Jason Skonieczny
Senior Thesis in Linguistics
Swarthmore College 2002
_Terrorism as Order-Word_
1.0 Introduction

*Terrorism* shapes opinions about the events and groups to which the term is applied in the media. In the days after September 11, 2001, *terrorism* and *terrorist attacks* were applied overwhelmingly to the events of September 11, 2001. The meaning of *terrorism*, we will argue, also encompasses a group of people. We will demonstrate in data from September 12 - 15, 2001 from the New York Times, LA Times, and Washington Post the word’s ability to signify these two things at once. We will show how the word’s semantic peculiarity, which we will call cosignification, is facilitated by a morphological peculiarity. We will also discuss the implications of this semantic ambiguity for the socio-political significance of the term, using Whorf and Deleuze and Guattari.

1.1 Definitions

Beres (1993) defines *terrorism* on the basis of a violation of just cause and just means in violent political action¹. Beres constructs the definition for international law. However, this definition does not capture the way the term works in public media use.

This investigation into media use of the term has implications for legal discourse, as well as linguistics of the media and a critical semiotics. The way the term works in the media shapes legal discourse in spite the attempts by those who work in legal discourse on precise and rigorous in terminology. The way the term is used in the media effects what might happen in a courtroom simply in that judges and jurists read newspapers.

¹ Beres, 1
Hitchens (1989) writes of terrorism, that the term is without a definition “held in common by all who use the term” and that it is “in search of a meaning.” It is for this reason “a junk word” which “disguises reality and impoverishes language and makes a banality out of the discussion of war and revolution and politics. It’s the perfect instrument for the cheapening of public opinion and for the intimidation of dissent.”

Hitchens’ polemics capture the semantic loadedness of the term terrorism, but overlook the possibility of work on developing linguistic structure to describe the intricacies of the term’s meaning. Our interpretation of the semantic data we have collected on terrorism and discussion of the word’s morphology and history will help describe some of the intricacies in the meaning of the term.

2.0 Semantic Ambiguity

Reviewing the corpus, we looked at contextual cues that might help us categorize terrorism. The word is straightforwardly a nominal. Within that categorization, though, we can distinguish events from non-events. We can ask if terrorism is an event or a non-event.

A simple way to distinguish event nominals from non-events is to look for contextual cues that locate the nominal in time as something that occurs or happens. For example, reference to a time period over which a nominal took place or phrasing that indicates that a nominal happened or occurred signal that nominal in that instance, as being applied to an event. We applied this as a diagnostic to instances of terrorism in the corpus data.

2 Hitchens 149-151
Grimshaw (1996) argues that complex event nominals have argument structure. Events, by this semantic and syntactic categorization, are a particular sub-class of nouns. Event nominals accept theta roles from prepositional phrases. We looked in the corpus data to see if terrorism took objects of prepositional phrases as arguments or if inserting arguments, as objects of prepositional phrases was compatible with the syntactic contexts of instances of terrorism.

Another effective diagnostic for testing if an instance of terrorism was signaled by its context as an event was substituting other nominals, which are clearly event nominals or non-event nominals, substituted for terrorism while preserving a basic semantic coherence.

2.1 Event Data

We will begin exhibiting the data by looking at examples where terrorism clearly refers to an event. Data marked with a lowercase letter is from the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, or Washington Post from September 12-15, 2002. Data marked with a number are from sources other than the corpus.

(a) the worst domestic terrorism—Oklahoma City

This nominal phrase explicitly assigns terrorism to an event, the April 1996 bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building.

(b) the terrorism that began at 8:45 in New York City

The nominal phrase in (b) clearly refers to terrorism as an event that began, locating it in time.

It is worth mentioning that non-events might be said to begin, as in
(1) The United States began in 1776

The United States is not an event, but it did begin in 1776. However, the time of day in (b) clearly locates terrorism in time to a degree of specificity ordinarily reserved for events. It would take a semantic stretch to say that the United States began at a certain time of day.

Terrorism is also clearly an event in,

(c) terrorism as a tactic of warfare

A tactic is an event or a sequence of events, therefore, terrorism is indicated as an event or a sequence of events. Further, we could put this nominal phrase in a larger clause with a prepositional phrase. The object of the preposition is clearly an argument.

(2) Al-Queda is enacting terrorism on the United States, as a tactic of warfare.

