

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at:

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/>

Available through a partnership with



*Scroll down to read the article.*

# Policy-makers, the Press and Politics: Reporting a Public Policy Document

ALISON LOVE

*Department of Linguistics, University of Zimbabwe*

## Abstract

*News media often have to present public policies, originally articulated in technical civil service documents, to the public, and to contextualise and comment on them. Such situations result in 'chains' of intertextual texts, where, for example, a news report is based on a policy document and an editorial then comments on and evaluates the content of the report. The transformations that take place as the chain progresses are evidence both of media practice and of the strategies by which a policy document may be positioned within a specific historical context. This article examines a case study in Zimbabwe immediately before the June 2000 Parliamentary elections, when a housing policy document was reported on in the government-controlled media and then became the subject of a lengthy editorial.*

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

It is frequently the task of the mass media to present newly formulated public policies as 'news stories'. Such policies exist primarily as written texts, although they may be publicly 'launched' at a press briefing or other public event. Media practitioners are thus often expected to act as intermediaries between policy-makers and the public, both in terms of the content of policies and of their political/social significance.

Media texts produced in this type of situation are intrinsically intertextual, since each must position itself in relation to previous texts. Fairclough characterises mass communication as 'an extended chain of communicative events' (Fairclough 1995: 41). He comments: 'The interesting question is, then, how public domain communication events are transformed as they move along the chain' (Fairclough 1995: 41). He stresses the need to focus on what choices are made at each link of the chain.

In the case of reporting of public policy documents, there are four important questions to consider in relation to intertextual chains. First, it is necessary to consider how the primary communicative event is represented.

---

1. This article is based on a presentation at the conference on Research and Practice in Professional Discourse, Hong Kong, November 2000, and also at a Department of Linguistics Seminar, University of Zimbabwe, February 2001.

Second, attention should be paid to what selection has been made from the original text, looking not only at what has been included, but also at what has been omitted. Third, it is important to examine what changes have been made in textual structure, especially re-ordering, which may be made to produce a change in emphasis or may reflect a change in genre. Finally, it is necessary to analyse what linguistic reformulations — changes in vocabulary and/or sentence structure — have been made.

A simple intertextual chain would be: primary policy document, news report and editorial comment. Each of these represents a natural progression in the process of bringing a new policy into the public domain, and each represents a different genre. Significant differences in textual organisation and language can therefore be expected between instances of these three types of text.

### The Case-study

The specific case-study discussed in this article is an example of journalistic practice in Zimbabwe, shortly before the June 2000 parliamentary elections. On Sunday 18 June, exactly one week before voting was to take place, the government-controlled *Sunday Mail* carried on its front page (though not as the main story) an article entitled 'State revamps housing policy' (Appendix 1). This was a rather dull, and in some places almost incomprehensible, account of a new housing policy report. It seemed a rather surprising front-page article for such a late stage of a white-hot election campaign. However, the following day, Monday 19 June, the government-controlled daily, *The Herald*, carried a lengthy editorial comment on the 'new housing policy'. This article will trace the intertextual links and transformatory moves between the policy document, the initial news report and the editorial comment and discuss their implications within the political context.

### The Policy Document

The policy document, entitled *National Housing Policy for Zimbabwe* and on which the above newspaper reports were based, was prepared by the National Task Force on Housing and published by the Ministry of Local Government and National Housing in August 1999.<sup>2</sup> It was the outcome of a series of meetings of the Task Force over two years, following a National Housing Convention at Victoria Falls in November 1997.

The actual 'policy' section of the document, from which the news report is drawn, contains the following headings:

---

2. I am grateful to Mr T. Mubvami, Department of Rural and Urban Planning, University of Zimbabwe, for obtaining a copy of the report for me.

**4.0 Proposed National Housing Policy**

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 National Housing Vision
- 4.3 National Housing Goal
- 4.4 Basic Points of Departure
  - 4.4.1 Constitutional Rights
  - 4.4.2 The Role of Government
  - 4.4.3 Development with a Human Face
  - 4.4.4 Freedom of Choice
  - 4.4.5 Non-discrimination
- 4.5 Underlying Policy Approaches and Considerations
  - 4.5.1 Housing, Economic Empowerment and Skills Transfer
  - 4.5.2 Sustainability and Affordability
  - 4.5.3 Home Ownership and Special Needs Housing
  - 4.5.4 Urban and Rural Balance
  - 4.5.5 Consumer Education and Protection
  - 4.5.6 Environmental Protection and Management
  - 4.5.7 Accountability and Monitoring
- 4.6 Key Strategic Approaches to Ensure Housing Delivery
  - 4.6.1 Crisis Control
  - 4.6.2 Supporting the Housing Process
  - 4.6.3 Institutional Arrangements
  - 4.6.4 Legislative Review
  - 4.6.5 Review and Replication of Best Practices
  - 4.6.6 Mobilising Housing Credit
  - 4.6.7 Mobilising Savings
  - 4.6.8 Subsidies
  - 4.6.9 Land

