

Linguistic Perspectives on Investigating Newswriting

Linguistics first focused on written language, later describing conversations as processes, and only then rediscovered written language from a process perspective: sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, text linguistics as well as discourse analysis all viewed writing as a core process of language use.

But even then, journalism and media were not a domain of interest to most linguists. Media texts were usually investigated as easily accessible traces of everyday language rather than as traces of public discourse as a specific area of language use. However, in the past decade things have changed. More and more linguists are investigating a) writing processes in b) public discourse, media, and journalism. It is a good time to sum up where we stand.

In this paper, I will provide a short, systematic overview of linguistic and linguistically-based interdisciplinary approaches in analyzing newswriting processes. Key questions are: What are the main issues and methods? Where has the field come from and what direction does it seem to be heading? How can the linguistics of news production be related to other disciplines? What kind of added value does that bring to journalism/media studies – and to those professional fields?

To illustrate claims and problems of current linguistic research in newswriting, I will present questions, methods, findings, and interpretations of the “*idee suisse*” project, in which newswriting in three newsrooms is investigated as a situated activity and then related to psychobiography, social settings and cultural resources – to individual, organizational, and political empowerments and constraints.

1 Where are we now? – Main issues and methods

The following list contains some of the most important contemporary (and future) researchers in newswriting:

Catenaccio, Paola; Coesemans, Roel; Cotter, Colleen; De Bie, Luc; De Preter, Wim; De Smedt, Mark; Garzone, Giuliana; Jacobs, Geert; Lams, Lut; Lindholm, Maria; Macgilchrist, Felicitas; Maeseele, Pieter; Michiels, Liesbeth; Palmans, Eva; Pander Maat, Henk; Peeters, Stefanie; Perrin, Daniel, , Richardson, John; Suhardja, Imelda; Temmerman, Martina; Tobback, Els; Van den Eynde, Steven; Van Hout, Tom; Van Praet, Ellen; Van Waes , Luuk; Verschueren, Jef

We know (a little bit) what we do

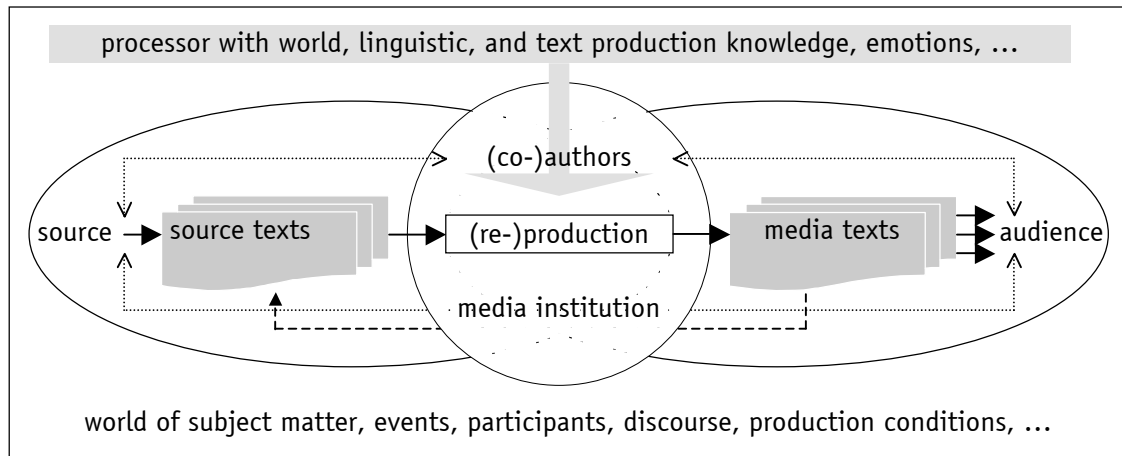


Fig. 1 ([Perrin, 2006 #1886]), 87)

But sometimes we don't know clearly enough what we do

| newswriting as ... | | social practice | |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|
| | | – | + |
| cognitive practice | – | version analysis he/she did this language used in news items in intertextual chains | variation analysis they all did this again and again language use as situated activity giving indirect access to social settings and cultural resources |
| | + | progression analysis he/she did and meant this language use as situated activity giving indirect access to individual psychobiography | metadiscourse analysis they all accept or not way he/she did language use as situated activity giving indirect access to individual and sociocultural structures |

Fig. 1 ([Perrin, 2006 #1886], 40)

„They“ do not at all what we do

- Tuchman, G. (2003). The production of news. In K. Bruhn Jensen (Ed.), *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research. Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies* (pp. 78-90). London: Routledge.
- Bell, A. (2006). News language. In K. Brown (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of language & linguistics* (2 ed., Vol. 8, pp. 615-617). Oxford: Elsevier.
- Conboy, M. (2007). Writing and journalism: politics, social movements, and the public sphere. In C. Bazerman (Ed.), *Handbook of research on writing* (pp. 201-216). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

„I agree that the handbook chapter didn't include process [...]. Any new reference book (and presumably a second volume of mine) will need to attend to this work.“

Charles Bazerman, personal communication

2 **Where do we come from, and where are we going to? – Development of the field**

„The field [of mass media discourse analysis] is only 20 years young, with most of its substantial work having been done in the last decade. For many levels and dimensions of analysis, we still lack the theoretical instruments. Thus, we still know little about the precise structures and processes of media discourse.“

Van Dijk, T. A. (1988, 23). News as discourse. Hillsdale: Erlbaum.

Explaining the white spot: The hidden practice of written communication

| communication mode → interactivity ↓ | writing | presenting | talking |
|---|---------|------------|---------|
| visible text production | [-] | [+] | [+] |
| spontaneous feedback | [-] | [+] | [+] |
| spontaneous turn-taking | [-] | [-] | [+] |

Fig. 1 ([[Perrin, 2006 #1886]])

Qualitative state of the art? – Multimethod approaches, natural data

- e.g. Progression analysis
developed to track news production in natural contexts
([[Perrin, 1998 #2638]]; Perrin, 2003; Perrin, 2006a).
- similar designs e.g. by [[Sleurs, 2005 #2843]] or [[Van Hout, 2007 #2744]]
- ethnographic, computer-based multi-method approach
- data can be obtained on three levels: a) the work situation, b) writing movements, c) writing strategies:

Level a: work situation

Before writing begins, details about the work situation are elicited with interviews and participatory observations.

Level b: writing movements

During the writing process, progression analysis records every writing movement in a logging program that runs in the background behind the text editor.

Level c: writing strategies

After the writing process is completed, progression analysis focuses on writing strategies:

the writers' reinforced, conscious, and therefore articulable ideas of how decisions are to be made during the act of writing so that the writing process or text product has a great probability of taking on the intended form and fulfilling the intended function.

