'That's just what we hear on telly all the time, isn't it?' Political discourse and the (cognitive) linguistic ethnography of critical reception

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1. Introduction

On 6th October, 2015, the Conservative Member of Parliament and British Home Secretary, Theresa May, delivered her annual address to the Conservative Party conference. The speech set out a number of government policies and positions but the section on immigration – in which she blamed economic problems such as a falling wages, faltering public services and job losses on rising numbers of migrants – hit the headlines, causing outrage amongst the liberal and left-wing commentariat. Maurice Wren, chief executive of the British Refugee Council called it a 'chilling' and 'bitter attack' (quoted in *The Guardian*, 2015). Writing for the liberal *Guardian* newspaper, Alan Travis (2015) said that it marked 'a new low in the politics of refugees and migration'. Human rights organisations and liberal journalists were not the only ones to object to what May said, but also business leaders; Simon Walker, the director general of the UK's Institute of Directors, called the speech 'irresponsible' and said that May was 'pandering to anti-immigration sentiment' (quoted in *The Guardian*, 2015). On the other side of the political spectrum, the right-wing *Daily Mail* (2015) called the conference address 'little short of magnificent' and claimed that May had 'found the courage to voice the thoughts of the vast, disenfranchised majority'. It is notable, however, that even on the political right, the speech garnered criticism; for example, both the Conservative supporting publications, *The Spectator* and *The Telegraph*, ran opinion pieces condemning it for being 'tawdry' and 'contemptible' (Massie, 2015), and 'ugly, misleading, cynical and irresponsible' (Kirkup, 2015).

In this chapter, I investigate how it is audiences construct interpretations such as those quoted above. My analytical focus is on the critical responses of three municipal politicians to Theresa May's speech. All three are members of the British Labour Party and have a seat in local government representing a constituency in a large city in the north of England. To do this analysis, I employ a critical cognitive stylistic approach. It is 'critical' because I 'take an

explicit sociopolitical stance' (van Dijk, 1993: 252); the first aim of this chapter is to amplify and support the critical voices raised in opposition to the speech and explain how it is these critical responses were produced – to describe how, based on the linguistic representation May proffers, these three discourse participants individually and collectively provide what Hall (1980) has called an 'oppositional reading' of the text (see also Brunsdon and Morley, 1999). My approach is 'cognitive' insofar as it describes the knowledge and cognitive processes involved in the critical reception of the speech. Specifically, I use concepts from Text World Theory (Gavins, 2007; Werth, 1999) and Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 1987, 1991, 2008) to analyse audience responses. The second aim of this chapter is therefore to demonstrate the utility of these concepts in analysing oppositional reading. Finally, I use the term 'stylistic' because rather than attending to the processes involved in discourse production – as per most critical forms of Discourse Analysis (see Fairclough. 1996: 51; Jeffries, 2010: 11) – my approach to discourse is 'reception-oriented' (Carter and Stockwell, 2008: 300). Indeed, more recently, work in stylistics has encompassed ethnographic methods of collecting reader-response data (for example, Norledge, 2016; Peplow, 2011, 2016; Peplow et al, 2015; Whiteley, 2011a, 2011b). Like these researchers, I also use ethnographic methods – focus group discussions and interviews – alongside think-aloud and annotation exercises, to elicit response data from the three participants. The work presented here extends this stylistic research into a non-literary context. My third aim, then, is to demonstrate the efficacy of combining cognitive analytical frameworks with ethnographic methods in order to provide a fully contextualised, socio-cognitive description of the interpretive processes involved in critical reception.

To meet these aims, in Section 2, I outline a cognitive theory of oppositional reading using concepts from Text World Theory (Gavins, 2007; Werth, 1999); in Section 3, I provide a more detailed linguistic analysis of a passage from May's speech and the representation of immigration it proffers; in Section 4, I examine the participants' views of immigration and the knowledge and attitudes they bring to the discourse; in Section 5, I outline the protocols for eliciting audience response data from the participants; and in Sections 6 and 7 I analyse the audience response data using concepts from Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 1991, 1987, 2008).

2. A cognitive model of critical reception

The view of discourse I adopt to analyse the critical reception of Theresa May's speech is taken from Text World Theory (Gavins, 2007; Werth, 1999). As a 'cognitive discourse grammar' (Werth, 1994: 90), this framework focuses on explaining the generation of complex, rich, discourse-level mental representations, or 'text-worlds' (for applications of the theory in a variety of different discourse contexts, see Gavins and Lahey, 2016). Text-worlds are conceptual deictic spaces defined by world-building elements such as time and location, alongside the objects and the people (these are called 'enactors' in the theory) those deictic spaces contain (Werth, 1999: 81; Gavins, 2007). Importantly, discourse participants construct these mental representations in response to the texts with which they engage. From this perspective, discourse in reception can be viewed as a kind of 'text-driven' cognition (see Gavins, 2007: 29). The text created by the speaker or writer provides a set of linguistic cues that cause audiences to access their pre-existing knowledge in order to create text-worlds of the events and situations described in the discourse. In Text World Theory, this pre-existing knowledge is modelled with the concept of a 'frame' (Werth, 1999: 103-113, see also Filmore, 2006). Frames are

> experiential models of (part of) human life which direct and influence human understanding of aspects of the world, as mediated through human perceptions and cultural knowledge.

(Werth, 1999: 107)

The text-worlds discourse participants create from the linguistic cues they encounter in the text might straightforwardly instantiate a pre-existing frame stored in their long-term memory. Alternatively, world-building might involve creatively combining existing frames to create new novel representations (think, for example, of the fantastical fictional text-worlds readers construct as they engage with science-fiction or fantasy literature). The creation of text-worlds is thus an active and dynamic cognitive process; participants bring their pre-existing repertoire of conceptual frames to the discourse situation in order to construct meaning from the linguistic forms they encounter.

