CONSTRUCTING PRESS RELEASES: QUOTATIONS AS PREFORMULATION[1]

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Abstract
This paper reports on empirical research into how press releases are being constructed. It starts from previous corpus-based work which has pointed to the 'preformulated' nature of press releases: in particular, it has been shown that through a number of metapragmatic features press releases can easily be copied by journalists in their own news reporting. In this paper we set out to subject one of these features, viz. pseudo-quotations, to a further, empirical study, in which we scrutinize the process of constructing the press releases. We propose a detailed analysis of this process by combining ethnographic fieldwork with some of the methodology of cognitive psychology, including think-aloud protocols and on-line registration of the total writing process. Our preliminary results indicate that this combination provides a sound starting point for both quantitative and qualitative analysis, allowing for a detailed analysis and interpretation of how press releases are being constructed.

1. INTRODUCTION

Of the various ways of trying to gain access to the media one of the most routinized ones is to issue press releases. It is generally assumed that back in the 1880s US congressman Benjamin Butler was the first to send journalists his 'self-prepared opinions' (Cook 1989: 20). Ever since, all sorts of would-be news sources – from companies and political parties to even private persons – have been writing press releases in order to see their views and words reproduced in news reporting. As the nature of journalists' professional routines is rapidly changing, press releases continue to play a major role in the construction of today's news, either on paper or online.

Crucially, press releases do not just compete for the journalists' attention per se, but they are meant to be retold by them as accurately as possible – preferably even verbatim – in their own news reporting. In addition, it has been shown that, in order to facilitate this reproduction process, press releases are "already prefabricated in an appropriate news style and therefore require the minimum of reworking" (Bell 1991: 58). The typical so-called 'preformulating' devices are illustrated in the press release reproduced in figure 1 below and they include the use of headlines followed by a comprehensive 'lead' paragraph as well as a number of special metapragmatic features[2], most prominently third-person self-reference ("W. P. Carey & Co." and "the company" instead of "we") and (pseudo)-quotation (as in the third and fourth paragraphs). While such preformulation is a very interesting discursive strategy in its own right (cf. Jacobs 1999), the purpose of this paper is to go beyond text analysis and to subject the concept of preformulation in press releases to a further, empirical study in which we work towards taking into account the full dynamics of the news construction process within its institutionalised media and PR setting. In particular, the question we would like to address is to what extent preformulating concerns play a real role in the actual news construction process. In doing so, we

Figure 1: preformulating devices in press releases

W. P. Carey & Co. provides Carrefour $91 million in net lease financing deal
Sale-leaseback transaction includes purchase of eight state-of-the-art warehouse facilities

New York, March 28 2002 -- *W. P. Carey & Co. LLC (NYSE: WPC), a leading real estate investment banking firm, announced today that it has acquired and leased-back eight warehouse facilities from Carrefour (Paris: CARR.PA), France's largest retailer, for approximately US $91 million (euro 104 million).*

Under the terms of the sale-leaseback agreement, the facilities will be leased to Carrefour under nine year net leases. The properties, totalling more than 3,460,000 square feet, are state-of-the-art facilities with average floor to ceiling heights of 32 feet or more and are located in Paris, Lille, Caen, Nancy, Le Mans, Agen, Bourges and Lyon. The facilities were purchased on behalf of Corporate Property Associates 14 Incorporated, a member of the $3 billion W. P. Carey Group of publicly held non-traded real estate investment trusts (REITs). To date the W. P. Carey Group has acquired 16 properties, net-leased to eight tenants in 12 cities throughout France.

"This sale-leaseback transaction will free up $91 million for Carrefour to fund corporate initiatives that focus on the company's core business," said Anthony S. Mohl, Senior Director of W. P. Carey. "The tightening of today's global credit markets is making a sale-leaseback the preferred choice of financing for companies seeking to grow and expand their business."

"The transaction was structured with a loan from DePfa/Aareal Bank," said Chantal Gautier, General Director of DePfa/Aareal Bank. "DePfa Bank/Aareal Bank was pleased with closing the financing on this portfolio of 8 facilities leased by Carrefour France. We

hope that the strong relationship we built with W. P. Carey over the course of this transaction will allow us to conduct many deals in the future as we appreciated the professionalism and efficiency of Anthony and his team in getting this deal done."

Founded in 1973, W. P. Carey & Co. specializes in corporate real estate financing through the corporate net lease, or sale-leaseback structure. The firm and its affiliates continue to be the leading lessors of net leased corporate real estate in the United States. As the largest publicly traded limited liability company in the world, the company owns and/or manages more than 450 commercial and industrial properties throughout the United States and Europe comprising of more than 55 million-square-feet of space. The firm is headquartered in Manhattan and has offices in London and Paris.

will take a diachronic view of the news since we believe that what gets published in the papers and broadcast on radio and TV is the result of a complex writing and rewriting process. The present study can be related to the natural history view of discourse in anthropology (Silverstein and Urban 1996) In particular, we believe that Bauman and Briggs's concept of 'entextualisation' is particularly relevant to preformulation in press releases since it refers to this process of "rendering discourse extractable", of "[lifting a stretch of linguistic production] out of its interactional setting (1990: 73)[3].