- accessed with cue-based retrospective verbal protocols
- propositional format: to do x to achieve y
- activated to validate the quantitative methods

Back to level b: visualizing progression

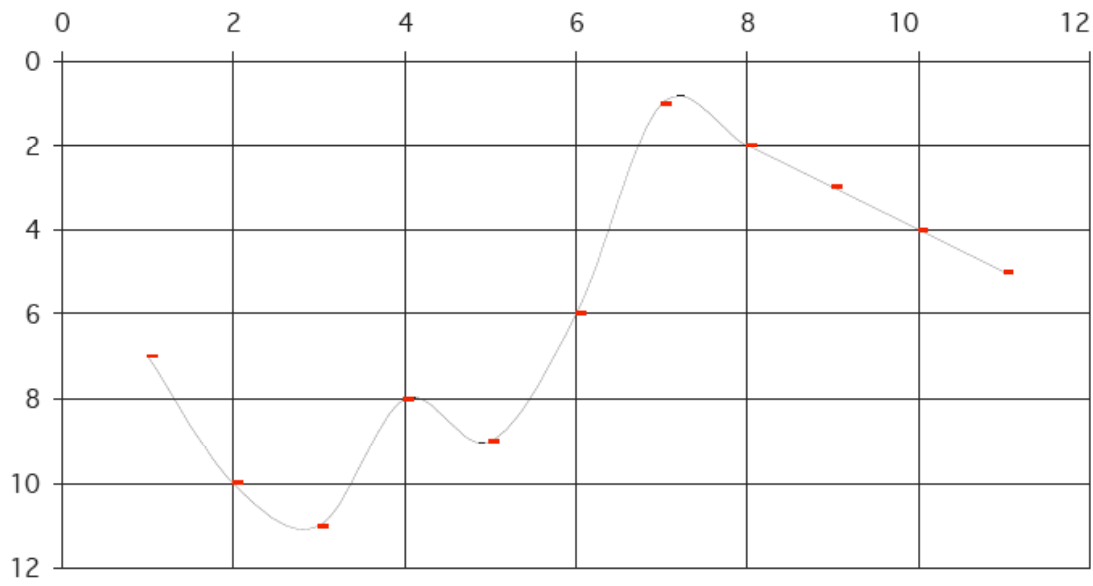


Fig. 2: Progression graph of the snowboard case, first session ([Wildi, 2007 #2796])

How to read progression graphs

- represents cursor movements during text production
- interpreted as the author's shifts of focus
- the temporal sequence of revisions in the writing process is represented on the ordinal scale of the x-axis
- the spatial sequence of revisions in the text product is on the y-axis, also ordinal

“Oscillating” vs. linear progression

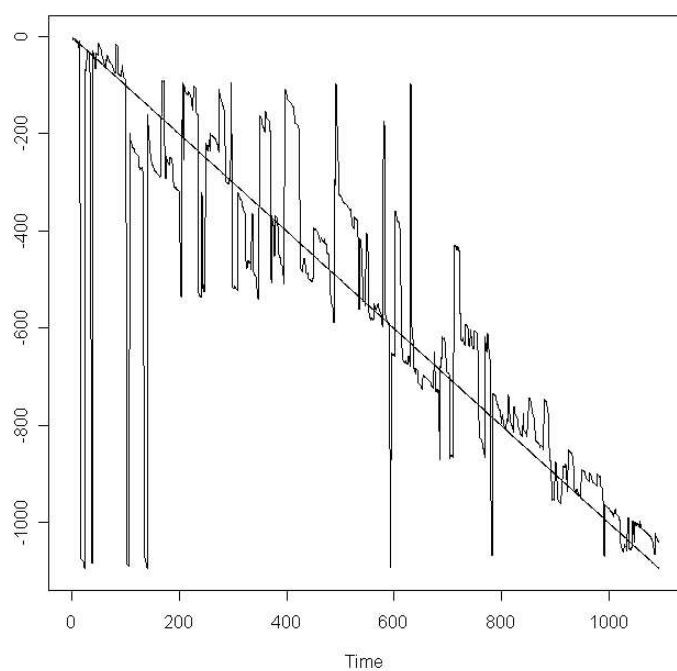


Fig. Progression graph compared with a perfectly linear writing process ([Wildi, 2007 #2796])

Quantitative state of the art? – Large corpora of progression data

large “quantitative” corpora, > 50 000 writing processes,
with “qualitative” subcorpora
of educational, academic and professional writing:

- all of the writing processes produced for a Swiss newspaper by all 190 journalists between the years 1999 and 2002
- all of the writing processes produced by hundreds of 1st to 5th graders between 2006 and 2009
- all of the translation processes produced by 120 translation students and 50 professionals between 2007 and 2009

Heading for integration: e.g. Realist Social Theory

- Layder, D. (1997). Modern social theory. Key debates and new directions. London: UCL Press.
- Sealey, A., & Carter, B. (2004). Applied Linguistics as Social Science. London et al.: Continuum.
- Perrin, D., Burger, M., Furer, M., Gnach, A., Schanne, M., & Wyss, V. (2008). Idée suisse. Final report. Winterthur: Institute of Applied Media Studies. <http://www.nfp56.ch>

Agency and (preexisting) structure

- “The realist view that we are advocating [...] is committed to an explanatory model in which the interplay between preexistent structures, having causal powers and properties, and people, possessing distinctive causal powers and practices of their own, results in contingent yet explicable outcomes.” (Sealey & Carter, 2004, 12)

Rethinking „structure“: the domain theory (Layder 1997)

- **psychobiography**: personal feelings, attitudes and predispositions of individuals engaged in their daily routines and experiences
- **situated activity**: human agency and interaction; **directly accessible**; explicable partly in terms of aspects of the other domains
- **social settings**: social structures, social context within which the interactions are situated: e.g. workplaces and their routines, practices
- **contextual resource**: cultural structures; “[...] anterior distributions of material and cultural capital which social actors inherit as a consequence of being born in a particular place at a particular time. While individuals have no choice about this, the distributions of these resources are systematically reproduced” (Sealey & Carter, 2004, 140).

Towards constructing situated knowledge

- The result of realist social research is “not a ‘master theory’ of the key causal mechanism, nor a catalogue of inconsistent results, but a **typology of broadly based configurations**”. (Sealey & Carter, 2004, 208)
- not the definite and brief answer on how to do jobs such as writing news, but a typology of situated knowledge: **what works for whom under what circumstances**.

3 Who is in the business now? – Interdisciplinary approach

How can the linguistics of news production be related to other disciplines?

Media linguistics, the „whys“ and the „hows“

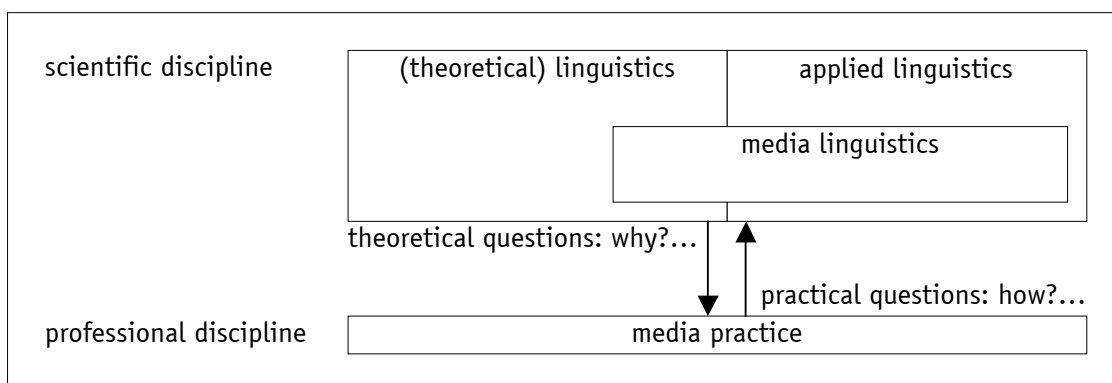


Fig. 1 ([[Perrin, 2006 #1886]], 30)