For my purposes, the advantage of a text-world approach is that world-building necessarily involves recruiting the audience member's own conceptual frames in the process of constructing a text-world from the cues in the text. As experiential models, frames

establish expectations about the kinds of objects, entities and relations that audiences encounter in the text-worlds they create (including the emotional or attitudinal valences we associate with these objects and entities). In the case of political discourse, there is much at stake ideologically in diverging from the conceptual frames that encode audience members' sense of reality. If these frame expectations are not met by the text-worlds discourse participants create – if the frame knowledge evoked in the process of world-building contradicts the text-world cued by the text – then there is a chance that the text-world representation will be resisted by the audience member (Browse, 2018). From a text-world perspective, then, the potential for audience resistance is not an extrinsic feature of political discourse in reception, but is always an imminent possibility in every discursive event. In the process of world-building, the discourse prompts participants to access the very same knowledge that might well form the basis of their resistance to it. Thus resistance or opposition is dialectically built in to the very processes by which audiences construct meaning from spoken or written texts.

In his seminal discussion of television news, Hall (1980: 125-127) suggests that there are three ways in which audiences might position themselves in relation to news content: they might "read" the news segment in the manner they perceive is intended by the news producers (Hall, 1980: 125, calls this the 'dominant-hegemonic' position); they might accept the abstract values to which the producer seems to adhere, but object to the particularities of representation in the news segment (a 'negotiated' position); or, finally, they might occupy an entirely 'oppositional' position. Although Hall (1980) discusses responses to news discourse, rather than the speech of politicians, these different 'positions' are pertinent to any discussion of critical reception. For my purposes, the last – the 'oppositional position' – is especially germane. Hall (1980) defines an oppositional reading to a text as follows:

> It is possible for a viewer perfectly to understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a globally contrary way. He/she detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference.

> (Hall, 1980: 127)

Although he writes in the vocabulary of Sausaurrean structuralism, with its (quite different) attendant view of communication as a process in which messages are "encoded" by a

"sender" and "decoded" by a "receiver", this definition of oppositional reading can be reframed from a more contemporary, text-world perspective. Hall's (1980) account of oppositional reading entails two forms of representation; on the one hand, what he calls 'both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse', and, on the other, 'some alternative framework of reference'. In keeping with Text World Theory, I will call the first of these representations the text-world proffered by the speaker or writer (or simply, 'the proffered text-world'), and the second the conceptual frame (or frames) associated by the audience with whatever topic is under discussion (I use the term 'audience' to encompass the readers of written texts and also the various addressees, over-hearers, and eavesdroppers [Bell, 1984] involved in the reception of spoken texts). An oppositional reading arises in the clash of these two competing conceptualizations – when a speaker or writer seems to proffer a text-world representation which breaks with the audience member's understanding of reality. I have diagrammed the relationship between text, proffered text-world and the audience member's own conceptual frame in Figure 1. Although I have suggested that oppositional positioning is the product of a clash between the proffered text-world and the audience member's pre-existing conceptual frame/s, there is also a sense in which the
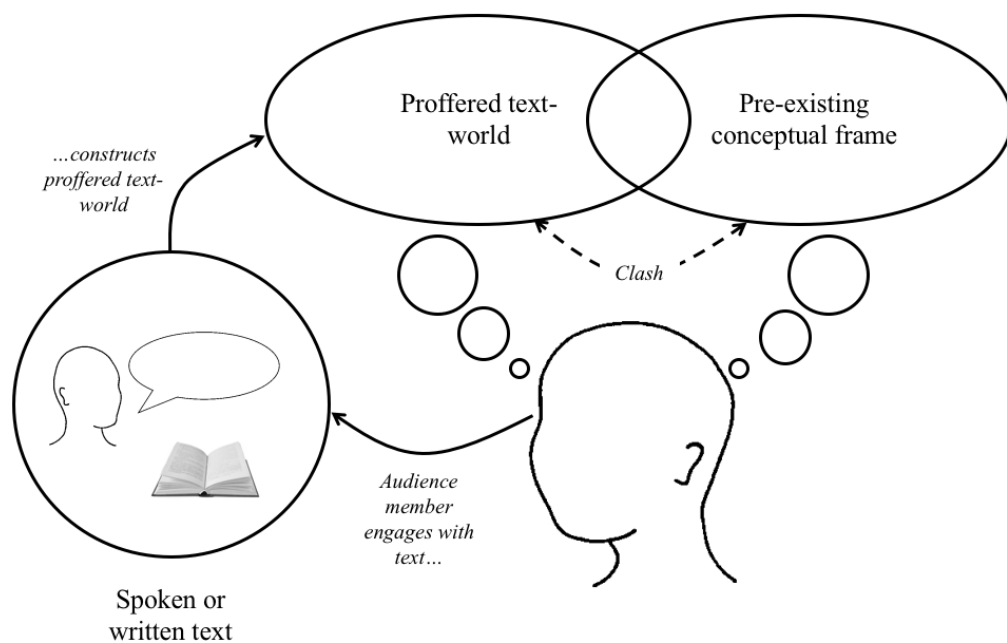

Figure 1. *A model of critical reception*

audience's preferred conceptualization might overlap with the proffered text-world, even in the case of such a clash (I have represented this overlap in Figure 1 by overlapping the proffered text-world and pre-existing conceptual frame circles). So, to pre-empt my later discussion for the sake of example, the participants in this study all agree with Theresa May that wages in the UK are in relative decline – their understanding of reality "overlaps" with hers in this sense – but, as I shall outline, the reasons they provide for this decline utterly contradict May's; she attributes it to the downward pressure on wages supposedly caused by immigration, they to unscrupulous bosses who want to exploit all workers (migrant or otherwise). The difference between proffered text-world and audience frame is thus not absolute, but the former should instead be seen as instantiating the latter to a greater or lesser extent. Of course, this raises the question of what counts as a significant enough difference for audiences to reject the text-world representation as an accurate depiction of reality and thus occupy Hall's (1980) oppositional position. There is not the space, here, to discuss such a complex issue. For the purposes of this chapter, it suffices to say that the participants in this study do, in fact, reject May's representation of immigration (which suggests that their own preferred conceptualization is at least different enough to provoke their opposition). Here, I aim to describe how, rather than why, they do that. It is with this aim in mind that I now describe the representation of immigration proffered in May's speech.