2. METHODOLOGY

In this paper we report on research that we did with a professional writer of press releases working for an Antwerp-based PR-company. The company is specialised in providing Public Relation services for the Information Technology and telecommunications industries. It employs 13 people, 10 of whom are account managers. Each account manager has a portfolio of clients and is responsible for, among other things, online news services, the organisation of workshops, press relations, launching special events, media training, press release programs and speaker programs. At the time of the research our 26-year-old writer, who – for the purposes of this paper – we will call Mark, had been with the company for 14 months. Before that he worked as a research assistant at a university for a little over a year. He has a degree in Political and Social Science and an MBA.[4]

The research that we report here is based on extensive fieldwork that we did in the fall of 2001. On the one hand, we refer to some of our ethnographic work (including interviews and direct observation), which was designed to gather information about what Mark thinks and what he actually does (Bernard 1988). Crucially, this approach is combined with methods from cognitive-psychological writing research, which should allow for a close, micro-level reconstruction, analysis and interpretation of PR routines (Levy and Ransdell 1996; Alamargot and Chanquoy 2001); in particular, we set out to combine simultaneous protocols

(Smagorinsky 1994) with online registration of the total writing process (Eklundh and Kollberg 1996; Van Waes 1992, 2000).

2.1 Interview

To start with, we held a semi-structured interview with Mark in order to gather information on his background and his ideas about press releases in general. The interview, which was recorded on minidisk, lasted for 154 minutes. Afterwards, we made a full transcription. In the interview the following matters were addressed: the briefing by the client, the actual writing process, sending out the press release, the relationship with the journalist and, finally, the follow-up of what happens to press releases in the media. The questions in the interview were kept very general and no explicit reference was made to the use of preformulation features. The order of the questions was based on the 'life-cycle' or the chronology of a press release, from start to finish.

2.2 Split-run

Next, we wanted to gather more concrete information on what Mark would consider a 'good' press release. For this part of our research we invited Mark to compare two different versions of the same press release: first we showed him one version, then the other. This is a so-called split-run test (cf. De Jong and Schellens 1995). We asked Mark whether he would be happy to put his name under either version and if not, to indicate which changes he would make. Usually, with split-run tests, two versions have to be 'made up' from scratch by the researcher. As it was, we were lucky to find two alternative versions of a single press release on the website of a Dutch banking company so we simply took the two existing versions and made only slight modifications. The most important modification was probably that we changed the paragraph structure of one of the two versions, with one version mirroring the structure of a newspaper article (the hard news up front) and the other version reading much as a story would (background information first).

2.3 Direct observation

To supplement the information about what Mark thought, we wanted to know what he did. That is why we observed him while he was working on a press release. We made extensive field notes of what Mark did and said.

2.4 Writing process analysis

Finally, to gain more insight in the details of the actual writing process, we made a recording of the writing process for another press release, using an online camera (Camtasia^{TM}). The entire writing process took 92 minutes. This registration enabled us to reconstruct the writing process accurately, letter by letter, revision by revision. Also, while he was writing we asked Mark to produce a continuous simultaneous protocol, which involved verbalizing whatever thoughts went through his head during the writing process. Immediately

afterwards, we asked Mark to produce a retrospective protocol to offer more explanation on certain choices he had made in the process of writing the press release. Here the on-line registration was used to help him reflect on a higher level in providing comments on selected strategic choices in the writing process. In this sense, the retrospective protocol can be considered complementary and more in-depth than the simultaneous protocol.

3. RESEARCH FOCUS

Of course, from the wide range of data we have been able to collect, we can present no more than a fraction here. That is why we will focus on just one out of a great number of features that have been said to play a preformulating role in press releases, viz. the special use of quotations. Typically, press releases contain direct quotes attributed to one of the organisation's own representatives. Bell says that such quotes "were almost certainly not verbalized by the named source. They were written by a press officer and merely approved by the source (sometimes not even that)" (1991: 60). As for the preformulating potential of pseudo-quotes in press releases, it has been shown that, along with other, more indirect forms of discourse representation, they make press releases sound more lively (the so-called dramatic function) and more neutral (the so-called distancing function), and hence more attractive for journalists to reproduce in their own news reporting (Jacobs 1999). Since our research objective is to find out to what extent preformulating concerns play a real role in the actual news construction process, the two issues we would like to address in this paper are:

1. the design of quotations: what can we learn from this case study about the design of quotes in general, i.e. is it true that they are 'pseudo-quotes' and how are they really constructed?

2. the function of quotations: what can we learn from this case study about the role that these quotes have been said to play in terms of preformulation?

In addition, our interest is in the methodology. On the basis of this single-case study we would like to find out if our process-oriented approach drawing from cultural ethnography as well as cognitive-psychological writing research may shed new light on what has previously been said about preformulation in press releases from a product-based perspective. In a sense, the present effort can therefore be seen as a methodological exploration. Finally, while our focus on quotes implies that we will pay attention to the design of the specific discursive resources that are employed in gaining access to the media, we believe that the very concept of preformulation may also lead to a deeper understanding of processes of identity construction in the media. In particular, Goffman's popular, but largely underdefined concept of footing is highly relevant here, since it refers to the alignment that speakers or writers (in this case would-be news sources)

take up not just to the hearers and readers (the newsmaking journalists) but also to themselves as a way of constraining the subsequent reception of their utterances (uptake in the media) (1981: 128).