Media linguistics and CMS and the micro-macro-balance

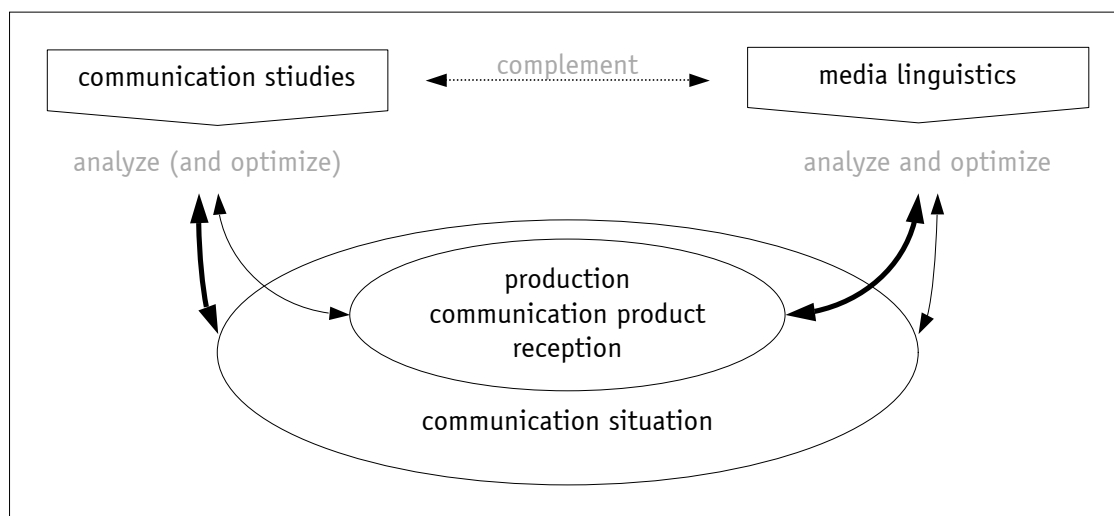


Fig. 1 ([Perrin, 2006 #1886], 33)

Research Case: The „idee suisse“ project

In the SNSF project “idee suisse”, we investigated the interplay of language policy, norms, and practice of Swiss Radio and Television (SRG): whether and how SRG should, actually does, and could fulfil language policy demands of promoting public understanding.

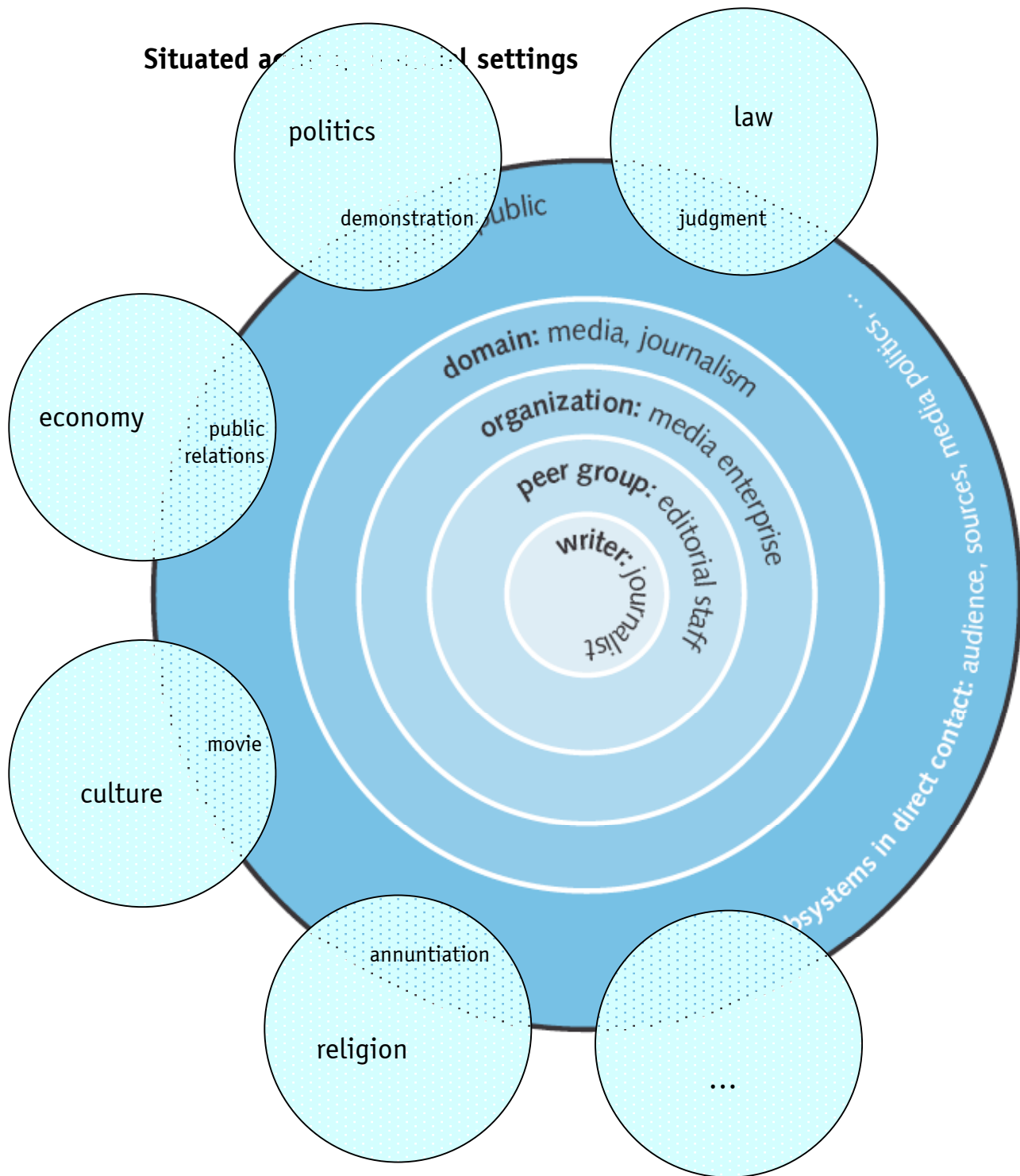


Fig. 1 ([Perrin, 2008 #2894])

Data generation on four organizational levels

| project module and focus | data source | | | | | | corpus amount |
|--|-------------|-----------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|---|
| | document | interview | text product | writing process | verbal protocol | conversation | |
| A media politics – societal remit | | | | | | | – documents (144) – guided interviews (23) |
| B media management – broadcasting company SRG | | | | | | | |
| C media production – TV news of SF and TSR – 3 news programs – 5 journalists per newsroom – 1 week per journalist | | | | | | | – editorial policies (3) – guided interviews (15) – news reports (120) – logfiles (120) |
| D production discourse – 1 case per journalist | | | | | | | – s-notations (15) – progression graphs (15) – verbal protocols (15) – workplace talks (9) – editorial conferences (20) |

Fig. 1 ([Perrin, 2008 #2894])