3. The speech

The political motivation, and therefore the motivation for the language used in the speech, should be understood in the context of the electoral insurgency of the populist, hard-right and anti-immigration UK Independence Party (UKIP), a political party whose base of supporters were overwhelmingly former-Conservative voters (see Ashcroft, 2014). The speech can be read as an attempt to win these voters back by taking a harsher line on immigration, whilst at the same time adopting a "common sense" rhetorical style in order to appeal to the broader, more moderate Conservative electoral coalition. This political strategy is reflected in the speech itself; May claims to occupy a "middle-ground" position located between UKIP – who she calls the 'anti-immigration far-right' – and the supposedly 'open-borders liberal-left' (the reference, here, is presumably to the Labour Party):

> But people on both extremes of the debate – from the anti-immigration far right to the open-borders liberal left – conflate refugees in desperate need of help with economic migrants who simply want to live in a more prosperous society.

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In the speech, these two positions comprise two 'extremes'. May's rhetorical challenge was to elaborate a more hard-line, right-wing approach to immigration by criticising those to her left, whilst not, at the same time, appearing to succumb to the demagoguery of those further to her political right. The linguistic means by which she meets this challenge will be familiar to those acquainted with 'critical' forms of Discourse Analysis (for example, Fairclough, 2001; Fowler et al, 1979; Kress and Hodge, 1979; Jeffries, 2010; Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Take this passage of the speech, which forms the locus of several critical comments from the participants in this study, and also the journalistic coverage of the speech (for example, Travis, 2015; Walker, quoted in *The Guardian*, 2015; Young, 2015):

> Because when immigration is too high, when the pace of change is too fast, it's impossible to build a cohesive society. It's difficult for schools and hospitals and core infrastructure like housing and transport to cope. And we know that for people in low-paid jobs, wages are forced down even further while some people are forced out of work altogether.

<p align="right">(May, 2015)</p>

As is well established in critical linguistic analysis, using nominalisations is a way of 'reducing' (Fairclough, 2001: 103) the information available to audiences, thereby mystifying what might be important aspects of the situation or events being described (see also, Fowler et al, 1979; Jeffries, 2010: 25-29; and for debate on this issue, see Billig, 2008a, 2008b; Martin, 2008; and van Dijk, 2008). There are two nominalisations in the first sentence of this passage, 'immigration' and 'the pace of change'. Immigration is a nominalisation because it describes a process – immigrants crossing a border from one country to another – rather than a thing. Using this nominalisation places an emphasis on the process as a whole rather than making the immigrants the conceptually salient part of the adverbial. One might have instead used the adverbial 'when too many immigrants come here', which would have the opposite effect – it would foreground the human actors. The second nominalisation, 'the pace of change', similarly downplays the role of immigrants in the situation described. Perhaps a more direct "translation" of this adverbial would be 'when communities change too fast'. However, this also seems to background immigrants (and even immigration, conceived holistically as a process). Indeed, for this reason, this nominalisation seems doubly euphemistic; it needs quite some conceptual unpacking before the human agents responsible

for the changes – immigrants – are implicated at all in the representation May proffers. In both cases, then, the nominalisations background the immigrants themselves whilst blaming the more abstract, larger-scale process of immigration for making it 'impossible to build a cohesive society' and 'difficult for schools and hospitals and core infrastructure like housing and transport to cope'.

Another linguistic form that has received much attention from critical linguists is the passive (for example, Fairclough, 2001: 104; Trew, 1979), especially because one affordance of this grammatical construction is that it allows for agent deletion. In this extract from the speech, May can be seen to use the passive in the same way as she uses nominalisation – to blame immigrants for economic and social problems whilst simultaneously downplaying their culpability for these issues. In the final sentence of this passage from the speech, there are two passive constructions, 'wages are forced down even further' and 'some people are forced out of work altogether'. In both cases, the agent – immigrants – has been removed. Again, the effect is to background the human actors that May blames for wages being forced down and people being forced out of work.

Although both the journalistic coverage and the participants in this study were very critical of this passage, the language used in it is rather indirect, certainly by the standards of traditional critical linguistic analysis (as I hope to have demonstrated in my discussion of passives and nominalisations). May could have adopted a far more polemical – overtly racist, even – tone by putting the blame squarely on immigrants; 'immigrants are stealing your jobs', 'immigrants are forcing down wages', 'it's difficult for schools and hospitals and core infrastructure like housing and transport to cope with all these immigrants' etc. The point, here, is emphatically *not* to disagree with either the participants in the study or the journalists who called the speech 'tawdry' and 'contemptible'. The speech is both those things. It does, however, beg the question of how the journalists, the participants, and I constructed this oppositional reading from the relatively evasive language that May uses. To investigate this requires not only analysing the text produced by May, but also the conceptual frames that participants bring to the discourse in the process of constructing meaning from the linguistic cues provided by the speech. For this reason, I now describe the participants in this study and what they think about immigration.

4. The participants

Three participants took part in the study, George, Cat, and Emily (all pseudonyms). They were recruited on the basis of their dense multiplex connections to one another (Milroy, 1987) and the fact that they are part of a social network that participates in various communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) across the British labour movement and activist left. All the participants are linked by their participation in the institutions of local government. They are all extremely active Labour Party members and supporters of the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn (which at the time of collecting the audience response data was somewhat of a shibboleth issue in British politics). They are also active members of the GMB trade union, and they support local campaign groups, frequently speaking at public protests and rallies against issues such as the Conservative government's support for the US bombing of Syria and its "austerity" economic agenda. One of the main things coordinating the group's activity across these different contexts is a shared political perspective. Following van Dijk (for example, 1998) we might model such a political perspective cognitively in terms of the social representations to which this group of political actors subscribes. Put in the text-world terminology I used to describe my approach to critical reception, the three participants share similar conceptual frames which they draw upon in order to construct meaning.