4. RESULTS

4.1 Interview
As far as our central focus on quotations is concerned, there are two occasions in the interview on which Mark deals with them. Here's a first extract[5]:

> gaan we dan over tot het opmaken van een persbericht (.) waar we dan ook meestal proberen een soort van ja hoe moet je dat zeggen een beschouwend of een visionair statement van een CEO of een (.) topman van het bedrijf bij te zetten wat er concreet op neerkomt dat je dat eigenlijk (..) idealiter ff bel je even met die persoon en stel je (.) praat je daar even over en krijg je dan een een een citaat. De realiteit leert (.) dat je dat meestal zelf al in je hoofd hebt en dat je hem of haar gewoon stuurt naar die richting. Dus het is even goed allez het komt eigenlijk zelfs zelfs vaker voor 't is eigenlijk de techniek die ik een beetje gebruik van (.) ik (.) stel zelf een citaat op voor die persoon in de lijn waarvan ik denk dat hij of zij dat zou zien euh (.) en het kan gebeuren dat ze zeggen van kijk hier ga je toch een beetje te ver in dat vind ik toch iets teeeee euhm het kan ook zijn dat ja perfect ligt beter dan ik het zelf zou kunnen (.) verwoorden (.) da's natuurlijk het ideale geval euhm maar meestal worden die dingen zonder probleem (.) goedgekeurd omdat ze ook weten als ze d'er zelf over moeten beginnen na te denken zeker in onze branche (.) het zijn meestal geen taalmensen (.) net daarvoor doen ze uiteindelijk ook beroep op ons voor onze copywriting skills voor een stukje.

> *We then start the construction of a press release (.) where we then usually try to add a kind of hmm yeah what should I call it a contemplative or a visionary statement by a CEO or a (.) top man of the company which in concrete terms boils down to the fact that you actually (..) ideally ff you call that person and propo (..) you talk about it for a bit and then you get a a a quotation. Reality teaches us (.) that usually you have one in mind already and you just steer him or her in that direction. So it is also well it actually actually happens more often it is actually the technique that I use a bit like (.) I (.) write a quotation for that person along the lines of the way I think he or she would see that euhm (.) and it does happen that that they say like look here you go a bit too far I think this is a bit toooo euhm or it could be that yeah perfect is better than I could (.) put it myself (.) of course that is the ideal situation euhm but usually usually these things are (.) approved without any problems also because they know that if they have to start thinking about it themselves especially in our line of business (.) they are usually not language people (.) that is precisely why they call upon us on our copywriting skills partly.*

In this extract Mark is describing where he gets his quotations from. Crucially, in addition to what he says, it is interesting to look at the way he says it.

In the beginning, his account of the design of quotes seems pretty straightforward. The use of expressions like 'concreet' (*in concrete terms*), 'wat er op neerkomt' (*boils down to*) and 'eigenlijk' (*actually*) suggests that he will come straight to the point:

> Gaan we dan over tot het opmaken van een persbericht (.) waar we dan ook meestal proberen een soort van hmm ja hoe moet je dat zeggen (.) een beschouwend of een visionair statement van een CEO of een (.) topman van het bedrijf bij te zetten. Wat er concreet op neerkomt dat je dat eigenlijk

> *We then start the construction of a press release (.) where we then usually try to add a kind of hmm yeah what should I call it (.) a contemplative or a visionary statement by a CEO or a (.) top man of the company which in concrete terms boils down the fact that you actually*

Next, somewhat surprisingly, he holds back. Rather than describing what 'actually' happens 'in concrete terms', Mark reverts to telling us about an ideal situation:

> idealiter ff bel je even met die persoon en stel je (.)

> *ideally ff you call that person and propo (..)*

Again, there is an abrupt pause, mid-word, and then he goes on to complete the sentence:

> praat je daar even over en krijg je dan een een een citaat

> *you talk about it for a bit and then you get a a a quotation*

'Krijg' (*get*) suggests that the quotation is a statement made by the person Mark is talking to, not one Mark produces himself. This seems to be in contrast with Bell's definition of pseudo-quotes. However, Mark goes on to contrast this 'ideal situation with how things happen in reality:

> De realiteit leert (.) dat je dat meestal zelf al in je hoofd hebt en dat je hem of haar gewoon stuurt naar die richting

> *Reality teaches us (.) that usually you have one in mind already and you just steer him or her in that direction*

Here Mark says that he knows what should be in the quotation and that he tries to make sure the person he wishes to quote actually says what he (Mark) had in mind all along. Finally he goes another step further to say that he usually writes the quotations himself.

Dus het is even goed allez het komt eigenlijk zelfs zelfs vaker voor 't is eigenlijk de techniek die ik een beetje gebruik van (.) ik (.) stel zelf een citaat op voor die persoon

So it is also well it actually actually happens more often it is actually the technique that I use a bit like (.) I (.) write a quotation for that person

Again, Mark's description is full of false starts and hesitation. He definitely feels the need to take the weight out of his statement: where before he used generic 'you' ('you' do this and 'you' do that), he now use 'ik' (*I*), giving the description a more personal, less generalised interpretation. He also says he uses the technique 'een beetje' (*a bit*), which seems another example of downplaying the importance of his statement. Then, after two more pauses, he finally comes out with it: 'ik (.) stel zelf een citaat op voor die persoon' (*I (.) write a quotation for that person*) only to instantly qualify his description by adding: 'in de lijn waarvan ik denk dat hij of zij dat zou zien' (*along the lines of the way I think he or she would see that*). Next, he says that the quoted source typically needs to approve the words between quotation marks. All of which seems to imply that even if Mark is writing the quotation, he does not make it up entirely.