(Ministry of Local Government and National Housing 1999)

It is an unexceptional document, following expectable generic conventions in textual structure, such as the breakdown of topics under multiple numbered sub-headings. The language is formal, impersonal, and contains a relatively high number of nominalisations and of rather long sentences, as in the following extract from the section 'National Housing Goal':

Government's goal is simply to increase housing in the country in the first instance. This can initially be achieved by increasing the share of housing in the National budget thereby increasing housing delivery on a sustainable, planned and programmable basis to reach the Government's target of 1,000,000 houses in ten years (National Task Force on Housing 1999: 19).

The first sentence of this extract is simple and accessible to any reader. However, the second is much more complex: the initial main clause is qualified by a number of phrases expressing a high level summary of the intentions of the policy. The first participial phrase of manner ('by increasing the share ...') expresses the more detailed policy proposed, while the second participial phrase ('thereby increasing housing delivery ...') expresses the result of that policy. The next phrase is prepositional ('on a sustainable ... basis') and post-modifies 'housing delivery'. The final phrase is an infinitive phrase of purpose ('to reach the Government's target ...') and qualifies the two participles ('increasing'), while simultaneously making anaphoric reference to the topic ('Government's goal'). The number of nominalisations is high: 'goal', 'housing', 'delivery', 'basis', 'target'. Such language is common in policy documents.

### News Reports

Drawing on Australian work, Fairclough suggests the following generic structure of the news story:

- 'nucleus' — headline + lead paragraph giving gist of story
- series of 'satellite' paragraphs — elaborating story
- wrap-up paragraph — giving 'sense of resolution' to story (Fairclough 1995: 72).

The article will examine the *Sunday Mail* report of the new housing policy in terms of this structure, but with slight modification. The news report will be discussed in terms of its selection from the policy document, the ordering of information and the degree and character of linguistic reformulation. The generic structure of the report is shown in Table 1, with the numbers indicating sentences (see Appendix 1). Added to Fairclough's model is a section 'Sub-leads', because this section of the report has particular textual prominence.

### Nucleus and Leads

The head-line — 'State revamps housing policy' — is a straightforward statement of topic. Sentences 1 and 2 establish the 'communicative event':

1. The Government has drawn up a major housing policy that will see the construction of over one million houses in the next 10 years while doing away with archaic laws that have been contributing to the critical shortage of accommodation in the country.
2. The National Housing Policy, which received a nod from President Mugabe, was developed following a National Housing Convention held in Victoria Falls at the end of last year.

In fact no 'event' is reported, merely the existence of a 'major housing policy' and its background. What is interesting is the selection of which

**Table 1: Generic Structure and Intertextual References of *Sunday Mail* Report**

Section of News Report	Sentences	Source Section in Policy Document	Heading of Source Section
NUCLEUS	Headline		
LEAD	1-2	4.3 4.6.4	National Housing Goal Legislative Review
SUB-LEADS	3	4.4.1	Constitutional Rights
	4-5	4.6.4	Legislative Review
	6-7	4.6.3	Institutional Arrangements
SATELLITES	8-10	4.6.1	Crisis Control
	11-13	4.6.6	Mobilising Housing Credit
	14-16	4.6.8	Subsidies
	17-19	4.6.9	Land
	20	Diagram	Institutional Structure
WRAP-UP	21-25	Foreword	Presidential Foreword

points from the policy document to foreground in the Leads. While the reference to the National Housing Goal seems an obvious choice, the second part of Sentence 2 is less expectable. The reference to the deleterious effects of 'archaic laws' which will be 'done away with' appears to relate to section 4.6.4 of the Policy — Legislative Review — which is not foregrounded in the policy document.

Thus, the primary focus of the news report is on two issues: the predictable interest in the goal of the housing policy, but also the less predictable issue of changes in laws. It appears that this choice, which is marked because it does not parallel the structure of the policy document, is made to introduce an interpretive frame of 'post-colonial change' into the text.