Both the audience's prior conceptualisation of the speaker, and their prior knowledge of the discourse topic are important in determining the extent to which proffered representations are resisted by the audience (Browse, 2018). For my purposes, this means describing the conceptual frames that the participants share of both May's topic – immigration – and May herself. Given constraints of space, in this chapter I focus on the former. In a group interview I conducted as part of the ethnographic research for this project, I asked participants what they thought about immigration. Of the three participants, Cat's response is perhaps the most "pro"-immigration (she says 'it's mainly a really positive thing') and she notes that members of her own family were immigrants. She also brings up other people's perceptions of immigration, saying that 'a lot of the fear… is actually misplaced'. Similarly, Emily talks about how people perceive immigration and, although she does not say that these perceptions are wrong or, as Cat puts it, 'misplaced', she does say 'I don't think we need an overhaul of our immigration laws'. Emily also talks from her experience – she was a practicing solicitor – about the strain on the legal processes associated with immigration due to government underfunding. From the perspective of these participants, immigration is not an intrinsically problematic process. Instead, the problems relate to how immigration is

perceived by the population or the manner in which immigration services are resourced by the government. Conversely, George has a much more agnostic approach to the process itself. George emphasises that he is 'pleased to live in a society which is multicultural', but says that immigration *may* – he is 'open minded' – have thrown up some 'challenges'. He suggests that twentieth century immigration into Britain was of a different order to the free movement of people within the European Union and cites the migration of Polish workers as an example.

Whilst George is a little sceptical of immigration, his view can be differentiated from May's in three senses. The first is that he celebrates the UK's multiculturalism. This is not a view May appears to share (she says that 'the pace of change' in communities is too fast). The second is that George places an emphasis on the immigrants themselves in order to empathise with them (he says 'I wish [Polish migrants] could make a life – a good life in – in Poland and they have to come here, 'cause you don't get a sense from some of them that it's very pleasant'), whereas – as I demonstrated – May tends to background the human beings involved in immigration. Indeed, George later says that

> I thought [former Labour leader] Ed Miliband's immigration policy was spot on... he didn't just say, oh right, okay, you know immigration's great and let's have open borders, but he said it's actually where you have im- exploitaiton.

The concern here is for the exploitation of immigrants, rather than the effects of immigration on local communities. Again, this suggests empathy – rather than hostility – towards immigrants. Thirdly, whereas May advocates for a right-wing crackdown on immigration rules, George is 'open minded' about whether the rules just need to be better enforced, or whether they should be changed. There is a sense, then, in which George occupies a middle-ground position between Cat and Emily on the one hand – who think there is little wrong in principle with the immigration rules – and May, on the other.

Although Cat, Emily, and George differ in their commitment to defending immigration policy as it stands, there is an overlap in their attitudes which is related to their wider political beliefs. In discussing their membership of the Labour Party, the participants all mention their background in campaigning for traditionally left-wing causes or their support for socialism. Emily said that before joining the Labour Party, she had always been 'campaigning on a left-wing agenda'. Cat, the only participant to have been a member of the Party under the former Labour leader and Prime Minister, Tony Blair, said that even at this time 'I still felt that I was

a socialist or I thought I was a socialist… and that the Labour party summed up my views' (the party under Blair was then much further to the right than under Corbyn). Similarly, George says 'through my family I developed a socialist, Labour outlook on the world, and they… were trade union members, and so… I thought about the world as a socialist'. The participant's attitudes to immigration are all coloured by this perspective. Cat is most explicit:

> the pressure that… Theresa May highlights…around services… is a scapegoat for why immigration is a bad thing, um, when actually it's about investment in public services for me.

Emily's discussion of under-resourcing in the immigration service is a good example of this; the problems with immigration are a product of cuts to government agencies (she says they have been 'cut, cut, cut, cut'). Notably, too, George also poses his disquiet around immigration in terms of worker's rights and exploitation. Funding public services and defending the rights of workers are all traditional concerns of the political left and the socialism to which all three participants adhere. Indeed, it is these concerns that form the locus of the group's critical responses to May's speech, responses to which I now turn.

5. Protocols

Audience response data was collected from the participants in three different ways. The first was an online, written form of "think-aloud" task in which participants were shown one paragraph of the speech on a computer screen and then asked to type their immediate reactions to the passage in a comment box underneath (for discussion of this method, see Norledge, 2016: 66-68, and Short and van Peer, 1989). The participants would then press the "next" button, which would take them to the following paragraph, and so on. There were sixteen paragraphs, rendering a corpus of 48 individual comments. Having completed the online task, participants were then invited to take part in a group discussion of the speech. In the first part of the discussion, participants were played a video of May delivering the speech and given a copy to annotate. These annotations comprised the second form of response data. Finally, the participants were asked a series of open-ended questions about their response to the speech. The group interview was transcribed and forms the third source of data. In what follows, I use all three sets of data to illustrate and describe the ways in which participants critically respond to May's address to the 2015 Conservative Party Conference.

6. Ways of resisting

There are two main ways in which the participants oppose the representation of immigration May proffers. The first I will call 'top-down' opposition. These forms of critical reception involve a wholesale rejection of the proffered text-world on the basis of an out-and-out clash with the preferred representation encoded in participants' pre-existing frame knowledge. A good example of this is provided in Figure 2. Figure 2a is one of George's annotations on the speech. George writes 'LOL. I find this out of touch with reality'. May's comments about the economy and job creation do not match George's conception of the economic situation. Indeed, the proffered text-world is so far from his preferred conceptual frame that it is funny; he writes 'LOL', which is short for 'laugh out loud'. Cat expresses similar disbelief. In her annotation (Figure 2b), she writes and underlines 'really!' This sentiment is also expressed by Emily in her think-aloud comments. She writes 'absolute nonsense. We do not have a growing economy'. Both the annotations and Emily's comment amount to a complete rejection of May's proffered representation on the basis of a clash with the participants' understanding of reality. I call these 'top-down' forms of opposition because the participants' pre-existing frames simply overrule the proffered representation.

In many ways, these top-down forms of opposition are linguistically the least interesting type of critical response because they relate to matters of content rather than linguistic form. Rather than rejecting the proffered representation's ontological claims to veracity or accuracy, far more interesting are the participant's objection to *how* a situation has been represented in the proffered text-world. These I call 'bottom-up' forms of opposition. An example is provided by Emily in Figure 2c. Here, Emily accuses May of using 'misleading figures'. This is echoed in her think-aloud comments on the same paragraph:

> I cannot accept that these figures can be directly attributed to just [the] needs of refugees and economic migrants. The speaker is trying to make me think that though. It is very misleading and manipulative.