In retrospect, it becomes clear that this is what Mark wanted to say from the very beginning: viz. that, just like Bell pointed out, the quotes in press releases are pseudo-quotes. What is interesting about our data, is that they seem to indicate that – for one reason or another - the constructed nature of quotations in press releases is no simple and straightforward matter: certainly Mark seems to be fairly reluctant to talk about his quoting practices.

In the second extract from the interview that deals with quotations, Mark sheds new light on a feature of pseudo-quotes that has so far received little or no attention: it is not just the words of the organisation's own CEO that qualify for quotation; apparently, third parties are involved too, with famous business analysts who are external to the company routinely lending - or rather selling - their voices. Here's the full extract:

Euhm als je nu bijvoorbeeld zegt van kijk (.) wij zijn een een een CRM-leverancier en we hebben onze nieuwe suite uit (.) onze nieuwe productsuite uit (.) dan uiteraard is het wel belangrijk dat daar de CEO een een visie op geeft (.) dus dan zetten we daar een leuk citaat bij euhm als het kan (.) maar dat gaat dan ook weer meestal over de grote Amerikaanse bedrijven die (.) het geld ervoor hebben (.) een citaat van een (.) analist. Hoe groter de naam hoe beter en hoe favorabel hoe meer favorabel de euhm (.) de quote hoe beter uiteraard (.) dus (.) Paula Breedveld van IDC in euh Nederland voegt daaraan toe (.) dubbel punt open de aanhalingstekens (.) deze CRM-leverancier is dus nu met deze nieuwe oplossing dez die deze nieuwe features brengt (.) de eerste op de Beneluxmarkt en zal daar ook zijn profijt mee doen ik zeg nu maar iets heel onnozel. Euhm met die citaten eindigen we dan meestal (.) euh, als het gaat over klanten van klanten of over partners van klanten ook weer meestal twee citaten (.) hooggeplaatste persoon van van de klant hooggeplaatste persoon van de klant van de klant.

Errm if for example you say like look (.) we are a a a provider of CRM and we have a new suite (.) our new product suite (.) then of course it is important that the CEO gives a a vision on it (.) so then we add a nice quotation erm if it possible (.) but then we are talking about the big American companies who have (.) the money for it (.) a quotation by an (.) analyst. The bigger the name the better and the more favourable the more favourable the erm (.) the quote the better of course (.) so (.) Paula Breedveld at IDC in erm The Netherlands adds (.) colon open quotation marks (.) this provider of CRM is now with this solution thes which provides these new features (.) the number one on the Benexelux market and will benefit from this I just say something really silly. Erm we usually end with these quotations (.) erm if it is about clients of clients or about partners of clients again usually two quotations (.) high-ranking person of of the client high-ranking person of the client of the client.

Clearly, together the two extracts from the interview provide interesting information about the various ways in which quotations in press releases can be constructed. As for the question why writers of press releases go to such lengths, the interview contains only one or two vague hints. First Mark says:

dan uiteraard is het wel belangrijk dat daar de CEO een een visie op geeft

then of course it is important that the CEO gives a a vision on it

However, he does not specify why it is important or even for whom. Later, when talking about buying quotations, Mark comments that:

Hoe groter de naam hoe beter en hoe favorabel hoe meer favorabel de euhm (.) de quote hoe beter uiteraard

The bigger the name the better and the more favourable the more favourable the erm (.) the quote the better of course

We can only assume that by 'beter' (*better*) he means more credible. Presumably, the journalist is more likely to copy a quote from someone outside the company, someone who is in addition an authority in the field, than a quote from the company's CEO. Incidentally, this practice of quoting third parties is not at all different from what journalists do when "by interjecting someone else's opinion they believe they are removing themselves from participation in the story, and they are letting the facts speak" (Tuchman 1972: 668).

Summing up: although quotations are generally acknowledged to be a major feature of press releases, we have found only two references to quotations in the interview. This could mean one of two things. First, Mark may feel that quotations are not an important part of press releases after all. This thesis, however, is strongly inconsistent with some of the other data that we will present below. Second, quotations may be too specific to come up in what was after all a fairly general and broad-based interview. In this light, it might not be a coincidence that the only two references we found were in answers to the following two questions: "Could you describe the writing of a press release, start

to finish?" and "Could you spell out some of the typical features of a press release?" In both cases Mark was asked to conjure up an image of a typical press release and discuss in very concrete terms what he knew on the subject. The rest of the data presented below are therefore zoomed in on the analysis and on the writing of actual press releases and they will shed more light on quotations, including the preformulating role that previous research has associated them with.

4.2 Split-run

As we mentioned earlier, in this part of our research, we asked Mark to compare two versions of a press release by a Dutch bank. As far as quotations are concerned, we added a quote to the second version and we attributed it to the bank's fictitious IT manager Rob Van Hove; in the first version, more or less the same words were used, but they were not attributed to anyone in particular.