### *Sub-leads*

This section has been added to Fairclough's model because it is prominent in the *Sunday Mail* report in its deviation from the textual order of the policy document. The first point to note is Sentence 3, which appears very odd at first reading:

3. In order to make the policy viable, the Government intends to introduce legislation that will have the effect of ensuring that Parliament will be obliged to address the issue of housing as a matter of grave importance.

The multiple expressions of purpose, intention, and effect seem strange. However, an examination of how the sentence has been reformulated from the section of the policy document to which it refers, 4.4.1 Constitutional Rights, makes clear the problem faced by the reporter. This section reads:

In an attempt to rewrite the Constitution of Zimbabwe, Government has created the Constitutional Commission. In terms of the provision of the Draft Constitution, it has been recommended that housing be included as an issue under social rights and obligations.

This inclusion in the Constitution will have the effect of ensuring that Parliament will be obliged to address the issue of housing as a matter of grave importance (National Task Force on Housing 1999: 19-20).

Since the Draft Constitution had been rejected by the electorate in the Referendum of February 2000, this passage had been overtaken by events, and the reporter's attempt to reformulate the sentence is extremely cumbersome.

Sentences 4 and 5 again foreground the Legislative Review section of the policy document:

4. The new amendment to the constitution would look at such archaic legislation as the Housing and Building Act, Housing Standards Act and the Regional, Town and Country Planning Act.
5. The policy document cited the example of the rent control regulations that were gazetted in terms of the Housing and Building Act of 1979 that were now irrelevant.

The news report repeats the characterisation of 'archaic laws' used in sentence 1 and then lists the relevant laws verbatim from the policy document.

Sentences 6 and 7 foreground the Institutional Arrangements:

6. The policy document points to the fact that there is need for re-engineering of the governmental, statutory and parastatal institutional framework within which the national housing strategy would be implemented.
7. 'The process of institutional rationalisation will, therefore, be dealt with as a matter of immediate priority in order to establish an institutional and funding framework within which the envisaged Government programmes can be implemented with success,' read part of the policy document.

This reporting contains minimal linguistic reformulation from the policy document. What is notable is the choice of this section for foregrounding in the report.

Thus, the Sub-lead section is characterised by marked choices of issues to bring to prominence. The emphasis appears to be on the need to change from the inherited colonial framework and on the responsibility of Parliament to effect these changes.

### *Satellites*

In this lengthy part of the news report, further details follow closely the order of the National Housing Policy sub-headings not yet mentioned. In terms of selection of material, what is most significant is what is omitted. No reference is made to sections 4.6.2 'Supporting housing process' or 4.6.7 'Mobilising savings'. This is possibly significant because both these sections relate to self-help in housing provision rather than to what Government intends to provide.

In terms of linguistic reformulation, a number of points of interest emerge. Firstly, there is, in fact, extremely little reformulation, and most of what there is appears to be minimal change to ensure the coherence and cohesion of the news report's summary of the policy document. Most of this part of the report is incorporated almost verbatim from the policy document. There is virtually no attempt to change the linguistic register from that appropriate to the expert policy-maker to one more accessible to a non-specialist newspaper reader. For example, sentences 14 and 15 read:

14. The issue of user end subsidies was another approach the Government will take in order to reach the target of a million houses in ten years.
15. It is hoped that the subsidy policy would be flexible to accommodate a wide range of tenure and delivery level in order to obtain maximum gearing with private investment savings and sweat equity.

No attempt is made to explain the implications of 'user end subsidies'. Possibly even more unfamiliar to the non-expert reader is the meaning of 'sweat equity'.

Where significant reformulation takes place, its purpose appears to be to foreground the potential role of Government in initiating change. For example, sentence 11 reads:

11. In order to cushion a number of people in need of housing, the Government would make available a housing credit scheme.

Here 'the Government' is grammatical subject and agent in the main clause. However, the related section from 4.6.6 of the policy document reads rather differently:

A number of households in need of housing can afford to access housing credit, provided this is available. Such credit is currently not accessible by most of such households. Making housing credit available must be seen as a fundamental requirement in order to facilitate the improvement of the housing circumstances of such households.

The substantial syntactic rearrangement which has been made here, changes the policy document's generalised statement of 'necessity' to an explicit Government intention.

Sentences 17 and 18 also show reformulation. The news report reads:

17. The whole policy will however depend heavily on the availability of land.
18. The Government will ensure the efficient assembly and release of appropriately located land.