In his comments, George makes a similar point: 'Rising demand for housing isn't (can't be?) just because of migration'. Neither George nor Emily disagree that there might be a demand for 210,000 new homes, or 900,000 new school places. They do not, however, believe that this demand can be attributed only to immigrant communities. Indeed, although there is a strong implication that this apparent demand for housing and school places is a

a.

b.

c.

Figure 2. *Annotations on the speech*

'consequence' of immigration that 'comes at a high price', May does not explicitly say that 'immigrants require an additional 210,000 new homes and 900,000 new school places'. Instead, she uses the nominalisation, 'rising demand' – a nominalisation which obscures the agent doing the demanding. Clearly, though, Emily and George are able to "unpack" this nominalisation; they notice that the 'rising demand' could well be attributed to the population in general, rather than migrants specifically.

These forms of bottom-up resistance to the proffered representation can be described using ideas from Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 1987, 1991, 2008), specifically the notion of 'construal':

> An expression's meaning is not just the conceptual content it evokes – equally important is how that content is construed. As part of its conventional semantic value, every symbolic structure construes its content in a certain fashion. It is hard to resist the visual metaphor, where content is likened to a scene and construal to a particular way of viewing it.

(Langacker, 2008: 55)

All linguistic forms evoke conceptual content at the same time as they construe that content in some manner. Langacker (1987, 2008) outlines four different dimensions of construal: specificity, focus, prominence, and perspective. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on two of these dimensions: focus and prominence. I begin with focus.

6.1 Resistance as rescoping

To continue Langacker's (2008: 55) visual metaphor, if grammatical forms entail some form of representation that can be likened to a scene, then 'focus' relates to what is included and excluded from that scene – what is included in the "viewing frame", so to speak. Take, for instance, the noun, 'arm'. The immediate scope of 'arm' is represented in Figure 3a. However, we also understand that arms are part of larger structures, i.e. bodies. We can therefore say that the maximal scope of 'arm' is the whole body, as represented in Figure 3b. Compare, this, say, to a noun like 'hand'. The immediate scope of 'hand' is represented in Figure 3c, and includes space around the hand, and some portion of the wrist and lower arm, too. Thus, the focus of a linguistic form is determined by its scope – by what aspects of conceptual structure are included in the immediate scope of predication, and which aspects form the conceptual substrate backgrounded in the maximal scope of predication.

Focus can be "scaled-up" to the clause. Cognitive grammar is a usage-based approach to language (Langacker, 2009). In our day-to-day lives we experience a number of energetic interactions between things – feet kicking balls, fingers pushing buttons, hands turning pages etc. These iterative experiences of some entity affecting some other entity are encoded in the transitive clause structure. The transitive clause can thus be represented abstractly as in Figure 4a. In Figure 4a, some yet-to-be-specified entity (called the trajector) affects some

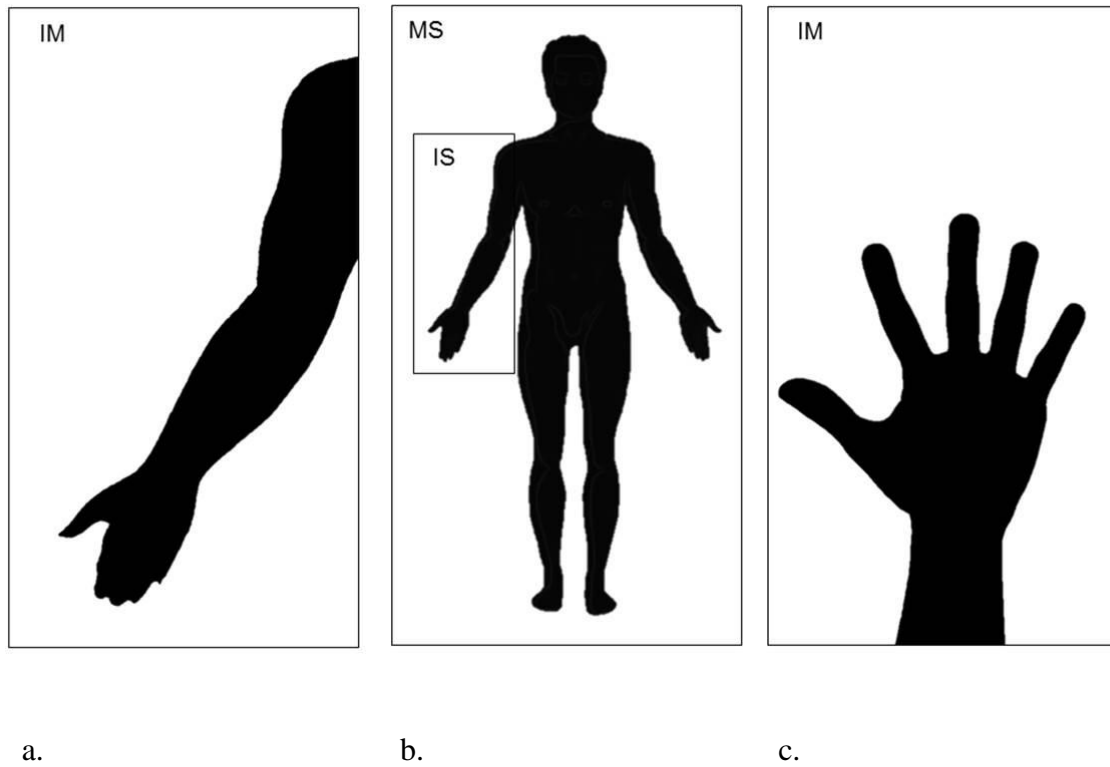a.   b.   c.

