk 1995). In the genre of the newspaper editorial, the writer is expected to present arguments that are acceptable to target readers, while also offering an interesting perspective on the events of the day. Since public opinion has, by definition, not yet consolidated around these events, opinion writers have a choice: They can tread carefully, showing respect for different judgements and acknowledging the presence of a broader public (Charaudeau 1997), or they can charge ahead with confidence, hoping to carry the readers with them. In the case of the *Guardian*, the former seems more characteristic, as the frequency of concessive patterns seems to suggest. However, it is also a truism that in editorials, opinions are not only expressed explicitly, but also through a variety of implicit means (van Dijk 1996). In the case of the patterns analysed here, we can say that both the nature of what is conceded or concurred, and the relationship between this and the counter argument, are ideologically important. Moreover, this is true on several levels, which we shall now consider in more detail.

On one level, as Taboada and Gómez-González acknowledge in the context of other argumentative genres, writers use concessive clauses (“but”, “however”, “although”) to manage the presentation of differing viewpoints, with the ultimate aim of showing that they themselves are presenting a balanced opinion: “One that is more credible because it is not polarized” (2012: 30). This in itself has ideological force, because it positions the writer as a tolerant, balanced analyst – even though the writer’s tolerance may only have a very limited scope. The frequency of concessive clauses of different types in this sample is evidence that editorial writers are influenced by the same desire to project a balanced and tolerant self-image.

Secondly, the nature of the ideas on which some degree of concurrence is presumed can be scrutinised. Admittedly, these propositions often turn out to be little more than common sense (“precise figuring in case after case isn’t possible” (6), “racism is not restricted to football” (7), “no one can be sure what lies ahead” (8)). But sometimes they yield rather more interesting insights into what *Guardian* readers are assumed to acknowledge as received opinion (“Egypt needs another authority under which it can manage the transition” (11), “charities should be allowed to care for trees” (13), “the memory of the fallen deserves minutes of silence” (15)). These concessions seem to represent a cross-section of rather conservative, middle-of-the-road opinion on a variety of issues, and the fact that the writer chooses to acknowledge them explicitly is itself worthy of interest. The representation of these views as *doxa*, as what is taken for granted within a specific social context (Bourdieu 1977), tends to reinforce them, albeit indirectly. Examples such as 11, 13 or 15 suggest that it would be out of order in this forum to state that Egypt is doing well, or that charities have no role to play in forestry, or that the two-minute silence on Remembrance Day is no longer relevant. In the concede-counter structures in this corpus, such views are rarely demolished: The countering that follows them is usually designed to refocus the argument, to



complement the received opinion with a more original insight, or to direct the reader towards one aspect that needs further examination.

On a third level, the editorial writer sometimes goes further, advancing more controversial interpretations under the guise of doxa, through use of concession/concurrence. Thus the editorial writer says of the chancellor, Osborne, “*Of course, he did not put it that way*”. “Of course”, here, implies the readers’ agreement with the proposition that politicians do not tell the truth when this is inconvenient. Similarly, when the editorial writer states that Barroso is not answerable to an electorate, the readers are roped into tacit agreement with the writer’s implied criticism of the non-accountable nature of EU institutions. Arguably, it is on this level that the process of disseminating and replicating ideology largely takes place.

Finally, we might also consider the further functions of these structures in the editorial genre. These concur/concede-counter pairs are undeniably just one subtype of the kind of oppositional structure used to underpin editorial writing in general (Davies 2013). As such, they are integrated into broader patterns of lexical and discursive patterning which opinion writers use to arrange facts and ideas in coherent ideological and rhetorical configurations. Their discourse-structuring functions may range from simple progression, in which writers set up a loose concede-counter structure to join various tangentially-connected ideas together in one text, to strongly contrastive writing in which dramatic contrasts are established and maintained throughout the text. Importantly, as well as helping to structure arguments by providing a strong yet flexible oppositional structure, these pairs also operationalise the ideological bond between a newspaper’s writers and readers. By “performing” consensus through the use of adverbials, the writer not only aligns readers with regard to a complex set of arguments, but also helps to build epideictic community, forging strong bonds between readers as members of a like-thinking group.

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