NOMINALIZATIONS, AGENTLESS PASSIVES,
AND SOCIAL ACTOR MYSTIFICATION:
NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS ON THE GREEK FINANCIAL CRISIS
by
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Abstract
Nominalization and agentless passives have attracted sustained attention in critical linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), where, it is argued, they ‘mystify’, i.e., reduce reader comprehension of, the role of social actors in depictions of events, particularly in news media discourse. Yet the capacity of readers to generate inferences automatically from textual cues and background information has not been adequately reflected in CDA accounts of reader cognition. The question of whether particular instances of nominalization or agentless passives actually reduce reader comprehension of social actors’ agentive roles was put to an empirical test by asking volunteer readers to identify social actors deleted from newspaper editorials by the addition of nominalization and agentless passives. While readers accurately inferred the missing actors in a majority of cases, textual constraints and background knowledge appeared to affect inference accuracy in ways generally consistent with the predictions of the idealized reader (IR) framework presented in O’Halloran (2003). It is argued that robust models of reader cognition should be incorporated more widely into CDA studies to prevent researchers from overestimating the capacity of textual features to mystify social actors to readers.

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# Table of Contents

## Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction ................................................. 1  
1.2 Aims of the thesis .......................................... 3  
1.3 Structure of the thesis ..................................... 5

## Chapter 2: Ideology and Social Actor Mystification: Nominalizations and Agentless Passives in Critical Linguistics and CDA

2.1 Introduction .................................................. 8  
2.2 Definitions of ideology: a brief overview .................. 8  
2.3 Ideology and mystification in critical linguistics and CDA ........................................................................ 10  
2.3.1 An emancipatory agenda for CL/CDA: Ideology, mystification, and truth ........................................... 11  
2.3.2 Ideology and mystification in early critical linguistics ............................................................................ 14  
2.4 Nominalizations and agentless passives: social actor mystification and ideology ................................................. 17  
2.4.1 Nominalizations and agentless passives in early critical linguistics .................................................. 18  
2.4.1.1 Nominalization in early critical linguistics .......................................................... 19  
2.4.1.2 Passive transformations in early critical linguistics .................................................. 22  
2.4.2 Nominalizations and agentless passives in later CDA work .............................................................. 25  
2.4.2.1 Nominalization in more recent CDA work ............................................................................. 26  
2.4.2.2 Passives in more recent CDA work ....................................................................................... 30  
2.5 Conclusion .......................................................... 33

## Chapter 3: Textual Analysis Part A – SFL Analysis

3.1 Introduction ....................................................... 35  
3.2 The functions of editorial texts ................................ 36  
3.3 The Greek financial crisis and the July 2015 referendum ........................................................................ 37  
3.4 The New York Times and Washington Post editorials ............................................................................. 41  
3.5 SFL analysis: Experiential meaning in the New York Times editorial ......................................................... 43  
3.6 SFL analysis: Experiential meaning in the Washington Post editorial ....................................................... 47  
3.7 Summary of SFL analysis ....................................... 52  
3.8 The problem of ideological interpretation .................. 53  
3.9 Conclusion ........................................................... 56