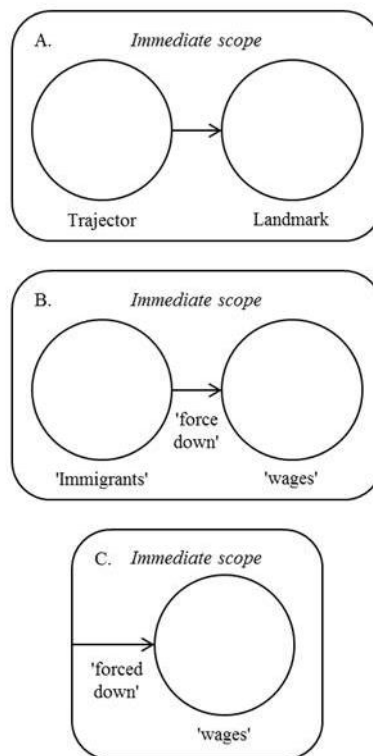Figure 3. *The immediate and maximal scope of arm and hand*

Figure 4. *Focusing on the level of the clause*

other yet-to-be-specified entity (the landmark). Figure 4a represents the immediate scope of a transitive clause in the active voice. To be more concrete, in Figure 4b, I have designated the trajector as 'immigrants', the verb process as 'force down', and the landmark as 'wages', to yield the active transitive clause 'immigrants force down wages'. In Figure 4b, the immigrants and the wages are both included in the immediate scope of predication. As I have already noted, one of the affordances of the English passive is that it allows for agent deletion; as Theresa May says in the speech, 'wages are forced down'. The passive with agent deletion consequently entails removing the trajector from the immediate scope of predication. We can represent this as in Figure 4c. Here, the wages are acted upon (as per the arrow) but the immigrants are removed from the immediate scope. In this extract from the speech, May proffers a representation of immigration which, in the case of her use of passives, removes immigrants from the immediate scope of predication.

As Figure 5 demonstrates, passives such as these are a cause of concern to Cat who circles them all (she circles 'wages are forced down even further', 'people are forced out of work altogether' and 'people who have been forced out of the labour market'). Indeed, one of the ways in which the participants resist this representation is by *rescoping* these passive grammatical forms. They perform this rescoping both with respect to the text-world representation May proffers and to their own conceptual frames for the economy. For an example of the latter, this is Cat's think-aloud comment on part of this section of the speech (the emphasis is mine):

> She identifies what government should do *but then blames immigration for job losses. Again trying to persuade the reader this is immigrations fault.*
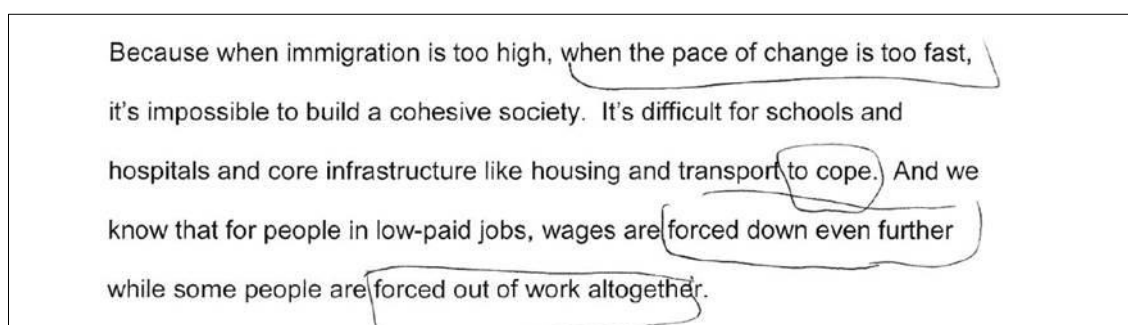

Figure 5. *Cat circles the passives.*

Despite May's use of the passive, Cat is able to rescope the proffered representation in order to identify that May 'blames immigration' and that she is 'trying to persuade the reader this is immigrations fault'. Participants also collectively rescope the passive in relation to their own frames for immigration and the economy, especially in relation to May's suggestion that 'wages are forced down even further'. Recall that earlier I said that as socialists, the participants were all committed to defending worker's rights. In the group discussion, this forms a collective basis on which to reject the proffered construal:

EMILY: And - and I mean - and again, you know, if it is - if it is British employers who are exploiting workers, then you know

CAT: [There's powers]

EMILY: [Then why not] you know, ta- take the - you know, there's already

SAM: Hm, mm

CAT: [They could - they could - yeah   ]

EMILY: [Things there that could bring them to account]

SAM: [There's laws and - mm   ]

CAT: And they could ra- raise the living wage, or raise the minimum wage, and

EMILY: And enforce people who don't pay

Throughout this exchange, the discussion of wages is reframed as a worker's rights issue, rather than one that directly relates to immigration. Emily begins by saying, 'if it is British employers who are exploiting workers'. Rather than rescope in relation to the proffered text-world – in which it is immigrants that are forcing down wages – instead Emily does so in terms of her own conceptual frame. There is a point of connection between the proffered text-world representation and the participants' own background knowledge of immigration and the economy – earlier I called this an 'overlap' – but it is also a point of departure. The reframing of the issue is achieved by rescoping from this point. To use Hall's (1980) terminology, Emily 'detotalizes' the "fact" of falling wages from the proffered text-world and resituates, or 'retotalizes' it (via a process of rescoping) in her own conceptual frame ('within some alternative framework of reference' [Hall, 1980: 127]). This rescoping in relation to the

participant's shared conceptual frame allows for alternative solutions to the problem of falling wages to be proposed. Cat says that government could 'raise the living wage, or raise the minimum wage' to which Emily adds 'and enforce people who don't pay it'. The participants, then, identify a number of methods – raising the minimum/living wage and enforcing existing laws – that could be used to stop a "race to the bottom" on pay. In this shared conception it is not migrants that are responsible for this race to the bottom, but exploitative employers and the government for failing to crack down on them (indeed, Cat's written comments on this section from the speech say 'she is using examples that are a failure of government'). May's use of the passive has in this instance left a "gap" which the participants have filled with their own frame knowledge.