In (2), the United States is clearly a recipient, theme, and/or locative. Terrorism is stated as enacted and this phrasing is adequately coherent. Terrorism is clearly an event/action in these examples.

2.2 Non-event Data

There are those instances of terrorism that are not clearly located in time or not marked contextually as events, and are that are therefore ambiguous. There are, however, other instances in which the contextual cues actually conflict with a classification of terrorism as an event.

(d) a war on international terrorism
In (2), we showed terrorism on the United States is an event. If we take the United States as a locative, the phrase would be equivalent with

(3) terrorism that happened in the United States

However, the notion of making a war on something does not match with notion of an event that happens. Take the following,

*(4) Nations must make a war on terrorism on the United States.
*(5) Nations must make a war on terrorism that happened in the United States.

The phrases in (4) and (5) seem quite incoherent semantically. Grimshaw shows that even simple events have some kind of argument structure. Terrorism from (d) doesn’t have even a simple argument structure like that which is appropriate to instances of terrorism that are marked as events. Try this diagnostic with other examples of terrorism that we classed as non-event data,

(e) terrorism cells
(f) a global assault against terrorism in general
(g) solace in the strictures of organized terrorism’s clutches
(h) the fight against terrorism and radical Islam
(i) expecting a white flag from terrorism is futile

Inserting prepositional phrases that assign arguments to terrorism like the diagnostic performed in (4) or contextual cues that locate terrorism in time like the diagnostic performed in (5) result in a semantic incoherence for all of (e) through (i). This is strong evidence that terrorism is not behaving as an event in these cases.

We will label these non-event instances of terrorism, categorically, as political agentive nominals. Terrorism in (e) through (i) represents an ideology or politic and refers indirectly the group of people that stands for that particular politic. Words for political parties or political agendas substitute paradigmatically into the contexts of
terrorism in (e) through (i) and preserve a basic semantic coherence. Try substituting communism, fascism, or racism into the contexts of terrorism in (e) through (i) and the resultant nominal phrases will be satisfactorily coherent. Also nation words substitute coherently into (e) through (i). Substituting events, however, will result in nominal phrases that don’t make sense. When events are substituted for terrorism in (e) through (i), the resultant phrases at least require a sort of metonymic work in interpretation to make them coherent.

2.3 Ambiguous Data

As we mentioned, there are also those instances of terrorism in the corpus data that don’t show contextual cues to signal the instance as either event or non-event. These instances are semantically ambiguous. For an example, take,

(j) One of those threats is terrorism.

One could easily substitute the event earthquakes in the place of terrorism and this phrase would be semantically coherent. One could also substitute, Al-Qaeda, China, or another political agentive nominal and this phrase would be semantically coherent. The majority of the instances of terrorism in our corpus were ambiguous.

2.4 Cosignification

We have established the ability of terrorism to occur as an event nominal and a political agentive nominal. This is unusual, these two semantic classes of nominal are ordinarily mutually exclusive.

We assert that terrorism, the event nominal, and terrorism, the political agentive nominal, refer to different entities. In examples where there are no contextual cues which
signal terrorism as either event or political agentive nominal the nominal can be considered as referring to both entities at the same time. We will call this double-referring, cosignification. Even in examples where the context clearly marks the instance as one or the other nominal class, there is still the connotation of both at work in the interpretation of the phrase. This shared connotation is also a kind of cosignification.

3.0 Morphology

The suffix -ism according to Marchand (1966) indicates a “system of principles... Leninism”, “a single principle”, or “an abnormal condition... Cocainism.”3 These semantic glosses seem to coincide with our non-event classification of terrorism. Political agentives as we have described them refer to a system of principles of a group of people or a condition of people. As we have said, political agentive nominals also indirectly refer to that group of people.

The suffix also forms a noun of action from verbs ending in -ize such as baptize. Marchand writes, “It is not, however, with this function that the sf has become productive in English or the various other European languages.”4

3.1 Lexical History

In the case of terrorism, the -ism seems to indicate meanings that Marchand defines as different types. We might ask how terrorism came to work as both a noun of action and a political agentive. The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) finds terrorism first came into use in 1795,

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3 Marchand, Bullets 4.51.1-4.51.3
4 Marchand, Bullets 4.51.4
Government by intimidation as directed and carried out by the party in power in France during the revolution of 1789 to 1794; the system of "Terror"

The OED finds the word came to be used with a different meaning in 1798,

A policy intended to strike with terror those against whom it is adopted; the employment of methods of intimidation; the fact of terrorizing or condition of being terrorized.