We shall not report in any great detail on the results of the split-run test, although it needs to be said that a lot of the time Mark was very busy trying to make sense of what the press release was about. This is probably due to the format of the test, with our professional being asked to do a researcher's job commenting on a press release that he did not have anything to do with. However, there were just a couple of brief occasions on which Mark did comment on the special preformulating quality of the press release and it is interesting to note that one of those comments is focused on the quotation in it. Here's the full quotation:

> 'Bij de ontwikkeling is gebruik gemaakt van de grote ervaring van |naam bank| met internet-bankieren', zegt Rob Van Hove, IT-manager. 'Wij zijn al jaren koploper in dit gebied en zijn dan ook blij als eerste aan onze klanten deze nieuwe en betrouwbare service te kunnen aanbieden'.

> *'In the development we used |name bank|'s extensive experience in internet banking', says Rob Van Hove, IT manager. 'We have been a frontrunner in this field for years and are therefore happy to be the first to offer this new and reliable service to our clients'.*

And this is what Mark had to say about it[6]:

> <u>zegt Rob Van Hove, IT-manager (…) wij zijn al jaren koploper in dit gebied en zijn dan ook blij als eerste</u> ja, ja hmpf dit dit dit dit dit ruikt weer naar Engels persbericht wij zijn blij onze klanten zijn nooit blij, dat euh, d'er is geen enkele journalist die dit overneemt, wij zijn blij wij zijn verheugd wij zijn verguld flikker allemaal d'eruit

> *<u>says Rob Van Hove, IT manager (…) we have been a frontrunner in this field and are therefore happy to be the first</u> yeah, yeah, hmpf this this this this this smells of English press release again we are happy our clients are never happy that euh there is not a single journalist who will copy this, we are happy we are elated fling leave it all out*

Clearly, Mark does not seem to be very happy with the jubilant, hip-hip-hurrah-style announcement that is attributed to the quoted source and that he considers typical of Anglo-American PR. Crucially, by concluding explicitly that 'there is no journalist who's going to copy this quote', he confirms that these quotes are there to be copied – that they are typically preformulating devices.

As was pointed out before, this quote was in the second version of the press release. This is what the first version said:

> Bij de ontwikkeling van |naam bank| Internetkassa is gebruik gemaakt van de grote ervaring van |naam bank| met internet-bankieren. De bank is al jaren koploper in dit gebied en is dan ook blij als eerste aan haar klanten deze nieuwe en betrouwbare service te kunnen aanbieden.

> *In the development of |name bank| Internetkassa |name bank|'s extensive experience in internet banking was used. The bank has been a frontrunner in this area for years and is therefore happy to be the first to offer this new and reliable service to its clients.*

Interestingly, while reading the first version, Mark did not make any comments about this extract at all, even though we have got the same hip-hip-hurray-kind of language that he came to object to in the second version. So it must have been the use of the quotation marks combined with the attribution to a quoted source that made Mark painfully aware of how inadequate these words are in terms of preformulation.

We can conclude that, more than the interview, this split-run exercise provides backing for what came out of previous discourse-analytic work, viz. that the use of quotes in press releases serves a preformulating purpose. In the rest of this paper we will be looking at Mark's own press releases and we will try to find out what he actually did in writing them.

4.3 Direct Observation

In this part we report on how we monitored Mark in the offices of his PR agency while he was working on a press release. The press release was for a software company that had just closed a major contract with a big Belgian bank for the automation of the bank's marketing activities. In writing up this press release, Mark had the following materials at his disposal: a brochure presenting the software company, the printout of a speech delivered by the bank's spokesperson at a seminar, and an interview in *Datanews*, an IT-magazine. Mark inserts quotes both from the bank's spokesperson and from the software company. Three different versions of the press release were made, but none of them were ever sent out because in the end the bank decided to withdraw for strategic reasons.

To begin with, our data bluntly confirm what Mark said in the interview with quite some hesitation, viz. that the quotes are pseudo-quotes. Of course, he turns to the materials at hand for inspiration, but he then rephrases what he finds in them. For example, in the printout of the bank's spokesperson's speech it is said that one of the advantages of the software is that users do not need any special training. Mark feels that this is a rather negative way of putting things

and so he prefers to talk about the "user-friendliness of the programme's interface", even though that is of course not what the spokesperson actually said.

Interestingly, after having written up the quotations, Mark goes on to revise the rest of the press release, trying to make sure that it fits in with the words between quotation marks. Let's give an example. Originally, it was said in the first paragraph that the software company "had signed a contract with the bank". However, Mark then added in one of the quotations that the "implementation ran smoothly". In revising the press release, he apparently felt that the two were incompatible because the first paragraph only dealt with the signing of a contract while the quote refers to its actual implementation. Crucially, rather than changing the quotation, Mark decided to redo the first paragraph. This seems to suggest that quotations are not simply bits of text which are jotted into the press release for good measure but that they impact on the press release as a whole.