6.2 Resistance as reprofiling

The second of Langacker's (1987, 2008) construal operations which is useful to consider in light of the participants' responses to the speech is prominence. Prominence relates to how salient conceptual structure is within the immediate scope of predication. Prominence is thus a matter of foreground and background. The most foregrounded aspect of conceptual structure is said to be 'profiled'. Returning to Figure 3c, we can say that the nominal, 'hand', profiles the fingers, thumb and palm, but excludes the wrist, lower arm, and surrounding space. In Cognitive Grammar, the concept of profile is integral to the difference between grammatical classes; for example, nouns profile things whereas verbs profile processes (Langacker, 1991: 5). As in the case of the focus construal operation, it is possible to scale the notion of prominence up to the level of the clause. The prototypically profiled element in the clause is the trajector (for more detailed discussion see Langacker, 1991: Ch.7). This is certainly the case when a transitive verb is used in the active voice (so, in 'immigrants force down wages', it is the immigrants who are profiled). Conversely, the passive is a marked structure because it is the landmark that is profiled (thus, 'wages are forced down by immigrants' profiles the wages, not the immigrants. In the case of agent deletion, such as 'wages are forced down', the landmark is similarly the profile because the trajector is missing from the immediate scope of predication altogether). Such a view of passives coheres with Trew's (1979) suggestion that even when passives do include an agent, that agent is backgrounded. What is and is not profiled in the clause is therefore an important part of how speakers and writers ideologically represent an event (indeed, see Hart, 2014).

It is also possible to place a "thing-like" construal on a clause by using a noun to describe a verb process; that is, by using nominalisation. Langacker (1991: 22-50) outlines a number of different kinds of nominalisation. The most pertinent for this discussion is what Langacker (1991: 24) calls an 'episodic' nominalisation. Episodic nominalisations profile a "freeze-frame" moment of the verb process, or, as Langacker (1991: 25) puts it, 'the result [of this form of nominalisation] is a derived noun that profiles a region whose constitutive entities are the component states of a process'. The effect of this form of nominalisation is thus to construe those 'constitutive entities' of the process holistically as a thing-like assemblage. The nominalisation 'demand' in 'we need to build 210,000 new homes every year to deal with rising demand' is one such case. The verb process, 'demand', presupposes a "demander", and goods or services that are demanded from someone. I have diagrammed the conceptual substrate of 'demand' in Figure 6a. The nominalisation places a holistic, thing-like construal on this process; the assemblage of conceptual elements *as a whole* is profiled, with no one aspect of conceptual structure being the most salient. I have represented this with a thick ellipse in Figure 6b.
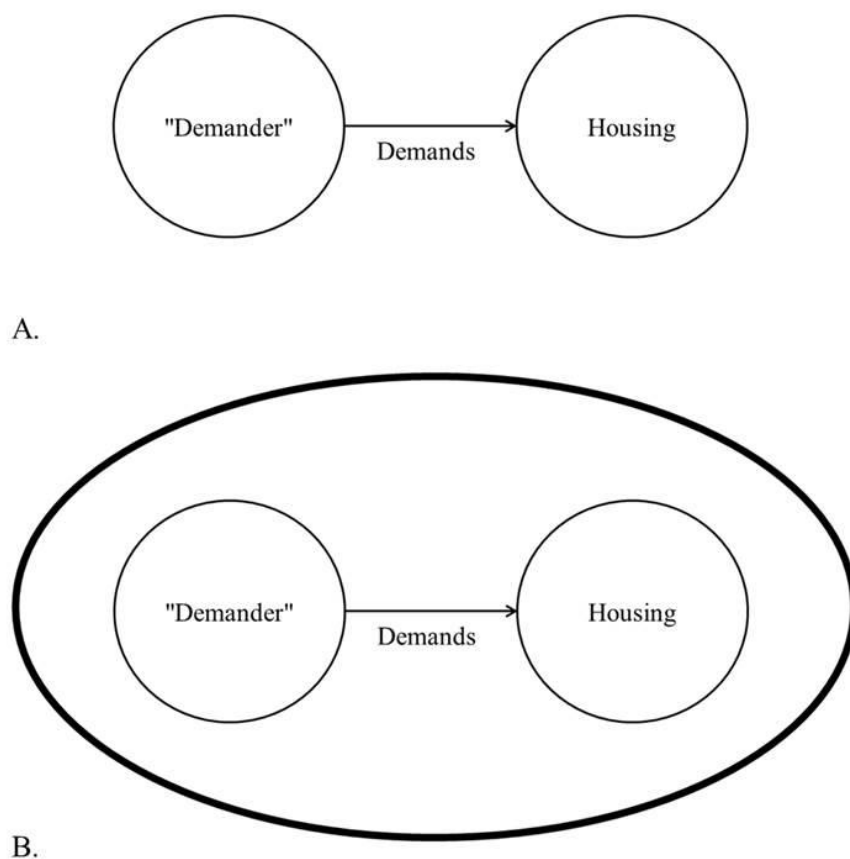

Figure 6. *The conceptual substrate of 'demand' and its "thing like" construal*

As I have already suggested, the participants are quite capable of unpacking this construal; they rightly ask who it is that makes the demand. This process of unpacking the nominalisation – of picking out a specific aspect of conceptual structure from amidst the holistic construal proffered by May – can be described as a form of *reprofiling*. As in the case of rescoping, the reprofiling is performed with respect to both May's proffered text-world and the participant's own preferred conceptual frames. The participants say that May is implying immigrants are the cause of the demand (the proffered text-world) at the same time as they voice their suspicions that the figure is actually the overall demand for housing (their own conceptualisation). The suspicion, of course, is just that – it is obvious from their comments that although George and Emily attribute the 210,000 to a larger group of people than just immigrants, they do not know the exact figures for the shortfall in housing (although George's parenthetical question, 'can't be?', suggests he has some idea about the numbers involved). Interestingly, although they dispute May's use of statistics, the numbers themselves are accepted as having some real-world validity; that is, they do not assume that May has simply made them up, but rather that she has employed some statistical trick in order to 'mislead' or 'manipulate' her audience (this is, of course, not an unreasonable assumption, given the level of media scrutiny the speech would have attracted). This is significant because it suggests that even a proffered text-world that is rejected by audiences can in some ways modify the knowledge that discourse participants already possess. Although the argumentative relevance of the figure is dismissed by the participants, it *is* integrated – via the process of reprofiling – into the discourse participant's preferred frame in such a way that it harmonises with their existing conception of reality (indeed, this integration is a form of what Garfinkel, 1967, calls 'ad hocing').