## Chapter 4: Textual Analysis Part B – Mystification Analysis

4.1 Introduction ....................................................... 58  
4.2 Nominalization in SFL ......................................... 59  
4.2.1 Nominalization as transformation and grammatical metaphor ....................................................... 59  
4.2.2 How nominalizations were identified in the editorial texts ............................................................. 61  
4.3 Analysis of mystification of agency: Nominalization .................................................................................. 64  
4.3.1 Mystification analysis of nominalization: The New York Times text ................................................. 68  
4.3.2 Mystification analysis of nominalization: The Washington Post text ............................................... 71  
4.3.3 Mystification analysis of nominalization: Summary ........................................................................... 76
List of Tables and Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure/Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.1</td>
<td>Ideational and textual structure of a passive clause</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>Process type distribution in the New York Times text</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.2</td>
<td>Transitivity structure of a clause in the New York Times text</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.3</td>
<td>Major social actors in Participant roles in the New York Times editorial</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.4</td>
<td>Process type distribution in the New York Times and Washington Post texts</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.5</td>
<td>Major social actors in Participant roles in the Washington Post editorial</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>Nominalized elements and groups in CL/CDA</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2</td>
<td>Nominalized groups with proposed non-metaphorical forms</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3</td>
<td>Nominalizations and agency mystifications in the NYT and WP editorials</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.4</td>
<td>Mystification analysis results for nominalizations and passives</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.1</td>
<td>Examples of additional nominalization in the New York Times text</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.2</td>
<td>Percentage of correct agency inference responses</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.3</td>
<td>Additional nominalization in the Washington Post text</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.4</td>
<td>Comparison of reader inference accuracy in modified editorials</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.5</td>
<td>Examples of new passives introduced to the editorial texts</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.6</td>
<td>Percentage of correct agency inference responses (New York Times text)</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.7</td>
<td>Percentage of correct agency inference responses (Washington Post text)</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Abbreviations

CDA  Critical Discourse Analysis

CL/CDA  Critical Linguistics / Critical Discourse Analysis, a general term referring to linguistically-oriented research concerned with the role of mass media texts in building support for abuses of power

EC  European Commission

ECB  European Central Bank

EU  European Union

GM  Grammatical metaphor

IMF  International Monetary Fund

IR  Idealized Reader, a framework presented in O’Halloran (2003)

NYT  The New York Times

RRT  Reader Response Theory

SFG  Systemic Functional Grammar

SFL  Systemic Functional Linguistics

WP  The Washington Post
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis was inspired by persistent questions about political and ideological meanings as expressed in texts, and the possible effects these meanings might have on readers. The role of mass media texts in influencing public opinion has been studied for some time (Lippmann 1922/1997; Bernays 1928/2005) and the role of news reporting has come under particular scrutiny (Chomsky & Herman 2002; Fairclough 1995; Bell & Garrett 1998; Montgomery 2007; Conboy 2013). Yet the processes by which media representations may affect readers’ world knowledge, and how readers respond to news reporting or other media, are complex and not clearly understood. Linguists have explored these topics since the 1970s, originally under the name of critical linguistics, a field which expanded to incorporate approaches from fields beyond linguistics, and is now known as critical discourse analysis (Fowler et al. 1979; Kress & Hodge 1979; Fowler 1991; Fairclough 2001). In this thesis I will use these terms together as CL/CDA when referring in general to linguistically-oriented research which is concerned with the role of mass media texts in potentially building public support for abuses of power.

CL/CDA has traditionally assumed that readers’ attitudes are partly shaped by the texts they read. This assumption rests in large part on a ‘consumption metaphor’ (O’Halloran 2003, pp. 253-254) of text processing in which news readers unwittingly ‘consume’ ideological meanings subtly conveyed in texts. As readers repeatedly consume texts which represent the world in particular ways, it is assumed, readers will come to see the world in similar ways. CL/CDA has taken for itself the function of exposing the ways
in which, in the views of Gouldner, “ideologies serve to mobilize social movements through the mediation of newspapers and related media” (Thompson 1984, p. 86).

These concerns are still relevant, perhaps especially so in the contentious age of ‘language policing’, social media and identity politics, in which choices of one term over another—such a UCLA professor’s choice of whether to capitalize the letter ‘I’ in *indigenous*—are seen by some among the public as “perceived grammatical choices that in actuality reflect ideologies” (Chait 2015).

This thesis focuses on two linguistic features—nominalization and agentless passives—which have attracted sustained attention in CL/CDA since the 1970s. Their capacity for omitting or backgrounding agency for actions is seen as central to their perceived power to subtly encode ideological meanings. The omission of agency in texts is argued to have potential ideological effects on readers by reducing their comprehension of the social actors involved in an action. An oft-used example is the noun *deforestation*, which omits any mention of the logging companies, etc., and represents the action of cutting down trees as an abstract phenomenon with no clear cause.