Sentence 17 is not immediately traceable to a specific sentence of the policy document. Rather, it appears to be constructed from the document's sub-heading 4.6.9 'Land', which is then reformulated into a statement, with obvious intertextual links to the issue foremost in the Government's election platform. Sentence 18 is a reformulation of the following from the policy document:

The efficient assembly and release of appropriately located and serviced land for housing is critical to achieving the desired rate of delivery of housing (National Task Force on Housing 1999: 30).

As in sentence 11, the reformulation serves to change the document's general statement of necessity into a firm Government intention, interestingly omitting the mention of 'servicing' the land. The final reformulation in this section is in sentence 20:

20. The proposed institutional structures include the Government as the co-ordinator, non-governmental organisations, National Housing Trust, local authorities, local non-governmental organisations, the private sector and the general public both in the urban and rural communities.

This list is constructed by a largely accurate transcoding of an organogram of the 'Proposed Institutional Structure for Housing Delivery in Zimbabwe' (National Task Force on Housing 1999: appendix). What is lost in the transcoding is the relationship between the players, leaving the impression that they are all vaguely equal. Moreover, the one significant omission is the pre-modifier 'international', which appears in the diagram with the first mention of 'non-Governmental Organisations'. The result is a confusing apparent repetition. However, this is presumably motivated by the animosity which had developed towards international NGOs in the months between the publication of the document and the news report, as many NGOs were seen as supporting opposition groups and/or policies.

### *Wrap-up*

The section which closes the report is a justification for the new policy and a positive evaluation of it, drawn entirely, and mostly verbatim, from the Presidential Foreword to the document. It does not really sum up the story, as often occurs in this position in a news report. Rather, it serves to give the policy Presidential blessing — and to bring the President and his verbatim words into the story.

### Comment

This news report appeared a little odd, since no event, not even an official launching of the policy, was reported. Comparison of the report with the policy document reveals a rather unsophisticated cut-and-paste job. No Ministry official is mentioned as a source, and the impression might be gained that a reporter had been simply given the policy document and instructed to produce a story from it. Significantly, given the timing of the appearance of the news report, what selection, reorganisation, and reformulation occurred tended to shift the focus of the story to an interpretive frame of post-colonial problems and of a strong agentive role for the government and to a slightly stronger emphasis on the issue of land availability. It seemed a fairly minor story, though clearly an example of 'positive government action'.

However, by the following day the 'news value' of the 'story' was being more effectively exploited. *The Herald* devoted a lengthy Comment to it (See Appendix 2).

### Editorial Comment

The best-known model of the generic structure of editorial comment is possibly Bolivar's (1994). Her model is very detailed, but this article will focus only on the macro-structure, which has been slightly adapted.

---

#### Bolivar (1994)

#### Suggested Components

---

Situation

headline + recapitulation of news item

Development

evaluation + grounds for evaluation

Recommendation

exhortation — to someone to do something

---

The most significant questions to address in relation to editorial comment relate to the presentation of the Situation and the Recommendation. In the Situation, how much knowledge of the event is presupposed? Does the recapitulation re-narrate the event or refer to it by nominalised labelling? How much evaluation is incorporated into the recapitulation? In the Recommendation, who is exhorted to do what, and how strong is the exhortation?

### Structure of 'Herald' Editorial

The full text of the 'Herald' editorial is given in Appendix 2. The structure of *The Herald* editorial is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Structure of *The Herald* Editorial

Macro-structure	Components	Sentences
<i>Situation</i>	<i>Headline</i>	
	Recapitulation	1-2
Development	Evaluation	3-4
	Grounds for evaluation	5-31
Recommendation	Exhortation	32-33

### *Situation and Recapitulation*

The headline of the Comment is straightforward, namely, 'New National Housing Policy a positive development'. The New National Housing Policy is introduced as Theme (initial element) and the grammatically compressed statement makes a simple positive evaluation. Thus, readers are clear as to the news item being commented on.

This is necessary because the opening of the Comment bears no immediate relation to the previous news report. The two sentences of the recapitulation focus first on other issues before introducing the National Housing Policy:

1. WHILE other parties make promises, ZANU (PF) has already started implementing crucial planks of its manifesto.
2. After cutting through the opposition to a proper distribution of land by changing the constitution and listing the first 804 farms to be acquired very soon, it has now launched the new National Housing Policy, which sees one million new homes being built over the next 10 years.