The first, and earlier gloss, most clearly coincides with our characterization of terrorism as political agentive. The first gloss defines terrorism as government. The second, later, gloss is most like our notion of an event/action. Employment, a policy we read as most clearly descriptive of a noun of action.

The OED, by our reading, documents terrorism applied to a political agentive before being applied as a noun of action. According to these facts, we might conjecture that the word came to be used as both, because the suffix was able to accept both meanings though originally maybe it carried only one of them. Perhaps also, the word was used, from the beginning, differently by different strata of the population.

Also important in the history of the term is that terror was being used before terrorism as a noun of action "the action or quality of causing dread," and "concr a thing or person that causes terror." This gloss applies, according to the OED, as far back as the sixteenth century.

The free root, terror, was already applied to both agent and action. However, according to the OED, terror referred to an agent not in the sense of a political agentive, like a government or set of principles.

The affixation of the -ism made a word which more strongly signified a principled, state or political terror. In the last several months, though, terror did seem to
signify a political entity and political action like terrorism, though this investigation did not do the same work on

4.0 Terrorism as cryptotype

Whorf, in “Grammatical Categories” (1937), discusses the cryptotype. The cryptotype is “a covert category... [the] name [cryptotype] calls attention to the rather hidden, cryptic nature of such word groups.” Terrorism covertly belongs to the two classes of event and non-event in examples where there are no contextual cues to clarify it either way. In this way that terrorism cosignifies, the term is a cryptotype, a covert category that, in a way, hides the conceptual discrepancy between its two referents. Even when there are contextual cues that clarify the instance of terrorism as an event or a political agentive nominal, there is still the effect of the cryptotype in the covert connotation of both.

Whorf writes in “The Relationship of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language,” (1939)

[It is in language’s] constant ways of arranging data and its most ordinary everyday analysis of phenomena that we need to recognize the influence it has on other activities, cultural and personal... there is a relation between a language and the rest of the culture of the society which uses it.... there are connections within this integration, between the kind of linguistic analyses employed and various behavioral reactions and also the shapes taken by various cultural developments.7

The data about terrorism that we have been looking at can and, according to Whorf, should, be placed in its cultural context. It is Whorf’s idea that language shapes

5 Whorf, 92
6 Whorf, 135
7 Whorf, 159
culture and culture shapes language. We are authorized by Whorf's ideas to make responsible connections between the shapes and developments of culture and the shapes and structures of language.

If terrorism is a cryptotype then there is something that it conceals or something that it allows to escape notice by its covert cosignification. This concealment would have a cultural effect. What is contained or covert in the lexical item terrorism is the connection between act and agent. The corresponding cultural effect is the encouragement to not interrogate how terrorism the action and terrorism the political agentive are actually connected.

There is no productive morphological construct that we can apply to terrorism to separate out terrorist groups and the act of terrorism with an adequate semblance of meaning. The speaker must make recourse to syntactic and extra-lexemic mechanisms in order to differentiate act and agent.

Morphologically, terror and terrorism permit and encourage that in media discourse, the two of act and agent be thought of as inseparable. The speaker is given an option to talk about terrorism that circumvents the assignment of different terms to the act and to the agent. It is reasonable to say that circumventing the assignment of different terms has the effect of discouraging the consideration of the two different ideas that the two terms might represent. In this way, a speaker can feel that they've talked about terrorism without talking about the way a political agentive comes to be known as responsible for a particular act of violence.

The speaker is able to ignore the complex of discursive channels through which responsibility for an event becomes reified as political and historical fact. A speaker can
feel that they’ve articulated an idea about *terrorism*. and formed a belief without addressing critically that people’s and their own beliefs about the responsibility attributed to the political agent, *terrorism*, for traumatic events, also called *terrorism* is socially constructed and not merely objective fact.

4.1 *Terrorism as Order-Word*

Deleuze and Guattari (1982) describe their idea of the order-word,

...language is the transmission of the word as order-word, not the communication of a sign as information. We call order-words, not a particular category of explicit statements (for example, in the imperative), but the relation of every word or every statement to implicit presuppositions...