Linguistic choices are widely held to both reflect and affect language users’ views of events, a claim supported in some respects by psychological research. Some evidence suggests that the choice of agentive or non-agentive expressions may affect reader perceptions of responsibility and blame (Fausey & Boroditsky 2010). A speaker’s choice to use passives rather than active expressions may in some cases be linked to the speaker’s ideological beliefs which emphasize one actor’s responsibility over another, e.g., by shifting focus to the victim’s actions in descriptions of rape (Bohner 2001). Passives are used for many reasons, however, and their mere presence in texts cannot
be taken as evidence of encoded ideological positions. In the case of American police killings of (typically unarmed) black people, for example, news reports which focus on victims’ actions and diminish the responsibility of police for their actions make use of multiple discursive strategies which go well beyond features like nominalizations and agentless passives (FAIR 2014). Most importantly, studies of sentence processing (Taraban & McClelland 1988; McKoon & Ratcliff 1992) suggest that readers apply background knowledge as well as textual information in the automatic generation of certain inferences while reading, which casts doubt on CL/CDA claims that information absent from a text is irretrievable by readers.

This thesis focuses on the theme of social actor mystification (although as will be discussed later I will prefer to use the more specific term agency mystification) via nominalization and agentless passives, and particularly on the question of whether agency is truly mystified to readers, and what evidence supports these claims.

1.2 Aims of the thesis

While the complex questions related to ideology and audience effects mentioned above deserve scholarly attention, many of them, particularly related to how ideologies may be reliably identified and ‘exposed’ when expressed in texts, are beyond the scope of this thesis. Through a combination of socio-political and linguistic analysis, as well as direct empirical observation, this thesis aims to offer a series of observations about politically-related texts in ways which minimize both researcher subjectivity and unsupported speculation. This thesis aims above all to consider evidence for mystification of agency in the case of nominalizations and agentless passives. By ‘agency’ I mean the role of the social actor performing the action, e.g., the person or
group cutting trees in the case of *deforestation*. As for ‘mystification’, in this study I adopt the definition featured in O’Halloran (2003, p. 1): “By ‘mystify’ I mean reducing the reader’s understanding of the events and participants being described. This may be highly significant if the rationale for the actions of one group of participants is mystified in a news text when this is not the case for another group of participants.”

This thesis investigates the likelihood of readers inferring agency automatically by the application of aspects of the idealized reader (IR) framework (O’Halloran 2003) to analyses of newspaper editorials. Reader inferences are also observed directly in a reader response study which sought to test empirically whether agency was mystified in the case of particular nominalizations and agentless passives.

This thesis features an SFL transitivity study (Halliday 1994) of a pair of newspaper editorials as well as a pair of mystification analyses: one a textual analysis, the other a reader response study. The SFL analysis aims to outline the socio-political context of the texts used in the mystification analyses by focusing on how significant groups of social actors were represented. The news issue discussed in the editorials is the financial crisis in Greece (2010-the time of writing), and in particular the moment in summer 2015 when Greece’s Syriza government called a national referendum on whether to accept the austerity terms demanded by the country’s creditors in the EU and the IMF. Ultimately, the questions being explored here are: is agency mystified to non-specialist readers via nominalizations and passives, and if so, on what grounds can text analysts make that determination? Further to this, how can these aspects of reader cognition be addressed in CL/CDA? The investigation of mystification is intended as an initial step to addressing questions of reader cognition that I consider fundamental to the larger, more complex questions of readers’ worldviews and how texts, and readers’
responses to them, function in the development of readers’ ideologies. Clearer empirical evidence of these functions may help support future claims regarding the relative success of transmission of ideological views via mass media texts.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis begins with a review of research in CL/CDA on nominalization and agentless passives. The question of agency mystification is explained as the key to claims about the potential ideological power of these linguistic features, and as an initial step in assessing the effects of texts on readers.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 discuss the analytical methods and results of each of the analyses undertaken to address these questions. Chapter 3 presents an SFL transitivity study looking at how three major social groups were represented in editorials from two major American newspapers, the New York Times and the Washington Post, in the days just prior to the referendum. The SFL analysis considers how these newspapers represented the major social groups in editorials during the crisis, and how these different representations may reflect the different political stances of the two newspapers. This study is presented in the SFL-CDA tradition in which the ways in which actors are represented are taken to reflect ideological stances on the part of authors. A profile of the portrayals offered by the two newspapers of the same actors during the Greek crisis is presented in order to provide a socio-political context for the mystification analysis offered in Chapter 4. While this thesis can only offer speculation as to how the texts may reflect worldviews of the authors, the ‘presences’ in the editorials of evaluative portrayals and open political comments are hypothesized to be more significant in
terms of potential reader effects than the ‘absences’ of agency considered in the mystification analysis.