Each of these sentences opens with a Marked Theme (Halliday 1994). In English, the normal, unmarked sentence organisation is for the grammatical subject of the main clause to occur in initial position and thus be considered the Theme, or 'starting point', of the sentence. If other material occurs in initial position, it is considered a marked choice and can be interpreted as influencing the context within which the reader processes the main clause (Gosden 1992, Thompson 1996: 131-2). In sentence 1, the marked theme ('WHILE other parties make promises') introduces a contrastive interpretive frame, which draws attention to the parties contesting the election. The main clause of the sentence then makes a general assertion relating to the election: 'ZANU (PF) has already started implementing crucial planks of its manifesto'. This first sentence thus repositions the news item in terms of the election campaign, with the agent of implementation being the ruling party, ZANU (PF), rather than 'the Government', as found in the policy document and, indeed, the news report. The implication is that the National Housing Policy is one of the 'crucial planks of the manifesto'. It should be noted that in the case of the Housing Policy, this 'implementation' is to have drawn up

a policy: the typical verb tenses in the news report are future or conditional. Thus, the publication of the Policy has been reformulated as a decisive action.

The second sentence opens with a long and syntactically complex marked theme, which mentions prior 'planks' which have been 'implemented'. The vocabulary is interesting: 'cutting through' suggests decisive action, while 'proper distribution of land' presupposes agreement on the evaluation. The actions which have achieved this 'proper distribution' are in fact all enabling rather than decisive: 'listing' farms which are 'to be acquired very soon'; in other words, no decisive action has in fact yet been taken. After the long marked theme, the main clause finally introduces the event to be commented on: 'it has now launched...'. In fact, no specific launch event has been reported. Thus, in this Situation section of the editorial, a long-worked on, relatively routine policy document has been transformed into crucial evidence of the ruling party's decisive action, by conflating the present publication (which had no connection with the election) with future 'promises'.

### *Evaluation*

The main evaluation of the editorial — that the National Housing Policy is a positive action by the ruling party — has been incorporated into the headline and recapitulation. However, sentences 3 and 4 develop the evaluation in an interesting way:

3. This can be implemented and will do much more than just solve a housing crisis.
4. The scale is huge but not impossible.

The editor is clearly aware that potential challenges to the evaluation lie in the area of feasibility. He, therefore, responds to anticipated questions. This implicit interaction is evident in the emphatic use of the modal verb 'can' and in the phrase 'huge but not impossible', where the combination of concession and negation presuppose a challenge (Hunston 2000: 179-80). It should be noted that this evaluation thus relates primarily to the ability of the National Housing Policy to deliver on promises.

### *Grounds for Evaluation*

There are several distinct phases in this long section, and only the most significant will be discussed here. Sentences 5-10 put forward evidence from other countries to show the feasibility of fast large-scale housing projects. The choice of post-World War Two Europe and Japan as the sources of evidence is interesting because this establishes a frame of 'post-war reconstruction', in some ways parallel to the 'post-colonial change' frame already mentioned. Both these interpretive frames suggest a situation

of historical crisis which requires rapid resolution. This is then combined with a 'decade' time-frame. While this is in fact the time-frame of the Policy, the merging of this into the 'decade' time-frame of post-war Europe and Japan subtly implies a parallel historical setting.

Sentences 15-19 give detailed attention to an 'archaic law' covering building materials allowed for urban construction. Oddly, this particular piece of legislation is not mentioned in the policy document. However, it may have been chosen because it concerns very concrete issues which readers can easily relate to.

Sentences 25-29 of the editorial elaborate the implications of the Policy in terms of employment creation. This is not based directly on the policy document text, which does not concern itself with this issue. The comments are therefore more speculative, but are able to portray a concrete vision of the future:

25. A major housing drive will do much more than just give a home to every family, important as that is.
26. A vast army of workers will be needed, providing employment.
27. The new jobs will not just be in the formal sector or in the building trades.
28. There will be ample room for the informal sector, making bricks for example, and in many other areas.
29. The new suburbs will need shops, creating new business opportunities and yet more jobs.

The concrete grammatical subjects — 'A vast army of workers', 'The new suburbs' — encourage the reader to visualise the implications of the policy. Moreover, the use of definite articles — 'The new jobs', 'The new suburbs' — presuppose that this future can be assumed to have reality.

Sentences 30-31 return to the policy document text, but make much more effort than the news report to make its provisions accessible to an ordinary reader, and draw attention to the needs of specific groups which will be catered for:

30. Special attention has been given to those whom the normal housing market will never be able to satisfy.
31. The old, the infirm, the very poor, and the recent school leaver or graduate will all need extra help if they are to have a decent roof over their heads.