As for the function of quotations, it first seems as if our fieldwork didn't bring anything out here: in what looks like a highly routinized construction process, Mark did not seem to bother about whether journalists would copy the quotes or not. However, in writing up the quotes he did have his own client on his mind, i.e. the software company that commissioned the press release, as well as the client's client, viz. the major Belgian bank. So, on closer scrutiny, it looks as if we have an alternative type of preformulation here – or if not full-fledged preformulation, at least a special type of reader-directedness, since the quotation is not only meant for the journalists but also for the very organisation that commissioned Mark to write the press release and that is meant to issue it, i.e. the software company. Mark says he includes quotes because the client wants them. It is worth mentioning in this respect that after he finished the first version, Mark e-mailed it to the software company's business manager with the following question:

> Bijgevoegd vind je het |naam bank| persbericht. Het nam iets langer in beslag dan ik gehoopt had. Je kan best controleren of alle cijfergegevens (implementatie op 3 maanden, campagne voorbereiden en uitvoeren beleid van drie naar één maand, enz) correct zijn. Als ik je OK ontvang, kan deze tekst naar Kristien. Ik heb er wel geen citaat van Marc bijgestoken. Is dat een probleem, denk je?
>
> *In attachment you find the |name bank| press release. It took me a bit longer than I had hoped. It is best if you check all the numbers (implementation in 3 months, preparing campaign and executing policy reduced from three months to one, etc.) are correct. If I get your OK, this text can go to Kristien. I have not included a quotation from Marc, though. Is that a problem, do you think?*

Two things are mentioned here: numbers and … quotations. As far as quotations are concerned, it is very clear from this extract that Mark includes them because the client wants them.

We can even go one step further. Far from including the quotes to get them copied by the journalists, Mark argues that it can be convenient to put

specific information in quotes as it is quite easy to leave them out if the client does not like them. All of which seems to suggest strongly that the preformulating function of quotations – if that is what we can still call it here – is more complicated than is commonly assumed.

Here is an illustration of this alternative preformulation from our data. Originally, the first version of the press release contained the following sentence:

In het verleden werkte |naam bank| steeds met eigen oplossingen.

In the past |name bank| always used its own solutions.

In revising the press release, Mark decided that this was not good enough and he put it in a quotation attributed to the software company's business manager, arguing that this is safer because the quoted source can always ask to leave it out:

"Voorheen werkte |naam bank| met een aantal zelfontwikkelde oplossingen (…)" stelt |naam|, business manager van |naam software bedrijf|.

"Before |name bank| always used a number of in-house solutions (…)" [says |name|, business manager of |name software company|.

Interestingly, leaving it out is actually what happened in the second version of the press release. In that version, the words attributed to the software company's business manager sound very different indeed:

"We hebben de klus geklaard op drie maanden tijd," stelt |naam|, Business Manager van |naam software bedrijf|. "Onze ervaring met grote bedrijven – en vooral met financiële instellingen – was hierbij van doorslaggevend belang. Door onze samenwerking met |naam bank| consolideren we onze leidende positie op de marketing CRM-markt in de Benelux."

"We finished the job in three months," says |name|, Business Manager of |name software company|. "Our experience with large companies – and especially financial institutions – has been of crucial importance in this respect. Through our cooperation with |name bank| we consolidate our leading position in the field of marketing CRM in the Benelux."

More extensive fieldwork is of course needed here. Also, we can wonder whether our data are not biased by Mark's position as a mediator between his client and the journalists. It might be worthwhile trying to find out if similar concerns are at work in organisations that write their own press releases. In all, however, there can be no doubt that the kind of fieldwork we report on here sheds interesting new light on quotes and the complex preformulating role they play in writing press releases.

4.4 Writing process analysis
In this fourth and final part we try to present a more fine-grained analysis of the actual writing process borrowing from the methodology of cognitive-

psychological writing research. The data presented here are related to a press release that Mark was asked to write on a successful technological partnership between a software company, Mark's client, and a major Belgian media company.

First, we will analyse the writing process on the basis of the data we collected from the technical logging. Next, we will discuss the simultaneous and retrospective protocols. Like in the previous parts we will focus on those extracts in which Mark is dealing with quotations.

Technical logging of the writing process

In our analysis of the technical logging we look at the development of the writing process and at pauses, without taking into account Mark's comments in the simultaneous protocol. In our interpretation it is important that we bear in mind that the production of protocols slows down the writing process. For example, pause length is seriously influenced by the need to phrase thoughts in simultaneous reflection, especially at complex cognitive junctions in the text (Janssen and Van Waes 1996). That is why our analysis of the technical logging will focus on process-internal comparisons. In this particular case, the production of the protocol has proven to be a constant factor in the process: i.e. Mark produces a very steady simultaneous protocol. This is clear from pause-analysis: average pause length over the total writing process is 12 seconds; there was no significant difference in average pause length between the first and second part of the writing process (Anova: $F(1,249)=0.084$, $p = 0.773 > 0.05$). There was also an equal distribution of the number of pauses: 46.4% in the first part; 53.6% in the second part (n=250).

Let's now turn to the data. When Mark decides to insert his first quotation we are exactly half way in the writing process. Surprisingly, the press release is almost finished at that point. The only thing left to be added is the final paragraph, which consists of two quotations: one from the client's client and one from the client himself, caso quo the CEO of the company. This means that Mark spends half of the total production time on the writing up of his quotations.