In Chapter 4, selected aspects of the IR framework are applied to an analysis of the same two newspaper editorials so as to consider whether agency was likely mystified for readers by the nominalizations or agentless passives in either text, and if so, on what grounds. The IR framework’s predictions for how textual information and background knowledge influence the likelihood of particular inferences are applied here to the question of agency for specific actions. Assuming no specialized topic knowledge on the part of readers and no above-normal expenditure of effort in reading the editorials, the analysis makes predictions for each individual instance of a nominalization or agentless passive in each text. These predictions are then used to develop a hypothesis for how often actual readers are likely to infer agency which has been deleted or backgrounded from a text via nominalization and/or passivization.

In Chapter 5, this hypothesis is put to the test a reader response study in which 27 readers were asked to identify agents that were deleted from the original texts via nominalization. The deletion and/or backgrounding of particular agents was carried out by modifying the original texts so as to create new nominalizations and passives from active clauses. Readers’ inferences of who was responsible for the actions described in these new nominalized or passivized forms are then compared to the agents actually deleted from the original texts, so as to provide a more objective judgment of reader inference accuracy.

Chapter 6 discusses the importance of rigorous empirical methods as well as coherent theoretical models which incorporate evidence of reader cognition to CL/CDA in
reducing researcher bias. The results of the three analyses are discussed, and it is argued that the potential ideological significance of agency mystification has been overstated in CDA, and that more substantial empirically-grounded theories are necessary to address claims of audience effects, particularly when considering specific formal features like nominalization. I will also suggest that work in cognitive science and related fields on sentence processing may provide ways forward for future research on mystification in CL/CDA.
Chapter 2: Ideology and Social Actor Mystification: 

Nominalizations and Agentless Passives in Critical Linguistics and CDA

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the ways in which ideology has traditionally been understood in political theory and philosophy. This discussion is followed by a review of how the concepts of ideology and social actor mystification have been defined within critical linguistics and CDA (CL/CDA), and how these treatments relate to the broader literature on ideology. The chapter concludes with an examination of how nominalization and agentless passives have been presented in CL/CDA, focusing on social actor mystification in relation to ideology. The treatment of these features and the arguments in CL/CDA regarding their possible ideological underpinnings and effects on readers are discussed in order to lay the groundwork for the empirical research which is described in later chapters.

2.2 Definitions of ideology: a brief overview

Ideology is a concept with a history dating back over two centuries. It was first coined in 1796, just after the French Revolution, by French Enlightenment thinker Antoine Destutt de Tracy, who proposed it as an objective science of ideas which was intended to remake the world in a more rationalist, scientific mold (Eagleton 2007). The term was later most famously taken up in the work of Marx and Engels, who saw ideology as a barrier to ‘true consciousness’: ideology was compared to a camera obscura, a lens through which people could see only a distorted image of the world (Thompson 1984). Very quickly, it seems, the term ideology lost the meaning of a field of study and came to mean something like sets of ideas themselves, in the same way that biology,
originally meaning the study of living things, came to refer to characteristics of living things themselves (Eagleton 2007). Additionally, beginning with Marx and Engels, ideology lost its originally neutral or positive meaning and acquired the negative sense of distorted, illogical, politically inflexible thinking, which remains today the popular sense of the term. The question of defining the relations between ‘true’ knowledge on the one hand, and ideology as ‘false consciousness’ on the other, has been called “the classical debate on ideology in the social sciences” (van Dijk 2014a, p.96), a debate that has gone on ever since the term acquired this negative sense in Marx and Engels.