Political remit vs. management claims

“Konzession“ 2007, article 2 (programming mandate), paragraph 2: “In ihren Programmen fördert sie [SRG] das Verständnis, den Zusammenhalt und den Austausch unter den [...] gesellschaftlichen Gruppierungen. [...]“

Managers’ statements in propositional reconstruction: “Public media are not the institutions to solve social and pedagogical problems”

General findings: Conflicting demands in journalistic text production

Conflicting demands lead to problems in balancing the basic practices of journalistic text production:

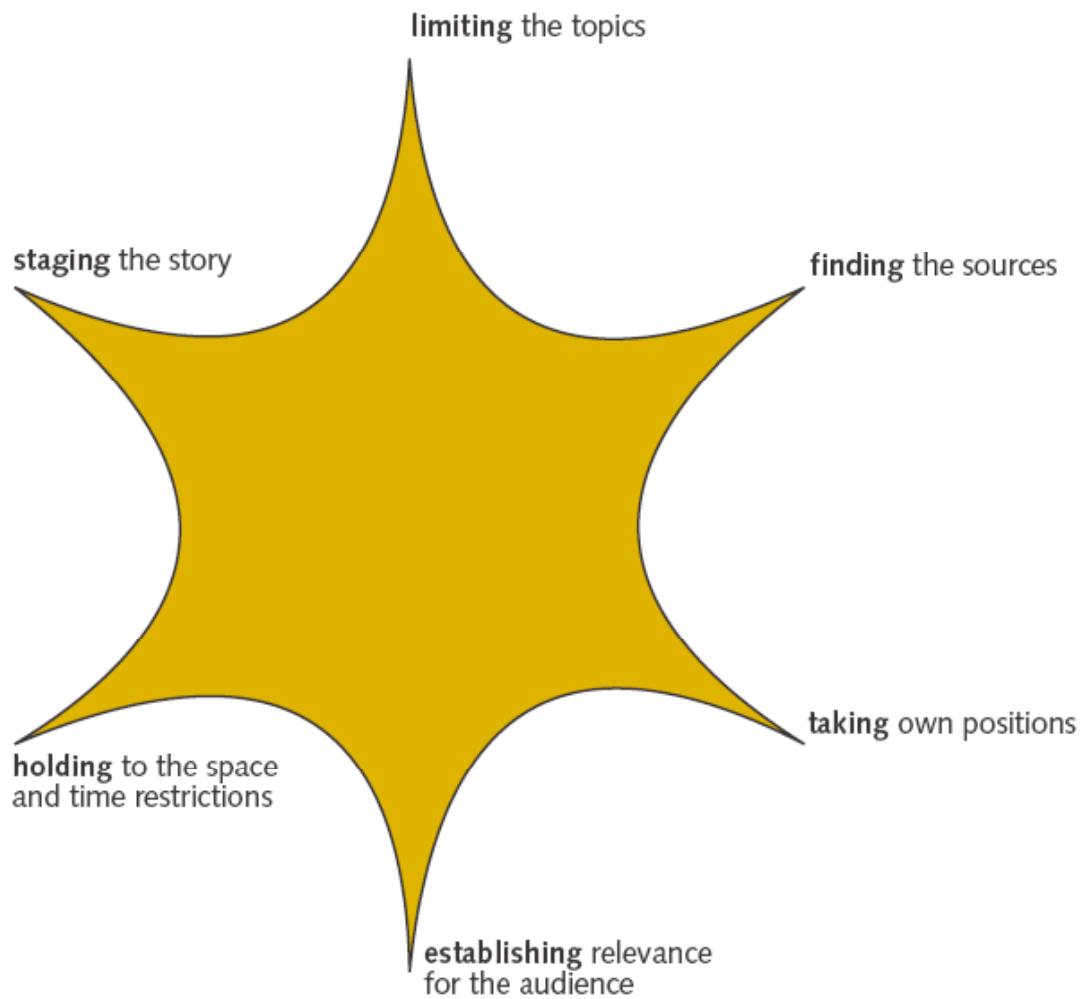


Fig. 1 ([[Perrin, 2008 #2894]])

Exemplary findings: The „background-recency-split“

Writing situation

- **Professional biography.** E.S., [...] studies in history and german and scandinavian languages, [...] Scandinavia correspondent for Swiss quality newspapers and TV; journalist at Swiss “Tagesschau” [...]
- **Professional embedding:** Criticises the loss of influence of the journalists in the newsroom, [...] **Dares doing “forbidden things”** (such as closing a news with a quote) if he thinks this enhances the quality of the news.
- **Text production patterns:** [...] takes the pictures to the cutter’s workplace, **together they compose the video, then he writes the text.** [...] Has a clear idea of the start – and counts on having ideas for the rest while writing [...]

Writing actions

Writes the introduction for the anchorwomen himself, as the first text, before the news itself.

Auch gestern nacht endeten alle Abstimmungen über den 15. Sitz im UNO-Sicherheitsrat ohne Resultat. 1[tt. | 1]1t. 2[weder | 2]2Weder Venezuela noch Guatamal3[| 3]3a vermochte 4[das | 4]4die nötige Zweidrittelmehrheit zu erreichen. Der Zweikampf zwis5[wchen | 5]5schen diesen Staaten ist zu einem Duell zwischen 6[Amerik | 6]6,7{amerika-feindlichen und }7| 8amerika-freundlichen8{9[DStz | 9]9 S10[D | 10]10taaten | 10}8 11{geworden - mit den Freunden Wa12[h | 12]12shingtons leicht im 13[vor teil | 13]13Vorteil.14[| 14]15}11| 1415[und am]15 | 7

Fig. 1 ([Perrin, 2008 #2894])

Writing strategies / protocol

0066 und was ich jetzt da versuche ist eigentlich die geschichte
0067 die schlicht mal einfach eine wahl ist in den sicherheitsrat sozusagen
0068 in den kontext zu setzen

0082 das sind zwei verschiedene geschichten die man da erzählt
0083 und mit den bildern
0084 kann ich natürlich die zweite geschichte schlecht erzählen
0085 das sind konkrete bilder auf denen man den wahlablauf sieht
0086 wo die quotes sind die sich wohl nur indirekt auf das beziehen
0087 das heisst in der moderation muss ich jetzt versuchen
0088 den kontext sozusagen zu umschreiben
0089 und weil wir ja sehr aktualitätsbezogen sind
0090 muss ich irgendwie schauen dass es eine aktualität hat

0098 chavez das ist noch schwierig in zwei drei sätzen
0099 für leute die nicht wissen was chavez für eine rolle spielt

Fig. 1 ([Perrin, 2008 #2894])

Writing strategies / propositional format

strategy format: to do X, because Y is true / to achieve Y

- Distinguish between two stories: the **recent story** and the **background/"context" story**.
- Tell the **recent story** in the **news text**, because it fits the **recent pictures** we have.
- Tell the **background story** because not all the **audience** is up to date with this news item.
- Tell the **background story** in the **anchor text** because there are no pictures.

Linking micro and macro: Emergent practices as hidden knowledge

The background-recency-split practice emerged in the journalist's conflict of basic practices when he had to bring together recent pictures (staging the story) with the need to provide background information (establishing relevance for the audience).