It is interesting to note that both quotations are preceded by very elaborate reflection and revision. Indeed, the strongest recursive revisions and the most marked moments of reflection in the complete writing process can be found in Mark's planning of the quotations. This is evidence of the cognitive complexity that Mark is struggling with when he is phrasing these quotations. The writing of the second quotation shows this most clearly. Mark starts planning it after 52 minutes. After a few minutes of planning what he is going to write (so-called content planning) he decides to re-read the whole text, which leads to quite a few revisions. After over 15 minutes he decides that now it is time to "tack on" a quotation from the software company's CEO. Again he tries to come up with something to say in the quotation, but he is distracted by a spelling mistake, which triggers another 10-minute revision episode. Then Mark starts working on the quotation a third time: 'Da's bijna het einde van de rit. Nu moeten we allen nog het citaat van |naam CEO| inblikken' (*That's almost the end of the ride. Now we just need to can |name CEO|'s quotation*). At that point we

have reached minute 79, which is 27 minutes after the first attempt to formulate the CEO's quotation.

That the cognitive knot surrounding the quotation was difficult to disentangle is confirmed by the results of our pause analysis. Although average pause length remains more or less constant over both parts of the writing process, long pauses of more than one minute - which typically occur in parts of the writing process which feature high cognitive complexity (Schilperoord 1995) - can clearly be traced back to two places, viz. to the phrasing and revision of the title (first part of the writing process) and … to the quotations[7]. At the start of the first quotation we find a 73-second pause, which is significantly longer than the average pause near paragraph boundaries. A similar pattern seems to be at work in the second quotation. As we said before, the construction of that quotation is characterised by recursive behaviour. Each time Mark decides to resume work on the CEO's quotation we find pauses of over one minute (compare average pause length = 12 seconds).

Clearly, the two quotations seem to involve a serious cognitive load. They constitute cognitive knots which invite extensive reflection. This is in line with what we have seen before and we shall now demonstrate that it is equally confirmed by the simultaneous and retrospective protocols.

Simultaneous and retrospective protocols

To begin with, from the simultaneous protocols it is very clear that the quotations are very consciously inserted 'as quotations': the choice of a format precedes the choice of the content that will be expressed in that format. The explicit precedence of format over content is clearly demonstrated in those extracts in which Mark talks about the planning of his quotations. Strikingly, his choice to use pseudo-quotations rather than 'real' ones is made explicit very early on. It looks as if this choice is an essential step in the construction of the quotation.

> SIM – [46.52]: Ik ga een citaat geven, of laten geven, door iemand van |naam mediabedrijf|, iemand waarvoor ik nog geen naam heb. Er zijn twee dingen die apart zijn voor dit specifieke project: het eerste is dat er een speciale feature is bijgemaakt, namelijk dat de mensen van |naam mediabedrijf| informatie kunnen uploaden voor FTP; wat interessant is voor meer technische publicaties.

> *SIM – [46.52]: I am going to offer a quotation, or have someone offer a quotation, someone at |name media company|, someone for whom I do not yet have a name. There are two things which are special about this specific project: the first is that they have added a special feature, which is that the people at |name media company| can upload information for FTP, which is interesting for more technical publications.*

> SIM citaat 2 - [52.10]: Nu ga ik nog een supercitaat in de mond van |naam| proberen te leggen, de CEO van |naam softwarebedrijf|.

> *SIM quotation 2 – [52.10] Now I am going to try to put a super-quotation in the mouth of |name|,|name software company|'s CEO.*

In the simultaneous protocol Mark does not offer an explicit reason for his choice of format. However, it looks as if it is the journalists who are first and foremost on his mind when he is writing a quotation. In the first excerpt, for example, we find an explicit reference to 'technische publicaties' (*technical publications*), which shows that Mark seems to be aware of the frame of reference of the journalists who will use the press release. Apart from that, there are just one or two other elements from the simultaneous protocol that seem to hint at the preformulating nature of quotes: when Mark says that this is "a fantastic way to end a quotation" and that "It is difficult to make him say something original", he may well be referring to the qualitative criteria that inform journalists' decisions to reproduce quotations or not. We find confirmation for this hypothesis in the retrospective protocol. Talking about the second quotation, Mark explicitly speculates on the preformulating potential of quotes. In the following excerpt from the retrospective protocol Mark reflects much more from the point of view of the journalist than he did in the simultaneous protocol.

> RETRO – [53.44]: De toegevoegde waarde van een citaat dat echt *to the point* is, krachtig is, dat eruit springt wordt gemakkelijk opgenomen. Aan de hand van een interessant citaat kan de journalist al bellen met de vraag om gesprekken te doen.

> *RETRO – [53.44]: The added value of a quotation which is really to the point, powerful, that jumps out is easily reproduced. On the basis of a powerful quotation the journalist can call and ask to do interviews.*

In the simultaneous protocol Mark may not refer explicitly to journalists, but, just as we've seen in the direct observation, he does refer to other groups who might read the press release, in particular the client who ordered the press release and who - after all – will be the first person to read it. While he is writing his quotation, Mark is clearly aware of the fact that his client will have to approve of the text.

> SIM citaat 1 - [48.10]: Dus dat gaan we er nog maar even uitlaten. Als ze erover struikelen, zal ik het wel horen.

> *SIM qutotation 1 – [48.10]: So we will leave that out for a bit. If that bothers them I am sure I will find out.*

But the client's client (i.c. the media company) is also part of the group of initial readers of this press release. In the simultaneous protocol Mark often refers to them. For example:

> SIM citaat 2 - [64.05]: Leuk voor de mensen van |naam mediabedrijf| dat ik ook hun naam in het citaat laat vallen.