The difficulty in defining ideology—in the modern sense of something like political ideas or beliefs themselves, and not the study thereof—with any precision is that one is quickly led into a maze of terms which are typically less than precise: thoughts, ideas, beliefs, concepts etc. are subjects English speakers understand well enough until asked to make fine and reliable distinctions between them. Further complicating matters is the importance of knowledge in ideology: if speakers express racist thoughts, for example, they will likely defend their racist ideology by appealing to knowledge, e.g., by saying that they know that black people are lazy, etc. The non-racist who wishes to expose this racist ideology will also appeal to knowledge, e.g., by saying that black people work long hours, often at difficult jobs, etc. The non-racist will claim to know that black people are hard-working with the same earnestness with which the racist makes the opposite claim, and indeed the racist may claim that the non-racist is simply being misled by a liberal ideology. Both may appeal to sources of factual information to support their views, citing scientific studies and the like, which can lead to arguments over the interpretation of empirical data, the criteria for knowledge, and thus to
fundamental questions of epistemology—i.e., how one can be said to ‘know’ something at all.

Even if one dismisses epistemology as a purely scholastic philosophical concern, the question remains whether ideologies can be studied as ‘things out there’ or whether they are internal to all people, making the study of ideology necessarily self-reflective. Is there a place where once can stand perfectly neutral and outside of any ideology to study the ideologies of others? Žižek (2012, p. 3) asks, “[i]s not the claim that we can accede to this place the most obvious case of ideology?”

The restrictive and pejorative sense of ideology as a set of political blinders, in popular usage, implies that one can claim to stand apart from ideology. By contrast, a more expansive definition of ideology as sets of coherent opinions about the social world, which are held in various forms by all people, implies that one cannot objectively stand outside all ideologies, and must attempt to identify the ideological stances of others in relation to one’s own (‘he has a racist ideology, but I have an anti-racist ideology’). As discussed below, CL/CDA has often adopted a more expansive definition of ideology, but the concept of ideological mystification in discourse retains much of the restrictive definition’s sense of hidden and distorted truths. The next section discusses some of the treatments of ideology and mystification in critical linguistics and CDA, and considers how these treatments relate to work on ideology in philosophy and political theory.

2.3 Ideology and mystification in critical linguistics and CDA

Linguistics was famously brought into the critical study of ideology in discourse in the work of Fowler et al. (1979) and Kress and Hodge (1979). This section discusses this
early work, particularly regarding the issue of how differing presentations of events, as realized in texts, relate to questions of ideology and truth.

2.3.1 An emancipatory agenda for CL/CDA: Ideology, mystification, and truth

Among the central assumptions of 1970s critical linguistics was the idea that language in use “embodies specific views (theories) of reality” (Fowler et al. 1979, p. 1) and that “through language ideologies become observable” (Hodge, Kress & Jones 1979, p. 81). This early work argued that language use reproduces ideologies and maintains social relationships, including their aspects of inequality and domination. Critical linguistics set itself the emancipatory task of exposing “linguistic practices which are instruments of social inequality and the concealment of truth” (Fowler et al. 1979, p. 2). This argument assumed that, while all language use embodies particular views of reality, analyses of texts’ portrayals of reality could reveal truths concealed by subtle linguistic practices. When the reproduction and transmission of ideologies in discourse was exposed to conscious scrutiny, it was argued, this process of reproduction “would be less effective” (Fowler et al. 1979, p. 3).