Conflicts lead to emergent practices

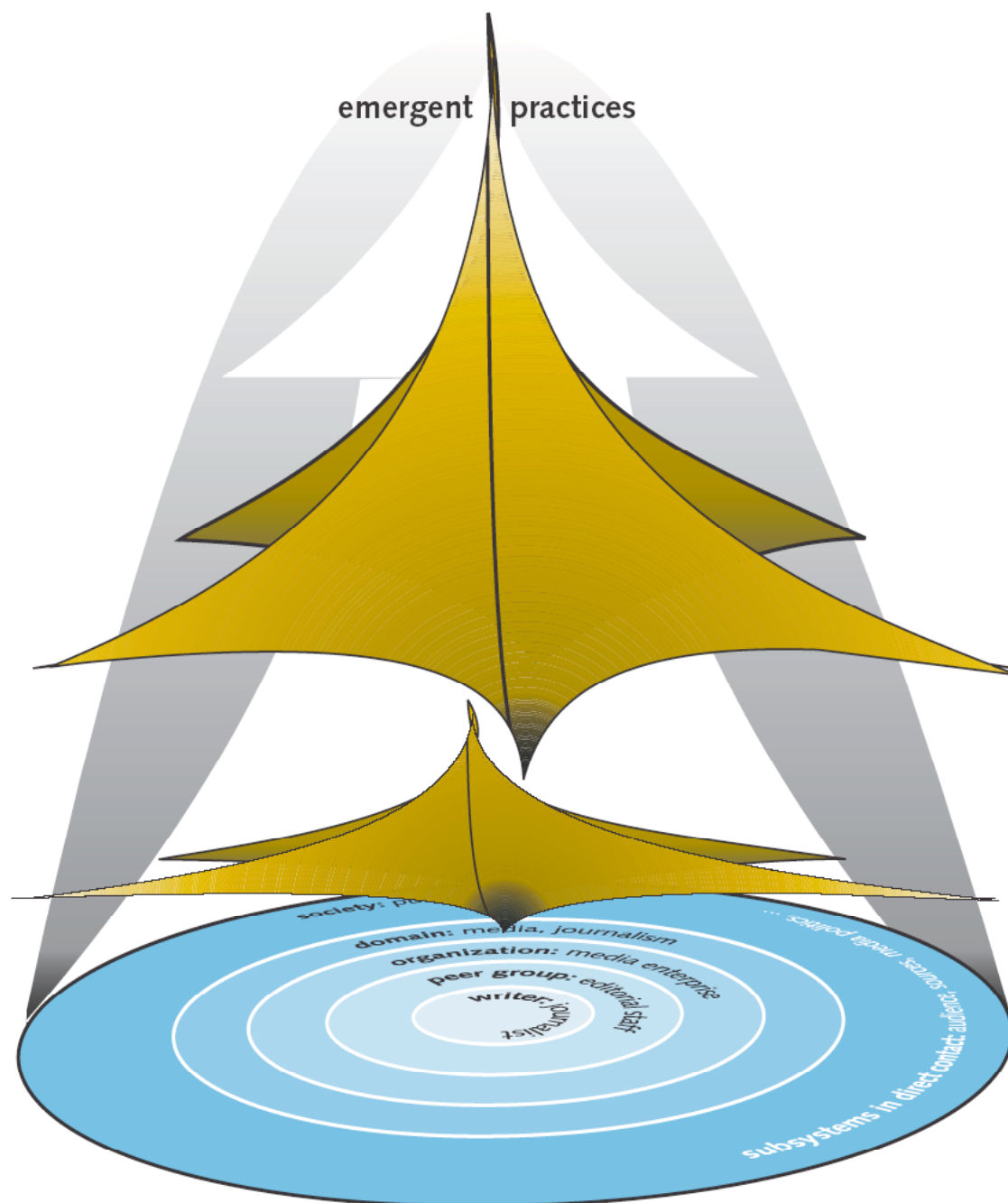


Fig. 1 ([Perrin, 2008 #2894])

Emergent practices as hidden knowledge

Experienced single exponents (outsiders, non-hypocrisy-driven) of an organization develop emergent and successful practices to meet the conflicting expectations of different stakeholders (societal subsystems)

This knowledge is implicit because the exponents are not aware of it. Therefore it is not yet part of the knowledge of the whole organization, and it risks remaining hidden and even disappearing with the exponents.

Knowledge transfer from the bottom

Since we located the crucial knowledge (of how to meet market forces and public demands at the same time) at the bottom of the organization, we call the knowledge transfer that we now have to promote a *knowledge transfer from the bottom*.

From double hidden knowledge to interdisciplinary cooperation

- We identified **narrative practices to promote public understanding** as journalists' situated activity (practices) representing psychobiography, social settings, and contextual resources.
- This application of RST **bridges micro and macro approaches** in research of public communication: situated language use (activity) as an interface to cognitive and social states and processes (structure).
- It demands systematic **cooperation of linguistics and communication**/media studies – which is rather new in German context (Tuchman 1976, Hickethier 1997, Bucher 1999, Hanitzsch 2005, Perrin 2006, Wyss 2008).

Investigating real newswriting: an interdisciplinary challenge

- linguistics (writing, reading, speaking, listening, language, ...)
- communication studies (public, journalism, media, ...)
- social theory (organizations, social settings, cultural resources, ...)
- cognitive theory (information processing, verbal protocols, ...)
- anthropology, ethnology, cultural studies, ... (workplace, profession, ...)
- science theory, methodology (method triangulation, ...)

4**What is it for? – Scientific and professional impact**

What kind of added value does that bring to journalism/media studies?
And what kind of added value does that bring to journalism and media
as professional fields?

Theoretical impact: e.g. modelling writing phases

- Phase models of the text production process basically assume that different writing activities predominate during different time periods in the process
- These time periods of activities can be recognized by more or less homogeneous time series dynamics in the data

Hayes & Flower, 1980; Kellogg, 1987; De Beaugrande, 1992; Hayes & Nash, 1996; Severinson-Eklundh & Kollberg, 2001; Alamargot & Chanquoy, 2001; Bracewell 2003

