

MODE

We have seen that if field or tenor varies, meanings and the wordings which realise those meanings vary. So also with Mode. Mode refers to the role language is playing in realising social action. It influences textual meanings, meanings which weave the experiential and interpersonal meanings together into text, making the language used relevant both to the surrounding verbal context (the co-text) and to the non-verbal environment (context). Textual meaning is realised primarily through Theme and cohesion.

As they stand, these statements about Mode are abstract and perhaps rather unconvincing. It is the purpose of this chapter to explain these statements while answering the question: what effect does mode have on meaning making?

Channel, Role and Medium

The examples used to address this central question involve junior secondary school students and their history teacher engaged in a unit of work based on an event of local history. They have reconstructed the event through use of actual court testimony and other primary source documents. A Recount of the event, written by the history master as part of the unit, is presented as the source text for this chapter.

The first point to notice about these two texts is that each involves the same experiential and interpersonal meanings. One student is involved in the production of both texts which discuss the same event. The main difference between the two is Mode. So how the experiential and interpersonal meanings are woven together, integrated in text, differ.

In Text 1 the *channel* of communication is *phonic* and in Text 2 it is *graphic*. In phonic channel language is realised vocally, and in the production of text, process sharing (sharing the process of constructing the text) is possible, as it is in Text 1. Hence text production in Text 1 is

dialogic. When the channel is phonic, *visual contact* between the speakers and addressees is usually possible. In Text 1 above, the speakers and addressees can see each other, providing each other with both verbal and visual feedback as they speak and listen.

Should Adrian and Tony telephone each other about a homework assignment based on the case, the channel would still be phonic and text production dialogic, but visual contact would no longer be possible. Penny's contribution borders on the monologic. Many teachers speak long monologues, especially when new material is being introduced.

In Text 2 above, the channel is graphic; text production is by means of graphic units. Text production through graphic channel is monologic. Process sharing in text construction is denied (unless the writer is using electronic text).

In both Texts 1 and 2 (and in Text 3 on the next page) language plays a *constitutive role* in realising social action. This contrasts with the *ancillary role* language would have played as Kelly searched for and confronted Fuller. In the latter case, language would have accompanied the goings on. In Texts 1, 2 and 3, on the other hand, language is all there is; language is constituting the social action (of revising, testing and expositing in turn).

Even though Text 2 is graphic channel, it is essentially *spoken medium*, as is Text 1. *Medium* refers to the lexicogrammatical characteristics of the language used. Spoken medium is characterised by *grammatical intricacy* whereas written language is characterised by *lexical density*. This distinction is readily seen when Penny's spoken contribution in Text 1 is compared with Manning Clark's written account in Text 3.

Penny's Answer to Question on Class Test

Q: Give three reasons why Kelly should not have been hung.

A: Kelly should not of been hung because he was a good man and did not mean to kill Fuller but just to wound him and teach him a lesson. Fuller also had stolen from him twice before and he would do it again.

From 1809 to 1821 Governor Macquarie tried to keep New South Wales in the main as a colony for convicts, ex-convicts, and their families. The expansion of wool-growing, the crossing of the Blue Mountains in 1813, the increase in the migration of free settlers after 1815, the increase in the demand for New South Wales wool in Great Britain...all these gradually converted the gaol at Port Jackson into a colony using convict labour. The Macquarie period, as an age of transition, was quite stormy, and the personalities of the principal antagonists—Macquarie, Macarthur, Bent and Marsden—added not a few claps to the thunder.

(Clark 1957:123)

Grammatical intricacy is calculated by dividing the number of clauses in a text by the number of sentences. So in Penny's contribution in Text 1 there are 12 clauses and 3 sentences (the ends of which are indicated by full-stops). So the grammatical intricacy of Penny's text is 4. In Text 3, there are 4 clauses and 3 sentences, so the grammatical intricacy is 1.3.

Lexical density is calculated by dividing the number of content lexical items in a text by the total number of lexical items in the same text. The content lexical items in Penny's contribution are: escaped, chain gang x2, stolen, bad x2, man, kept, Fuller x3, Kelly x3, wound x2, shoot, shot, get, teach, lesson, good, character x2. Hence, 24 of the 80 lexical items are content items, so the lexical density of Penny's text is $(24/80 \times 100)$ 30%.

The lexical density of Text 3, on the other hand is 45%; 43 of the 95 lexical items are content items. The context lexical items in Text 3 are: 1809, 1821, Governor Macquarie, keep, New South Wales x2, colony x2, convicts, ex-convicts, families, expansion, wool-growing, crossing, Blue Mountains, 1813, increase x2, migration, free, settlers, 1815, demand, wool, Great Britain, converted, goal, Port Jackson, convict, labour, Macquarie period, age, transition, stormy, personalities, principal, antagonists, Macquarie, Macarthur, Bent, Marsden, claps, thunder.

While Penny's spoken text is more grammatically intricate than Clark's, the latter, being written medium, is more lexically dense. Hence written language is not 'more complex' than spoken; they are complex in different ways.

Another related characteristic of written medium is a tendency to use *grammatical metaphor* in the form of *nominalisation*. Nominalisation refers to the process of turning doing into things. This, along with a large number

of nominal groups, is readily apparent in Text 3 where the following items have been nominalised:

the expansion	wool-growing	the crossing
the increase	the migration	the increase
the demand	transition	a colony using
		convict labour
claps	the thunder	

Eggins (1994:59) points out that such nominalisation has two main textual advantages. The first relates to how text is organised as text. The source text, a Recount, in this chapter is organised around human actors and their actions *in real world sequence*. So the writer tells us what happened first, next, and so on. Nominalisation, on the other hand, has allowed Clark to bypass real-world sequence and organise the text *rhetorically* instead, in terms of ideas, reasons, causes, explanations, and so forth. These are presented in the order in which he wants to talk about them, not necessarily in their order of occurrence in time.

There is a place for both kinds of organisation, of course. Texts organised around human actors and their actions in sequence tell us what actually happened. Those organised rhetorically typically provide an interpretation of and a set of generalisations about experience.

Secondly, nominalisation allows the writer to pack in more lexical content per clause, particularly via nominal groups, through which nouns (Thing) can be counted (Numerative), specified (Deictic), described (Epithet), classified (Classifier) and qualified (Qualifier). Through nominalisation Clark has packed four reasons for why the gaol changed into a colony into a single Theme/Subject in Clause 2. Likewise, locutions like the increase in the migration of free-settlers and a colony using convict labour allows for information to be condensed.

Heavy nominalisation makes a text sound prestigious, abstract and formal, authoritative and impersonal

Halliday (1994) states that learners only begin coming to grips with grammatical metaphor around age 12, the age of the students involved in this unit. To their credit, the teachers involved allowed spoken medium in answers to assignment and test questions. Clark's text, on the other hand, would be appropriate for senior secondary school age students or older people, who have more control of grammatical metaphor characteristic of written medium.