This argument adopts a ‘soft’ version of the Marxist conception of ideology: ideologies are distortions of ‘truth’, distortions which can be encoded through language use, although this argument also implies an acceptance of the claim that all discourses embody their own views of reality. In this argument, the discourses of powerful social institutions—governments, newspapers, etc.—contain harmful distortions of reality which help maintain relations of domination. The task of the critical linguist, therefore, is to expose these distortions and omissions by analyzing texts in relation to their social contexts. In simple terms, the argument holds that exposing the role of language in
creating ideological distortions of events will enable people to realize how newspapers and politicians are presenting reality in a politically useful way, and they will thereby be empowered to resist the social relations of domination being justified to them through propagandistic means.

One area in which CL/CDA claims to identify distortions of truth is in mystification of agency, notably police agency for violent actions as described in news reports. ‘Mystification’, as generally used in CL/CDA (see Fowler 1991, p. 80; O’Halloran 2003, pp. 1-3), refers to reducing readers’ comprehension of participants and actions referred to in a text by various means, such as the use of nominalizations which leave actors unnamed, or agentless passives. Information about participants’ identities may be omitted entirely from a text or simply ‘backgrounded’, de-emphasized so that the text focuses the reader’s attention on some participants to the exclusion of others. Both have been called types of ‘exclusion’ (see van Leeuwen 1996, pp. 38-42). This information may be easily inferred by readers in some cases, but in others, the text may be said to affect readers’ comprehension of events in an ideologically significant way.

To take a current example with deep historical roots, killings by American police of black citizens are reported in the American press in a way that tends to focus public debate on the actions of victims rather than those of police (FAIR 2014). These killings are, at the time of writing, inspiring increasingly urgent protests from an American public demanding accountability for police officers who are rarely charged in connection to these shootings. It is possible that news reporting that presents the shootings in ways that focus on the decision-making power of police officers and centered debate on police actions could affect public attitudes toward these killings. In CL/CDA terms, such reporting would present reality in a way that countered a
traditional transmission of ideology, in this case a racist ideology in which police violence—common in America but committed at disproportionate rates against black people—is normalized and acceptable.

It is this kind of ‘common-sense’ acceptance of things like police violence and segregated cities which critical linguists aim to challenge: “The goals of the critical linguists are in general terms de-familiarization or consciousness-raising” (Fowler 1996, p. 5). Critical linguists, while choosing their objects of analysis on the basis of political positions, hope to expose the linguistic means by which certain ideas, actors, and actions are consistently and significantly made more prominent, while others are backgrounded or assumed and left unexamined. By exposing these processes, critical linguists aim to encourage a more critical consciousness on the part of news readers.

The prominence of social actors in news texts can be investigated through text analysis, and the author’s choices of topic and focus may be critiqued so as to expose other possible topics and points of focus. If texts from a given source consistently focus on certain actors over others, evidence of these patterns may be used to support claims about their effects on the understanding of readers. If one understands ideology in its modern pejorative sense, it is plausible that a news reader, influenced by news accounts which accept police justifications of violence and consistently blame the victims, would be described as viewing reality through a distorting ideological lens.

Critical linguists’ treatment of ideological reproduction in discourse allows various treatments of ideology itself while aiming to expose the linguistic means by which ideologies are transmitted. A broad view of ideology does not require one to claim to represent an objective, inarguable ‘truth’ of events. Yet it allows one to critique
ideology by discussing conflicts between different representations of events, all of
which may be said to represent reality according to one ideology or other. The
admission that one is also viewing the world through an ideological lens does not
require one to abandon the aim of exposing the processes by which ideologies which
one opposes are reproduced in discourse. By exposing these dominant and harmful
ideologies in discourse, critical linguists may simply aim to raise subtle issues of topic
selection, prominence, and framing in texts to the level of conscious scrutiny, where it
may be hoped readers are more able to resist narratives which de-emphasize significant
alternative views more in accordance with their own. The next section discusses a
prominent early critical linguistic study which demonstrates how some of these
tensions regarding the exposure of ideologies in texts have been addressed.