Thus, the grounds for evaluation of the National Housing Policy move through a 'post-war reconstruction' frame to a related 'archaic laws' frame, to issues of employment and the housing problems of such groups as school leavers. This culmination is significant because it addresses issues which appeal to the younger urban population, the precise section of the nation most disenchanted with the prevailing political and economic climate.

### *Exhortation*

The culmination prepares the ground for the exhortation, which comprises the final two sentences:

32. The new Parliament we elect next weekend will be asked to pass a package of legislation to allow the housing policy to be implemented.
33. So vital is this sector that care must be taken by voters to ensure that those they vote for will take the policy seriously and will implement the ZANU (PF) Government's programme.

Here the editorial switches back to the context of its opening — the election campaign. The thematic grammatical subject of sentence 32 transfers the focus from housing to 'The new Parliament we elect next weekend'. The 'fate' of the National Housing Policy is put in the hands of this hypothetical agent. Thus, the editorial has resolved the problem caused by the reference to the Draft Constitution in the original policy document, and, indeed, has turned it into a strength, by pointing out that it will be the responsibility of the 'new Parliament' to ensure that this self-evidently good policy becomes law. It, therefore, forms the platform on which the final exhortation can be built.

Sentence 33 opens with a marked syntactic structure, with the evaluative clause complement in marked theme position. This provides strong emphasis for the positive evaluation of the housing policy. This main clause provides the context for the exhortation to voters which, unusually, is placed in the dependent clause, thus making it a logical outcome of considering this vital issue. The exhortation is expressed as a passive — 'care must be taken' — with those exhorted relegated to an agentive prepositional phrase — 'by voters'. This appears to be an attempt to defuse any suggestion that voters are being told what to do. Rather, they are having a 'vital' issue and its implications pointed out to them. Moreover, the exhortation itself is at several removes from action: 'care must be taken... to ensure that those they vote for... will implement the ZANU (PF) Government's programme'.

Thus, the exhortation is, on the one hand, relatively cautious and understated, particularly when compared with the strength of the opening of the editorial. On the other hand, it is carefully constructed to present implementation of the policy as linked to the election and the policy as part of the ruling party's programme. It is possible that this complex combination is an attempt to woo urban voters, for whom housing and employment were certainly crucial issues, to think twice before experimenting with an untried opposition party.

### **Interpretation of Intertextual Analysis**

To fully understand the intertextual processes of selection, reorganisation and reformulation employed in these texts, it is necessary to investigate the

precise context of the news report. The main news story of Sunday 18 May 2000 covered President Mugabe's key election rally in the historically significant Highfield area of Harare.<sup>3</sup> This rally, which should have formed the climax of the ruling party's election campaign, had been rather poorly attended. There was hence a need for the ruling party to obtain positive reporting of some kind as damage limitation. It is, therefore, likely that a reporter had been handed the National Housing Policy and been asked to come up with a pro-Government story. This would account for the absence of any specific 'event' in the report.

It should also be noted that reporters for the Government-controlled press frequently produce 'stories' by cut-and-paste methods from Government press releases, with little attempt at reformulation. There may be several reasons for this. Firstly, editorial policy dictates that their main concern is essentially symbolic: they wish to present the idea that Government has done something positive, and the details are not very important, especially as they may be too technical to be of much interest to readers. Secondly, reporters in these publications may well be hesitant to depart very far from such strongly authoritative sources, fearing criticism from superiors. On the other hand, they may also lack the training in the processes — essentially linguistic — of assessing a policy text for its accessibility to the readership and in reformulating it into a more appropriate linguistic register. The only reformulation attempted by *The Sunday Mail* report is the small-scale effort to position the policy document in a framework of 'post-colonial change of laws and institutions'.

*The Herald* editorial, however, uses this slim base for a substantial reformulation. The policy document is completely recontextualised. It is repositioned as part of the ruling party's election programme. The policy itself is presented as 'action', as if it had already been implemented, or, at least, the assumption of its implementation is presented. The editorial adopts a 'post-war reconstruction' interpretive framework, which parallels attempts in other parts of the ruling party's election campaign to effectively erase 20 years of post-Independence history and take people back to an immediate 'post-war' situation. The most notable case of this approach, of course, is the concentration on the land issue. The motivation appears to be to deflect any potential criticism of the ruling party for inaction on these issues during the first 20 years of Independence. Moreover, the editorial shifts the focus not only to the provision of housing for disadvantaged groups but also to employment creation, both issues which would appeal to disaffected urban voters.