> *SIM quotation 2 – [64.05]: Nice for the people of |name media company| that I mention their name in the quotation too.*

This awareness was already there in SIM – [46.52].

Clearly, the moment Mark decides to assign the first quotation to "someone at |name media company|" we have to consider this a strategic choice which is meant to facilitate literal reproduction by the journalist. What Mark actually does is to construct a pseudo-quotation on the basis of written materials from his client (annual reports, earlier press releases, briefing) and then – crucially – to put those words in the mouth of the client's client', i.e. of what looks like a disinterested third party. This way he seems to actively create an objective mouthpiece through which he can make an evaluative statement like "The service level agreements (SLA's) of TR guarantee timely and efficient delivery of information" without losing any credibility. This reminds us of the practice of buying analysts' quotes that Mark talked about in the interview. Clearly, the data reported above provide powerful evidence of preformulation in press releases in general and of what has been called the 'distancing function' of pseudo-quotes in particular (cf. Jacobs 1999: 189 ff.): what happens here is that, by putting the words in the mouth of the media company's spokesperson (i.e. the client's client), Mark endows the (client's) claim of 'timely and efficient delivery of information' with "a sense of purity and otherness", "an enhanced reality" (Tannen 1989: 105). In Goffman's terminology, "instead of stating a view outright", pseudo-quotation allows Mark – and his client through him - to "attribute it to a character who happens to be himself, but one he has been careful to withdraw from in one regard or another" (1974: 190).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this part we will summarize what we have learnt from our research as far as the two issues spelled out in section 3 are concerned, viz. the design and function of quotations, as well as reflecting on the methodological innovations that we have tried to introduce in this paper, combining an ethnographic approach with cognitive-psychological writing research.

First, the design of quotations. From our research it is clear that quotations in press releases are typically pseudo-quotes made up by the writer of the press release. Indeed, the data reported here suggest that the picture is more complicated than is commonly assumed, with not just the views of the organisation's own leaders but also the would-be words of all sorts of third parties qualifying to be included between quotation marks. Those third parties range from famous business analysts, whose sound bites turn out to be for sale, to representatives of other organisations that are involved in the events reported in the press release (Mark's client's clients).

As for the function of quotations, it seems to be confirmed that they are there because they might well be reproduced by the journalists who want to use the press release in their own news reporting - or at least because the organisation that issues the press release (Mark's client) assumes that they would be reproduced. Our writer seemed rather concerned about alienating journalists through pushy, promotional language and he wanted quotes – including those attributed to third parties - to play a role in avoiding such alienation. It is clear

that preformulation is on Mark's mind whenever he is constructing quotes (or talking about them, for that matter). Interestingly, our data seem to suggest that preformulation plays a double role, both anticipating what the journalists would do with Mark's work and helping to meet the requirements of his own client (the organisation issuing the press release).

At this stage, we also need to reflect on the limitations of our research. Certainly, our search was very much focused since we looked at a single PR professional, one who happened to be an experienced writer who no doubt had internalised a lot of unwritten rules about the production of press releases in general and the use of quotations in particular. It might be interesting to compare the data reported in this paper with the results of a study we are currently conducting with novice writers. Also, at several points, it looked as if Mark did not want to talk about the pseudo-nature of quotes in press releases; it felt as if he was uneasy about disclosing some of the tricks of the trade. This is what we clearly saw in our analysis of the interview, but less so in some of the other data.

In general, we can say that the ethnographic approach provided a good picture both of what Mark thinks and does. Starting from discourse-analytic work on press releases and preformulation, we managed to get wide-ranging information about how the PR business really works. The different methods turned out to be complementary. The interview was intended as a broadly oriented initial exploration while the split-run was focused on the analysis of a specific press release. Although the interview shed some light on the design and function of quotations, many questions were left unanswered, with Mark steering clear of a number of the more interesting issues. One of the limitations of the split-run, on the other hand, was that we asked Mark to comment on a press release that was totally new and strange to him. In addition, both the interview and the split-run test provided information about what Mark said he feels and does, not about what he actually does. This is different for the direct observation and the writing process analysis, in which we closely monitored Mark while he was at work. Here again, in spite of some overlap, the two methods proved highly complementary. The most important limitation of the direct observation method is that we could not keep track of everything that happened on the screen. Adjustments that were made, pauses that reveal a writer struggling: a lot of them got lost. In contrast, the online registration of Mark's writing process provided us with quantifiable data. Crucially, both in the technical logging and the simultaneous and retrospective protocols we found powerful backing for the results from the ethnographically inspired approach.

All of which suggests that both the unheard-of combination of ethnographic work and cognitive-psychological writing research and the process perspective on the media that we have experimented with in this paper are promising enough to set up further, larger-scale investigation in the field.

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NOTES

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[2] See Verschueren (1995) for a comprehensive definition of metapragmatics.

[3] See Jacobs (1996) and Deacon, Fenton and Bryman (1999) for interesting related work on the broadcast and print media.

[4] All data reported are in Dutch.

[5] (.) indicates a very short pause (not timed, less than 1 second). (..) indicates a longer pause.

[6] We underline the text that Mark actually reads. The rest of the excerpt is his comments on what he reads.

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[7] Note that, just like quotes, titles are traditionally considered to be preformulating devices, which means that an analysis of long pauses in our data points strongly to preformulation.