2.3.2 Ideology and mystification in early critical linguistics

A much-cited example of early critical linguistics is that of Trew (1979a), which
offered a critical analysis of media representations of Rhodesian police killings of
unarmed protesters, described by Trew as ‘black Africans’. Incidentally, my use of the
term ‘protesters’ is not accidental and may encode an anti-colonialist ideology, as some
in CL/CDA might argue. For the sake of clarity regarding my own views, I am opposed
to colonialism in its historic and modern forms, and quite suspicious of the legitimacy
of much state violence, a fact which the reader may wish to bear in mind.

Trew (1979a) analyzed newspaper headlines and news texts describing the event,
arguing that the headline *Rioting blacks shot dead by police* featured lexical choices
(*Rioting blacks*) which legitimized the police violence (police were presented as acting
justly to control the violent crowd). The use of nominalizations (*Sunday’s killings*) and
passives (*Eleven Africans were shot dead*) which referred to the killings in a way that left the police who committed them unnamed, was also presented as evidence for the ideological slant of the newspapers in question.

Trew’s study described linguistic choices like these as encoding ideological choices by representing the social world in a way which mystified the agency of certain groups of social actors. The ideological effects of these linguistic choices were assumed to be cumulative in nature: “The ideological character of a discourse consists in the systematic patterns and organization of linguistic characteristics of the relevant kind, including, in particular, the systematic patterns of classification of process and participants and the presentation of agency and interaction” (Trew 1979b, p. 154). In simple terms, linguistic descriptions of who does what to whom proceed from particular ideological viewpoints, and a reader exposed to patterns of representation is being exposed to a certain view of the world, which is assumed to have at least some influence on readers’ world-views. Ideology, in Trew’s approach, could be exposed by identifying contrasting representations of social actors and their actions, to highlight areas where these representations came into meaningful conflict.

Crucially, though, this work must proceed through the medium of language, which Trew did not assume was immune to ideological influence: “All perception involves theory or ideology, and there are no ‘raw’, uninterpreted, theory-free facts.” (Trew 1979a, p. 95). Ideology, in this study, was “a system of concepts and images which are a way of seeing and grasping things, and of interpreting what is seen or heard or read” (Trew 1979a, p. 95). This broad conception of ideology appears neutral as to the truthfulness of the various ways of seeing. This is also a definition which extends to all
people: surely all able-minded people have their own coherent ways of interpreting reality; if they did not, then much of human experience would remain unintelligible.

This characterization of ideology seems more in line with that of political theorist Martin Seliger (1977), who adopted a neutral definition encompassing any and all action-oriented political belief systems. Such a definition is also in line with that of the Oxford English Dictionary, which describes ideology as “a systematic scheme of ideas, usually relating to politics, economics, or society and forming the basis of action or policy; a set of beliefs governing conduct” (Oxford University Press 2015).

The question of whether one understands ideology as neutral and expansive or restricted and oppression-related is not an incidental one: as noted above, either one takes the perspective of ‘truth’ from which one can expose ideologies which distort and conceal truth, or one sees the world through ideological lenses like others. Critical linguists generally adopted a more expansive definition of ideology which encompassed even their own worldviews. Lacking an Archimedean point from which to expose ideologies and hidden truths objectively, though, critical linguistics requires, but has not generally provided, an account of ideology’s relation to truth, with the exception of van Dijk (2014a).

A broader and more neutral understanding of ideology extends the concept of ideology to all people, regardless of social power. This broader definition, however, does not imply that all discourse is so inherently ideological that no statements can be said to express truth: “Decisions about which systems of representation are correct and which are not can be taken only in the light of the relevant scientific and social practices to which the systems belong” (Trew 1979a, p. 95). Such a position seems more or less in
line with Lakoff and Johnson’s challenge to the objectivist model of truth, which acknowledged the existence of truths (e.g., two plus two equals four), but insisted that “truth is always relative to a conceptual system that is defined in large part by metaphor” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 159). In Lakoff and Johnson’s work, the cumulative effects of ideological characterizations have roots in the metaphorically-structured conceptual systems which may understand a topic such as poverty as, variously, a crime committed by the state against its own population, a result of a lack of moral discipline among poor people, a punishment from God, etc.