---

3. The rally took place where Mugabe had launched his successful pre-Independence election campaign in 1980.

The original text, the National Housing Policy, was a civil service document drawn up by a National Task Force, under the direction of a government ministry, but also in response to a National Housing Convention which incorporated a wide range of stakeholders. The first stage in reformulation, *The Sunday Mail* report, served largely to draw attention to the document, repositioning it as an unspecific 'event', providing little attempt to help the readership to understand its detailed provisions, but giving greater emphasis to the role of the government in its projected implementation. In *The Herald* editorial, the policy document had been completely re-presented as part of ZANU (PF)'s election manifesto, at a point in the election campaign when the ruling party needed desperately to influence urban voters.

Thus a text, the National Housing Policy, which was published as a civil service document, was progressively transformed into a piece of election propaganda, passing through an intermediate stage of a most uninformative news report. This raises questions about journalistic practice in the establishment media in Zimbabwe. Not long after these texts were published, Bornwell Chakaodza, who was Editor of *The Herald* at the point when this editorial was published, but who lost his job soon after the election, suggested that the quality of reporting in the official media was influenced by two rather different contributing factors, namely, incompetent reporters, who were unable to produce original journalism, and the suspension of professional ethics in favour of a sycophantic support of the ruling party (*Daily News*, 21 May 2001).

This case-study suggests that Chakaodza's interpretation was correct. Reporters do indeed have difficulty in reformulating the texts of such genres as relatively technical policy documents so that the newsworthy issues are made accessible to the general reader, preferring to take the easier approach of presenting any government policy as an unspecifically positive achievement. *The Herald* editorial shows the willingness to suspend professional ethics, in its transformation of the policy document into a piece of election propaganda.

## References

- DAILY NEWS, *THE*, Harare, 21 May 2001, 'Chakaodza tells Herald secrets'.  
FAIRCLOUGH, N. 1995, *Media Discourse*, London: Edward Arnold.  
GOSDEN, H. 1992, 'Discourse functions of marked theme in scientific research articles', *English for Specific Purposes*, 11: 207-224.  
HALLIDAY, M.A.K. 1994, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar, Second Edition*, London: Edward Arnold.  
HERALD, *THE*, Harare, 19 June 2000, 'New National Housing Policy a positive development'.

- HUNSTON, S. 2000, 'Evaluation and the planes of discourse', in S. Hunston and G. Thompson eds, *Evaluation in Text*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- NATIONAL TASK FORCE ON HOUSING 1999, *National Housing Policy for Zimbabwe*, Harare: Ministry of Local Government and National Housing.
- SUNDAY MAIL, THE, Harare, 18 June 2000, 'State revamps housing policy'.
- THOMPSON, G. 1996, *Introducing Functional Grammar*, London: Edward Arnold.

**APPENDIX 1**

*The Sunday Mail*: 18 June 2000

***State Revamps Housing Policy***

1. THE Government has drawn up a major housing policy that will see the construction of over one million houses in the next 10 years while doing away with archaic laws that have been contributing to the critical shortage of accommodation in the country.
2. The National Housing Policy which received a nod from President Mugabe, was developed following a National Housing Convention held in Victoria Falls at the end of last year.
3. In order to make the policy viable, the Government intends to introduce legislation that will have the effect of ensuring that Parliament will be obliged to address the issue of housing as a matter of grave importance.
4. The new amendment to the constitution would look at such archaic legislation as the Housing and Building Act, Housing Standards Act and the Regional, Town and Country Planning Act.
5. The policy document cited the example of the rent control regulations that were gazetted in terms of the Housing and Building Act of 1979 that were now irrelevant.
6. The policy document points to the fact that there is need for re-engineering of governmental, statutory and parastatal institutional framework within which the national housing strategy would be implemented.
7. 'The process of institutional rationalisation will therefore be dealt with as a matter of immediate priority in order to establish an institutional and funding framework within which the envisaged Government programmes can be implemented with success', read part of the policy document.
8. Other areas that would be looked at to ensure the success of the policy include rekindling confidence back into the housing sector by addressing crisis situations.
9. It is envisaged that this move would bring more stability and confidence back into the housing sector.
10. The Government intends to pursue an incentive-based approach to stabilise the living environments for many communities living in unstable and degenerating residential areas.
11. In order to cushion a number of people in need of housing, the Government would make available a housing credit scheme.
12. This credit scheme would be supplemented with savings to enable a large number of people in need of housing to acquire access to formal starter housing under a range of tenure options.