An integrative visualization of models of writing phases

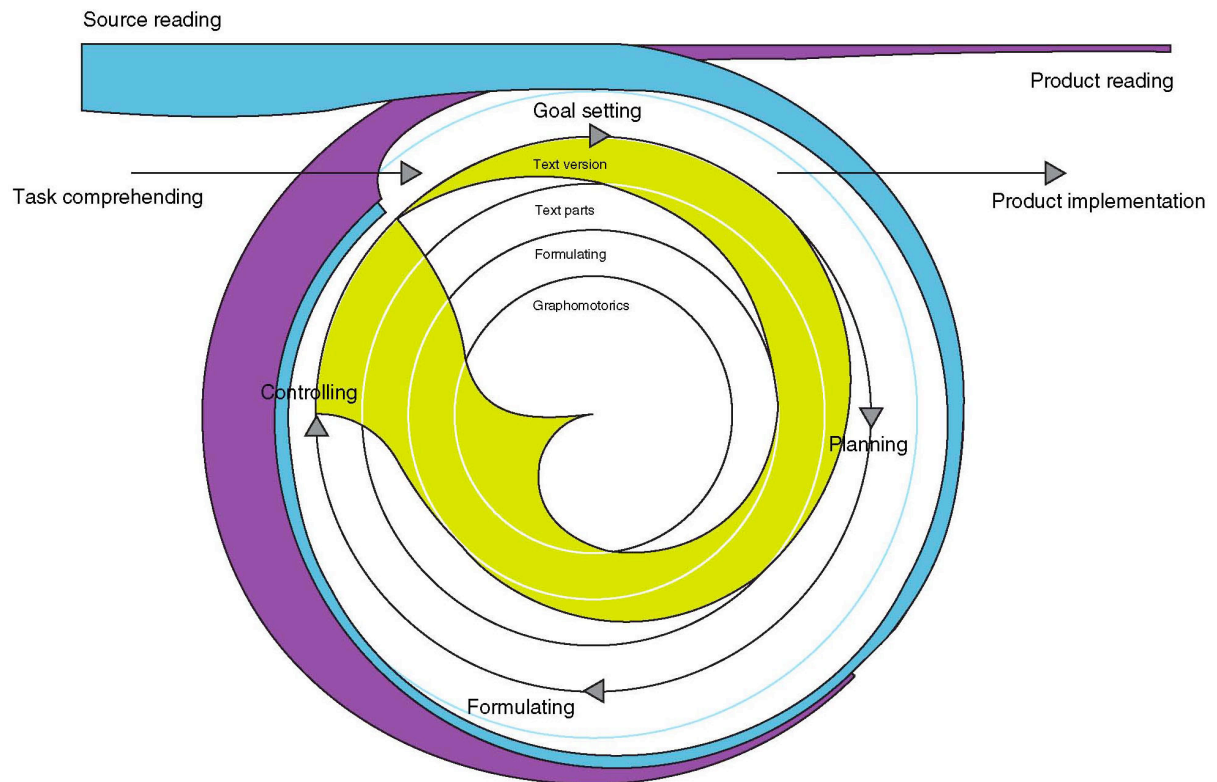


Fig. 1 Key concepts concerning phases in text production models ([Wildi, 2007 #2796])

)

Conceptually focused. Ecologically/empirically grounded?

- concepts are based merely on plausibility
or data from a few number of case studies
or data from laboratory experiments
- concept of phase is ecologically/empirically underdetermined
in theories of writing
- e.g.: did we select the most interesting cases
to do our case studies?

New: statistics, triangulation, and natural contexts

- interdisciplinary group of linguists and mathematicians
- procedures to statistically describe regularities
- in large corpora of writing processes in natural contexts
- results of this quantitative procedures
are triangulated with qualitative results

Information processing: signal extraction to detect phases

- towards less noise around the information
- towards reliable, intersubjective description

The use of trend slopes in progression graphs

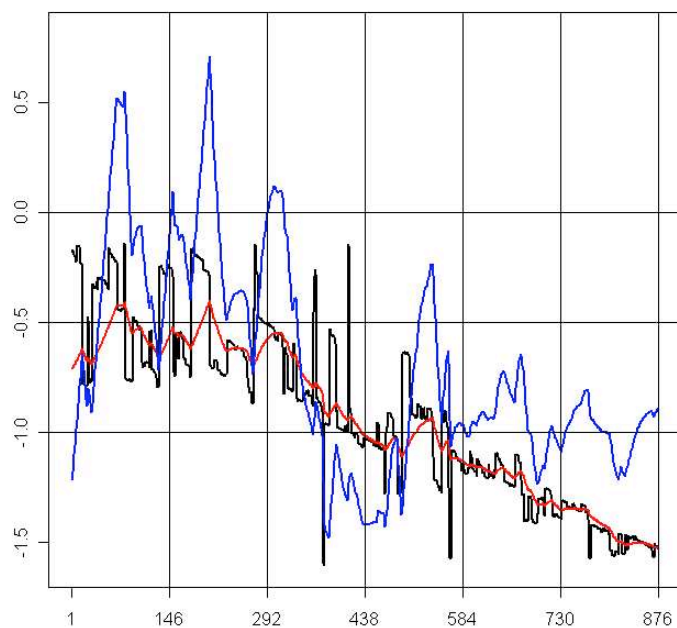


Fig. 8 Progression graph (black), trend level (red) and trend slope (blue) ([[Wildi, 2007 #2796]])

The oscillation phase

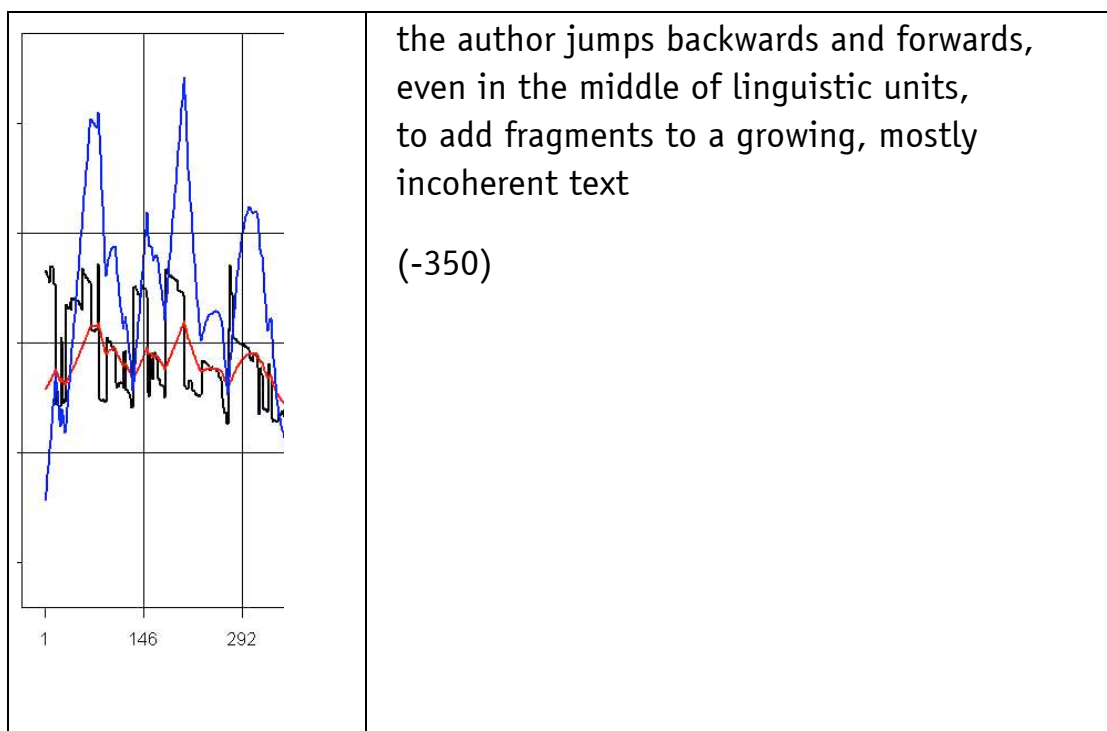


Fig. 8 ([[Wildi, 2007 #2796]])