The notion of order-word is appropriate to *terrorism* because it captures the notion that even statements that are not issued in the imperative, still function as commands. By the implicit presuppositions of every statement, every statement is an order or recommendation to think and therefore to behave in a certain way instructed by the acceptance of those presuppositions.

The order-word goes further than Whorf’s cryptotype in describing the way a language leaves certain facts assumed and unquestioned by implicit presupposition. Further, the order-word captures that statements in which there are assumptions and presuppositions are effectively commands to accept those assumptions and presuppositions. Whorf’s cryptotype indicates that language works covertly but the order-word captures that the workings of language are not the workings of a static system. Father the way a language works changes as the language changes. But those changes are traceable in the records of speech acts.

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8 Deleuze, 79
The implicit presupposition that the term *terrorism* covers over is that there is a stable and objective connection between events of *terrorism* and the political agentive responsible. This semantic presupposition can be read pragmatically as the statements analyzed in the preceding sections were issued in a particular historical context by the collective of writers in the media organizations of the New York Times, Washington Post and Los Angeles Times. When read pragmatically against this background, the implicit presupposition of using *terrorism*, because of its cosignification, is the presupposition that the political agentive that these media organizations portrayed as responsible for the acts of September 11, 2001 over the time period contemporaneous with this corpus and the groups that they would continue to portray as responsible afterwards were responsible according to an objective, absolute, and reportable reality.

We assert that the cosignification in the application of the term *terrorism* in the media from September 12 through 15, 2001 issued a command, therefore, by its implicit presuppositions, to the readerships of the media organizations involved that the connection between act and agent was not to be critically evaluated because the linguistic portrayal of the actions and responsible agents of September 11, 2001 put forward by those media organizations was and remains a objectively correct linguistic portrayal of a reality.
Below is the full corpus of data, labeled by publication and date and according to our interpretation based on event/action and political agentive.

**Washington Post September 12**

Ambiguous

(1) horror of terrorism
(2) terrorism expert
(3) support for terrorism
(4) war on international terrorism
(5) counterterrorism experts warned
(6) terrorism experts depicted
(7) counterterrorism programs
(8) counterterrorism budgets
(9) policy towards terrorism
(10) hold responsible governments that support terrorism
(11) bring a government terrorism sponsor to its knees
(12) accused of plotting terrorism
(13) accused of supporting terrorism
(14) suspected terrorism sponsor
(15) terrorism consultant to several government agencies
(16) trend in terrorism
(17) a major and immediate escalation in America’s worldwide war against terrorism
(18) a “turning point” in the global war against terrorism
(19) America’s battle against terrorism

Event

(20) terrorism at home aimed at innocent civilians

Political Agentive

(21) terrorism cells

**September 13**

Ambiguous

(22) deny knowledge of any evidence that he has been involved in terrorism
(23) According to U.S. terrorism experts
(24) not part of an ongoing wave of terrorism
(25) have yet to devise a coherent anti-terrorism program
(26) politically and religiously inspired terrorism as a law enforcement problem
prevent future acts of terrorism
chief of CIA counterterrorism operations
Nation to Boost Anti-Terrorism Precautions
in case of an act of terrorism
the seat of American democracy will not be scared shut by terrorism
deal with terrorism
take on terrorism
counterterrorism specialist
important target of U.S. counter-terrorism forces
that the decent people of the world make common cause against terrorism

Event

‘preempting terrorism’

September 14

Ambiguous
declaration of an international campaign against terrorism
Terrorism is becoming more sophisticated and much more ferocious
states that facilitate terrorism
efforts to fight terrorism
response to terrorism
discussions with the Taliban about terrorism
reassessing an approach to fighting terrorism
“depoliticize” terrorism and “deligitimize” it in the eyes of the world
sponsoring terrorism
how the nation defends itself against terrorism
a stronger response to terrorism
a weak U.S. policy on terrorism
a horrific act of terrorism
tighten the screws on those who would support terrorism
the wicked world of terrorism
enacted anti-terrorism and immigration control legislation
efforts to counter and investigate domestic or international terrorism
a global assault against terrorism in general

Event

appears to herald a significant shift in the nation’s strategy for coping with terrorism
treating terrorism as a criminal manner
the worst domestic terrorism—Oklahoma City
history’s worst episode of terrorism
Political Agentive