13. This, the draft said, would ensure progressive development of the urban environment.
14. The issue of user end subsidies was another approach the Government will take in order to reach the target of a million houses in ten years.
15. It is hoped that the subsidy policy would be flexible to accommodate a wide range of tenure and delivery level in order to obtain maximum gearing with private investment savings and sweat equity.
16. The policy is intended to cater for the vulnerable groups who include the ultra-low income households, the elderly, young people leaving college and the disabled.
17. The whole policy will however depend heavily on the availability of land.
18. The Government will ensure the efficient assembly and release of appropriately located land.
19. The Government will intervene to facilitate nationally uniform norms and standards in relation to land development including the preparation of Master and Local Plans which would include the inclusion of minimum residential stand and zoning conditions.
20. The proposed institutional structures include the Government as the co-ordinator, non-governmental organisations, National Housing Trust, local authorities, local non-governmental organisations, the private sector and the general public both in the urban and rural communities.
21. Writing in the foreword of the National Housing Policy document, President Mugabe said housing was a critical factor in the socio-economic development of the country.
22. He said since independence, housing had been regarded as a budgetary item that received annual financial allocations.
23. 'It has however, been proved beyond doubt that Zimbabwe has enough resources in terms of both financial and professional skills to meet its housing requirements.
24. What is lacking is the mechanism to marshal these resources where they can be utilised for housing development,' read part of the foreword by President Mugabe.
25. He further stated that the policy called for unity of purpose and improved co-ordination among all stakeholders in the housing sector.

**APPENDIX 2**

*The Herald*: Monday 19 June 2000

***New National Housing Policy a Positive Development***

1. WHILE other parties make promises, ZANU (PF) has already started implementing crucial planks of its manifesto.
2. After cutting through the opposition to a proper distribution of land by changing the constitution and listing the first 804 farms to be acquired very soon, it has now launched the new National Housing Policy, which sees one million new homes being built over the next 10 years.
3. This can be implemented and will do much more than just solve a housing crisis.
4. The scale is huge but not impossible.
5. Other countries have built similar numbers of houses in proportion to their population.
6. We only have to look at several European countries after Second World War.
7. Germany had hardly a house or block of flats undamaged, and the majority of the country's homes were destroyed.
8. People were living in the open, in filthy cellars or in shacks among the ruins.
9. Yet by the late 1950s, just a decade after work started in earnest in building new homes, almost every family in the nation, whether in the western or eastern states, had a decent home.
10. The cities of Japan and the western areas of the Soviet Union were almost as badly destroyed, yet the millions of homeless people were within a few years securely housed.
11. What happened is that Governments rewrote the rule-books to ensure rapid construction could take place, experimented with new materials to cut costs, and then set up the systems for the actual building.
12. In the countries with the most damage up to 10 percent of the work force was employed in the building and materials sectors.
13. Many of the new homes were fairly basic but in the decades of prosperity that followed the massive construction effort, modest renovation and additions moved the austerity housing up market.
14. The new housing policy promises a similar sort of effort in Zimbabwe.
15. It covers the pitfalls that have prevented rapid housing development in the past.
16. Zimbabwe has some rather peculiar laws.
17. One minor example is the standards set for building.
18. It is very difficult, if not quite impossible, to build anything in a city using farm bricks and lime mortar.

19. Yet the Parliament building itself, not to mention the President's own office building, are among the dozens of old surviving structures in Harare that used very similar technologies.
20. The financing of construction has seen no real advance since the advent of the first building societies decades ago.
21. The plan looks at innovative ways to mobilise other sources.
22. More incentives will be offered to ensure that more people can have their own home.
23. Yet, while willing to be imaginative, the policy also adheres to the fundamentals.
24. There must be proper town planning, for example, to prevent the horrors of unplanned development that are so difficult to solve later.
25. A major housing drive will do much more than just give a home to every family, important as that is.
26. A vast army of workers will be needed, providing employment.
27. The new jobs will not just be in the formal sector or in the building trades.
28. There will be ample room for the informal sector, making bricks for example, and in many other areas.
29. The new suburbs will need shops, creating new business opportunities and yet more jobs.
30. Special attention has been given to those whom the normal housing market will never be able to satisfy.
31. The old, the infirm, the very poor, and the recent school leaver or graduate will all need extra help if they are to have a decent roof over their heads.
32. The new Parliament we elect next weekend will be asked to pass a package of legislation to allow the housing policy to be implemented.
33. So vital is this sector that care must be taken by voters to ensure that those they vote for will take the policy seriously and will implement the ZANU (PF) Government's programme.