The flip-flop phase

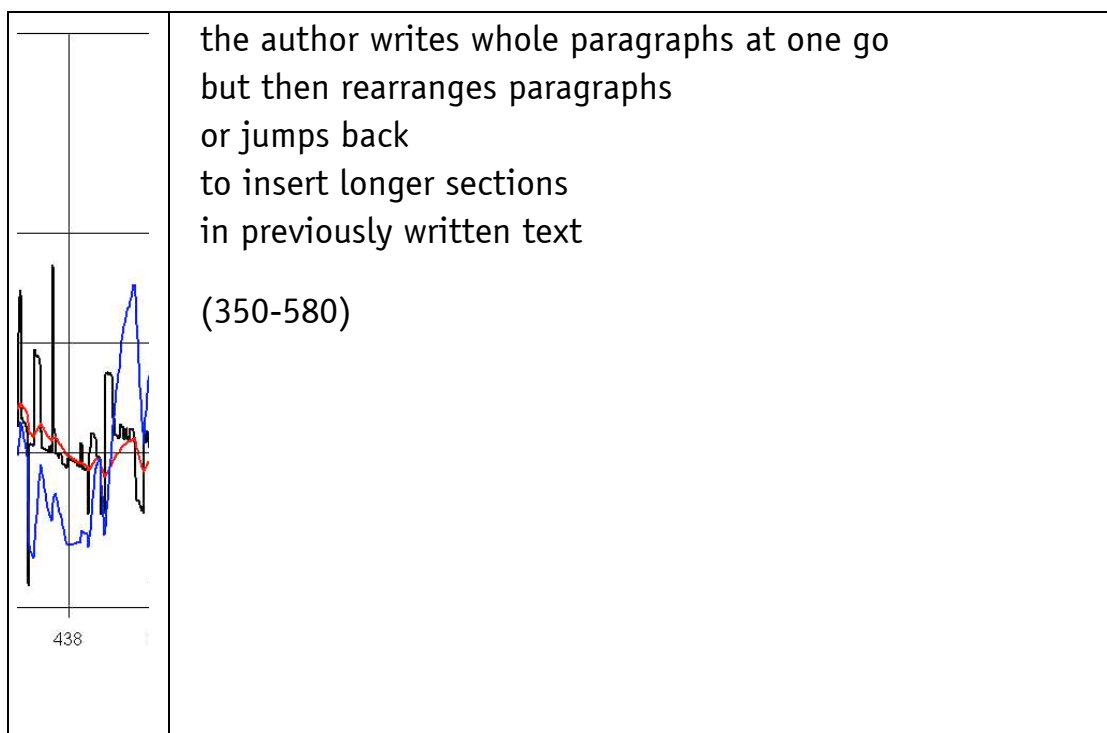


Fig. 8 ([[Wildi, 2007 #2796]])

The top-to-bottom phase

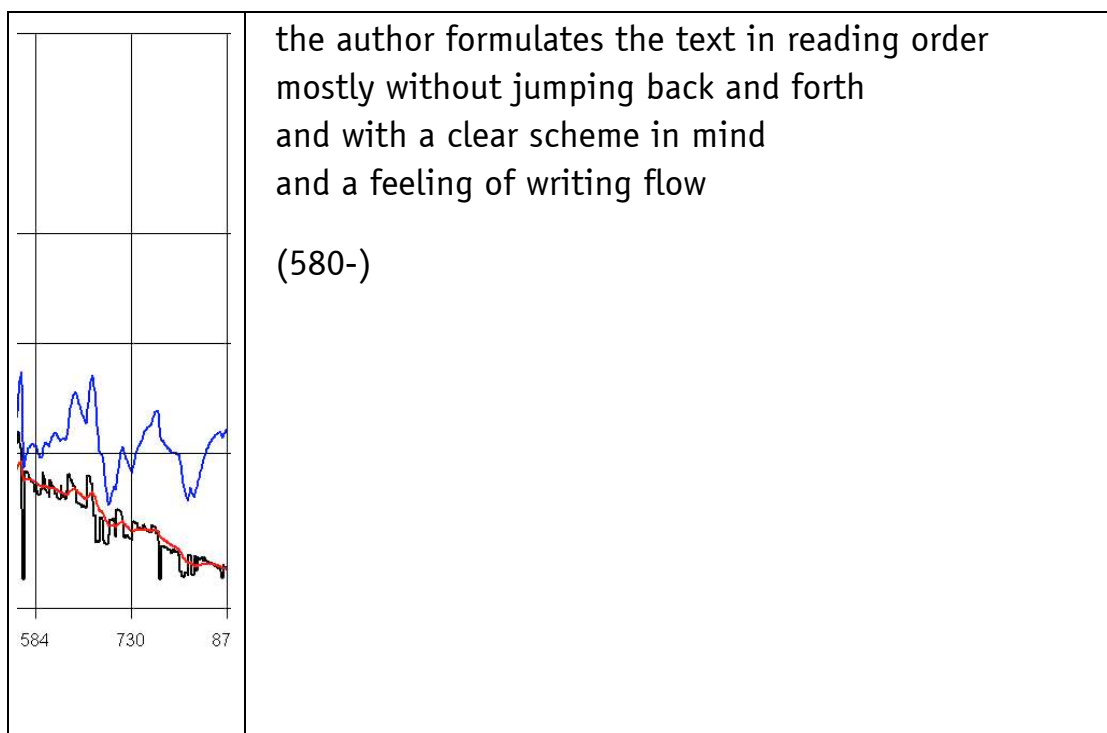


Fig. 8 ([[Wildi, 2007 #2796]])

A simple example: losing control in multiple session writing processes

The circus case: from top-to-bottom to oscillation phases

First session

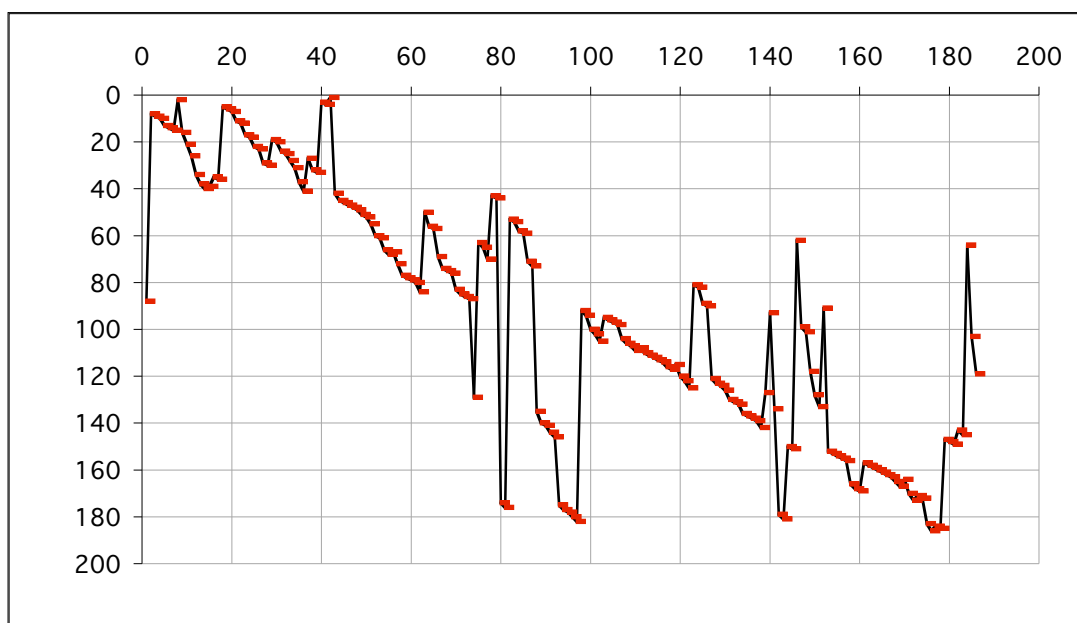


Fig. 2: Progression graph of the circus case, first session ([Perrin, 2008 #2894])