(60) the fight against terrorism and radical Islam
(61) a multi-front attack on terrorism
(62) it’s going to take some time to root out terrorism
(63) war against terrorism
(64) “lead the world to victory over terrorism”

September 15

Ambiguous

(65) suspected by American officials of sponsoring terrorism
(66) support for terrorism
(67) willingness to tackle terrorism
(68) additional terrorism
(69) international efforts to ensure that terrorism never succeeds again
(70) those behind the deadliest act of terrorism in American history
(71) campaign against terrorism
(72) anti-terrorism campaign

Event

Political Agentive

(73) declared war against terrorism
(74) eliminate the terrorism whose roots lie in that region
(75) a war against international terrorism
(76) to combat terrorism
(77) forming a common front against terrorism

New York Times September 12

Ambiguous

(78) this newly disclosed threat of large-scale sophisticated terrorism
(79) joint action to protect the world from terrorism, nuclear or otherwise.
(80) One of those threats is terrorism.
(81) terrorism security alert
(82) phrases issued at earlier times after earlier acts of terrorism
(83) anti-terrorism lieutenant
(84) America’s helplessness in the face of terrorism
America's susceptibility to terrorism
National counterterrorism strategy
Most people in counterterrorism were talking about the likelihood of a doomsday scenario involving germ warfare or nuclear weapons
National Commission on Terrorism
Anticapitalism terrorism
The foundation for modern terrorism
much to fear from terrorism that strikes at innocent civilians
resort to terrorism

Event

a large-scale operation to prevent terrorism
overwhelming reminder of the terrorism that remains a scar on the city's psyche

Political Agentive

A common battle against terrorism

September 13

the country's worst confrontation with terrorism
solace in the stricture's of organized terrorism's clutches
coalition against terrorism

to say that the justifiable response to it is suicide terrorism is utterly sick

terrorism that strikes at innocent civilians

September 14

Terrorism will not disappear if one terrorist or 10 terrorists are arrested
Terrorism will only disappear when the reasons are cured
how much you're going to tell a ten-year old about terrorism
creating one agency to handle terrorism
$10 billion a year to fight terrorism
somebody specifically in charge of our counterterrorism efforts
stand with us against terrorism
ending states that sponsor terrorism
support among Arab countries for an antiterrorism coalition

Event

Political Agentive

coming together and whipping terrorism
consolidate power to combat terrorism
combat cyberterrorism

September 15

Ambiguous

a new wave of middair terrorism
trained and motivated to stop terrorism
a target of fundamentalist terrorism
suicide bombings are a prime tool of terrorism
the shifting dynamics of international terrorism
previous terrorism investigations
pictures from places where terrorism is woven into the fabric of everyday life
the organization that brought the terrorism about

Event

prevention of terrorism

Political Agentive

if law enforcement becomes more global to match terrorism's global reach
expecting a white flag from terrorism is futile
terrorism suspects

Los Angeles Times Sept. 12

Ambiguous

possible terrorism targets
tactics of terrorism
terrorism has become the leading threat to national security
Many of the turning points in terrorism over the last four decades
The most sensational act of airline terrorism
Terrorism came to U.S. soil for the first time
The largest terrorism plot concerning aviation
Abroad, terrorism turned even nastier
The terrorism that began at 8:45 in New York City
A region plagued by terrorism
their own battle with terrorism
a more united international front to fight terrorism
condemned all forms of terrorism as "hateful"
eradicate the plague of terrorism
unite their forces in fighting the scourge of terrorism
not a battle between the United States and terrorism but between the free
and democratic world and terrorism
a major force behind international terrorism
The number of Americans killed by international terrorism
The worst siege of terrorism waged against the United States...
Nothing like today's attack, "in the history of terrorism."
the profoundest miscalculation of the threat not just to U.S. interests but to
U.S. lives that terrorism represents
would not deter terrorism
flag terrorism attacks
protect against terrorism

Event

terrorism as a tactic of warfare
This kind of terrorism is the face of war in the 21st century
retaliation would be viewed as "state terrorism"
day of terrorism
We didn’t have any terrorism in mind when the buildings went up originally
prevent terrorism

Political Agentive

Crucible of much of the world’s terrorism
against the foot soldiers of terrorism
Pledged solidarity in the fight against terrorism
Bibliography


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