7. That's just what we hear on telly all the time

The participants, then, are able to "fill" the gaps in the proffered representation. They do this either by rescoping (in the case of passives) or reprofiling (in the case of nominalisations), the construal of immigration proffered by May. Indeed, this idea of identifying what is missing or backgrounded in the proffered text-world is raised more or less explicitly by Emily who says the problem with the speech is 'kind of what isn't in [it]' and 'what isn't said'. It is the participants who supply this missing information as part of the process of world-building. As I argued in the previous sections, they do this both in relation to their own preferred conceptual frames but also the conceptual substrate underpinning the proffered text-world representation. In the case of the latter, they reconstrue the proffered text-world so as to make

May's relatively euphemistic anti-immigration rhetoric explicit. The agents supposedly responsible for forcing down wages, taking jobs and demanding houses – immigrants – are profiled in the participant's re-representations of the content of the speech. Even if they do not use technical vocabulary such as 'passive' or 'nominalisation', the three participants are clearly aware of May's indirect linguistic strategy:

EMILY: [That] which um I did put on my notes was - was that um, you know, what she's saying here is the anti-immigration far right, open borders liberal left

GEORGE: Mm

EMILY: But what you've got here is a very right-wing [immigration policy]

CAT: [(laughs)   ]

GEORGE: [Yeah, yeah, hm   ]

EMILY: This isn't in the middle, so

CAT: But I kinda think that's trying to moderate her own [views]

EMILY: [Yeah]

CAT: By saying, well I'm not the most extreme person on immigration and but - you know, you don't want those open door (.) liberal left

EMILY: Mm

CAT: Um, but what I'm saying here is somewhere in the middle actually, even though it's not, like you say

Cat and Emily perceive that May is 'trying to moderate her views', or at least appear to adopt a moderate stance on immigration. At the same time, however, their ability to reconstrue this proffered representation allows them to identify it as 'a very right-wing immigration policy'. May's attempt to look "reasonable" consequently fails.

Given the difference in George's attitude to immigration, it is worth noting some of the dissimilarities between his responses and the other participants. Earlier in the interview, he says he began listening to the speech 'willing… to follow… [May's] train of thought'. It is

notable that the passives that Cat and Emily rescope – 'wages are forced down even further while some people are forced out of work altogether' – occasion no comment from George in either his think-aloud remarks, or his annotations. He does refer to these in the group interview, however, saying 'I thought she halfway went in many ways towards, uh you know, trying to convince me… You know, when she – when she pushes her buttons of people whose wages are cut, job security'. May's apparent concern for wages and conditions thus harmonise with George's own reservations about immigration and form a bridgehead, so to speak, between his own conception of immigration and hers. In fact, he later describes the paragraph in which May outlines the importance of occupying a middle-ground between the 'open borders liberal left' and 'anti-immigration right' as 'actually pretty good and convincing'. In response to George's comments, Emily points to another part of the speech which says 'many of the people [who get into the Schengen area] will eventually get EU citizenship and the free movement rights that come with it'. She exclaims '<u>so what</u>, what – why is that? – she's not qualified in any way to go on to say, and this would not be good… it's just like – kind of like left hanging, isn't it?' George replies –

GEORGE: Which is why - actually why I started off relatively open minded

EMILY: [Right   ]

GEORGE: [And then] became unconvinced because like that

EMILY: Mm

GEORGE: That second paragraph is quite carefully constructed and

EMILY: [Mm   ]

GEORGE: [There is] an argumentation in there, that she then just drops and starts firing points

George's annotations on the text shortly after the second paragraph evidence the sense in which he thinks the careful argumentation 'drops' and that May 'starts firing points'; he describes her use of figures as 'very cynical'. For George, May's 'cynical' use of statistics – which he is able to unpick by reprofiling the nominalisation, 'demand' – undermines her previous appearance of balance, the result being that George 'became unconvinced'. When asked why he became unconvinced, he says 'I just think – I think that she um – she told a fairly conventional story… that's just what we hear on telly all the time, isn't it?' Owing to

his greater scepticism of immigration and its impact on the labour market, the textual prompts which cause George's opposition to the speech are different, but the opposition itself is rather similar to Cat and Emily's reasons for rejecting the speech; according to George, rather than a balanced, middle-ground view of immigration, May's speech articulates the kinds of arguments George is used to seeing in the media. In fact, Cat likewise notes that this is the kind of speech she would expect May to give. When asked why, she said

> Just because of what the narrative is at the moment around immigration, and like how that's grown, and like Emily was saying about [the refugee] crisis and all that sort of stuff, that's what they want… people to think.

Here, the third person pronoun, 'they', refers to the Conservative Party, rather than the media, but the point stands; May's rhetorical strategy of occupying a middle-ground fails because George, Cat and Emily see it as a (text-world) instantiation of an already widespread right-wing conceptual frame for immigration. Granted, this particular text-world proffers a euphemistic construal of this underlying right-wing, anti-immigration frame, backgrounding, as it does, immigrants. Nonetheless, the participant's ability to reconstrue the proffered text-world in relation to this underlying conceptual frame (in addition to their own preferred frames) allows them to make this identification between May's 'carefully constructed', 'moderate' construal and 'a very right wing immigration policy'. Reconstrual is thus a cognitive process which is integral to the participant's construction of an oppositional position.

8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have used Text World Theory and Cognitive Grammar to outline some of the bottom-up and top-down conceptual and linguistic processes involved in constructing George, Emily and Cat's oppositional reading of May's speech. These analytical frameworks have been useful because of their focus on the pre-existing knowledge audiences bring with them to the discourse in order to construct meaning. According to these perspectives, the potential for reader resistance is an intrinsic element of discourse processing. An important part of describing the participants' interpretative processes involved using ethnographic methods to determine their shared representations of, and attitudes towards, immigration. Indeed, the ethnography complemented the cognitive linguistic analysis of reader response data; it explains the nuanced differences in the way George constructed his oppositional position as compared to Cat and Emily, and how those differences were coordinated and

integrated in such a way as to arrive at a shared group perspective on the speech – that May's speech was a novel construal of a fundamentally familiar right-wing conceptual frame for immigration. I thereby hope to have demonstrated the utility of combining ethnographic and cognitive approaches to describe the interpretive procedures employed in critical reception. In theorising the audience as active participants in the discourse, it seems to me that such an approach is invaluable in accounting for the critical responses of activ*ist* audiences.

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