Second session

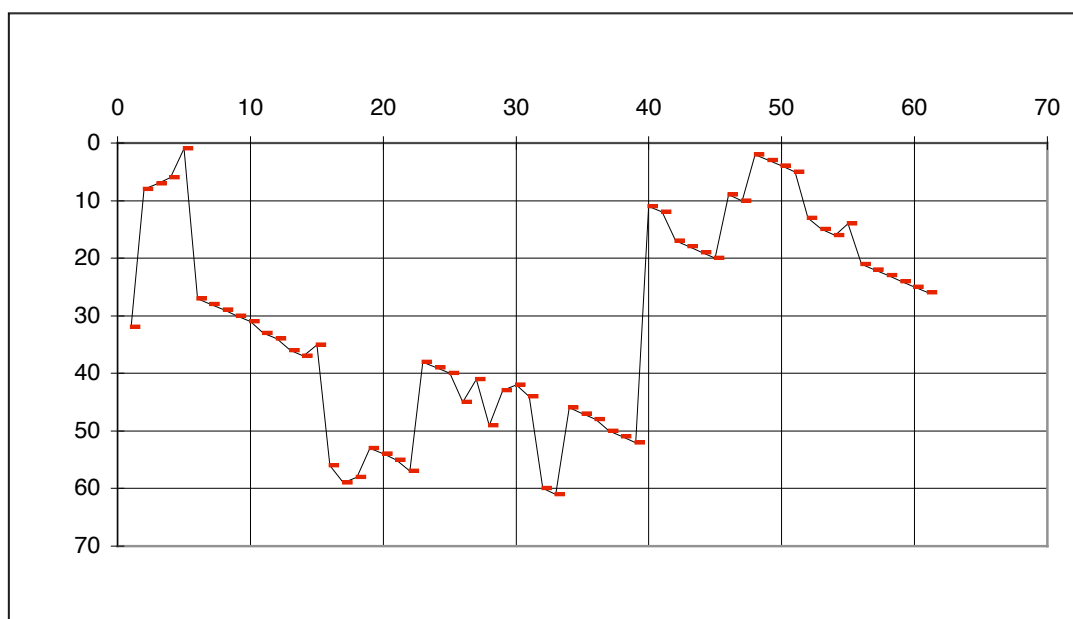


Fig. 3: Progression graph of the circus case, second session ([Perrin, 2008 #2894])

Third (and last) session

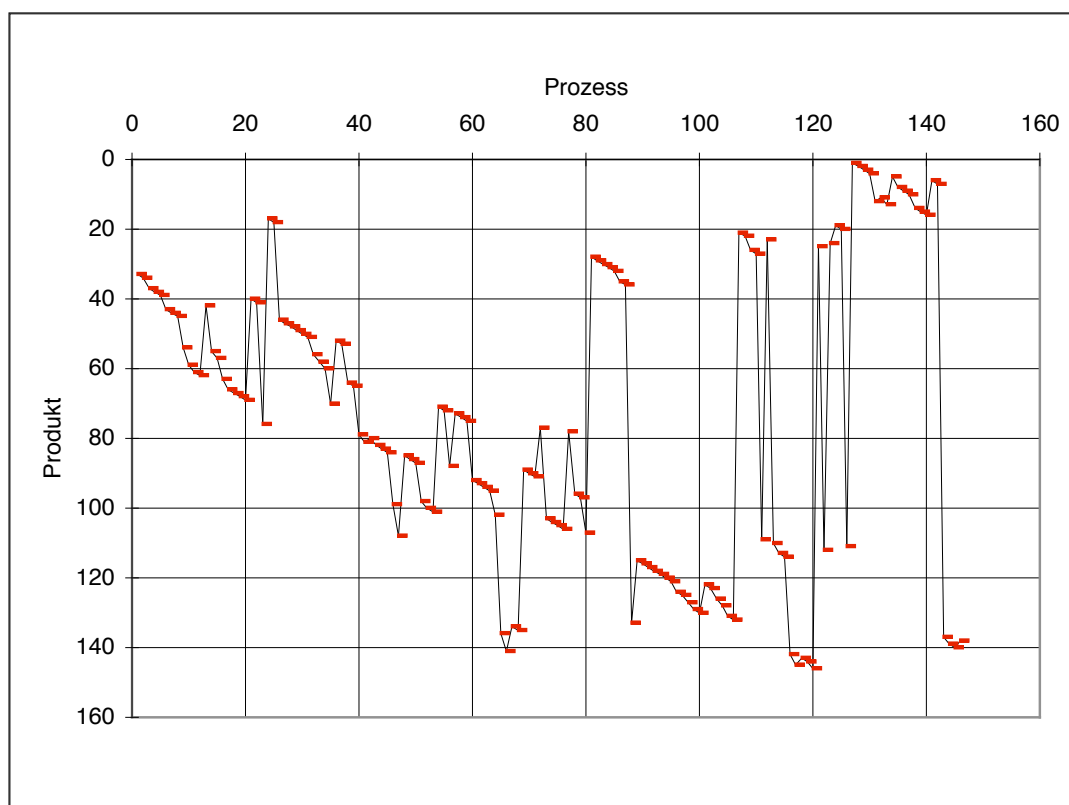


Fig. 4: Progression graph of the circus case, third session ([Perrin, 2008 #2894])

Back to qualitative validation

The impression gained from the progression graphs
is confirmed in the verbal protocols by the journalist:
She reported having lost control in the writing process.

file sf_ts_061031_1930_rierola_roncalli_verbal, line 260- ([[Perrin, 2008 #2894]])

Practical impact: Profiles of inexperienced vs. experienced writers

| writing behaviour | | time | |
|-------------------|--------|---|---|
| | | short | long |
| experience | expert | write-to-tell mode 1 think 2 write in reading order 3 revise in reading order | from write-to-think to write-to-tell 1 write and forget 2 reread and rewrite with other eyes 3 revise in reading order |
| | novice | write-to-think mode 1 write 2 rewrite 3 loose control | late write-to-think , no write-to-tell 1 wait 2 (see left) |

Fig. 1 ([[Perrin, 2006 #1886]])

5 **Let's do it. – Next steps**

„14 December 2007 - NT&T is happy to announce that our research group has been formally approved by Ghent University. This means that NT&T is now an official research group of the Faculty of Arts. Yay!“

<http://www.ntt.ugent.be/events>

The interdisciplinary perspective

- theoretically sound bridging of micro and macro perspectives
- systematic work on corpora (large corpora, theoretical sampling)
- statistical refinement
- ...

The transdisciplinary perspective

- intergrate professional knowledge and research interests
- improve writing performances of individuals and organizations
- (re-)design writing courses for professionals
- ...

The future

- Scientific approaches to (journalistic) writing might soon base their concepts on introspection, experiments, single case studies – and on statistical modeling based on large corpora of data from various fields.
Let's face it and work together!