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*Reporting Armistice: A diachronic, functional perspective*

This thesis presents an investigation of diachronic consistency and variation in the register of newspaper reports. The data are instances of the register from *The Sydney Morning Herald*, reporting the conclusions of seven major wars in Australia's history from 1902 to 2003: Boer War, World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, Gulf War, and Iraq War. The study has two primary motivations: an interest in texts that construe the social contexts of the past and what they indicate about contemporary language and culture; and an interest in exploring changes in context within a particular register of English and how this can be managed using current linguistic models.

The research is interdisciplinary in that, as well as being a primarily linguistic enquiry, it is also an investigation of culture in history, insofar as the linguistic investigation can illuminate on historical context. It is a study of the patterns of interaction between the *Herald* as an institution and the people of Sydney as its readers, and the cultural history of how Sydneysiders have experienced war and armistice through the media. Thus, as far as culture is a major part of the context of a text, this investigation addresses the problem of describing, and ascribing relevance to, contextual variables in a diachronic set of texts.

The eight chapters of the thesis present a multistratal, functional analysis of the texts as instances of register, using the framework of systemic functional linguistics (SFL). Through the analysis of context, semantics and lexicogrammar, the thesis identifies both consistency and variation among the texts. It is argued, that the lexicogrammatical and semantic consistency through which the texts can be identified as instances of a register is motivated by consistency in the context at a primary degree of delicacy, while variation among the texts, which occurs within a limited range, is motivated by contextual shifts at greater degrees of delicacy. In particular, the analysis shows that different ways of orienting to time, space and news information in the texts construe diachronically different contextual calibrations in relation to the content and function of the news, the role of the journalist, and the role of technology in news production. The thesis highlights the need for further modelling of context at greater degrees of delicacy in order for the more specific differences between contexts to be made explicit.