While advances in research on conceptual systems from cognitive psychology and cognitive science have not widely been adopted into CL/CDA, critical linguistic work such as Trew (1979a) adopts a roughly comparable approach to the relation of truth to ideology. The statements ‘two plus two equals four’, ‘it is the responsibility of any government to provide clean water for its people,’ ‘bombing civilians is a war crime’, may all be evaluated for correctness according to various relevant standards. Though each may be said to encode beliefs consistent with some ideology or other, this need not impair our judgments of their correctness.

2.4 Nominalizations and agentless passives: social actor mystification and ideology

At this point it will be useful to take a closer look at some concrete examples of nominalizations and agentless passives as defined and discussed within CL/CDA. While CL/CDA studies share a certain set of assumptions and a general approach to discourse analysis, there is no set methodology, nor is critical linguistics/CDA a theory of language in itself. Although early work such as Kress and Hodge (1979) borrowed certain ideas from Chomsky’s Transformational Grammar, the linguistic theory which
has most thoroughly influenced the critical approach to discourse analysis is Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics or SFL (Halliday 1994). The following section discusses early critical linguistic work on nominalizations and agentless passives which was influenced by Chomsky’s transformational theory. Later sections discuss SFL’s presentation of nominalization and passivization, and conclude with a discussion of these linguistic features as presented in more recent CDA work.

2.4.1 Nominalizations and agentless passives in early critical linguistics

Kress and Hodge (1979) began their book *Language as Ideology* by arguing that language is ideological since it expresses points of view which emerge from ideological backgrounds. It is also ideological, they argue, because “it involves systematic distortion in the service of class interest” (Kress & Hodge 1979, p. 6). They found evidence of this distortion in transformations, a concept borrowed from Chomsky (1957). They did not share Chomsky’s assumptions about deep structure or his focus on formal properties, however, and put the concept of transformations to a completely different use. A transformation, for them, was “a set of operations on basic forms” (Kress & Hodge 1979, p. 9). Transformations, they argued, “serve two functions, economy and distortion” (Kress & Hodge 1979, p.9), which were so comingled as to be inseparable.

These ‘basic forms’ seem analogous to the kernel sentences initially proposed by Chomsky, which were connected to surface utterances by a set of assumed sub-structural levels. Recovering these was essentially a reflective exercise in interpretation, even speculation: “A hearer or reader can attempt to recover these [successive layers beneath the structure of an utterance] until the underlying set of basic forms is
reached...[which identifies] the hypothesized genesis of the utterance” (Kress & Hodge 1979, p. 10, my emphasis). This process of recovering hypothesized basic forms began with a set of inferences as to the interpretation of the surface utterance, followed by further speculation as to a speaker’s rationale for presenting the (assumed) transformed version. This was a process of inference which had no claim to empirical verification: “In this chapter we...speculate about the relation between linguistic processes and their [assumed] ideological motivations” (Kress & Hodge 1979, p. 17).

2.4.1.1 Nominalization in early critical linguistics

Kress and Hodge (1979) analyzed newspaper editorials, a text genre where opinions and political advocacy are displayed openly. They assumed, “if a systematic theory, an ideology, is guiding the use of language here, then we would expect systematic use of linguistic forms to be evident.” (Kress & Hodge 1979, p. 19) The study proceeded from the assumption that with nominalization, as with passives, underlying basic forms had been transformed. This process of nominalization involved “sentences, or parts of sentences, descriptions of actions and the participants involved in them, turned into nouns, or nominals” (Kress & Hodge 1979, p. 20).

Nouns and noun phrases such as the ban, picketing, and a blackout were assumed to be nominalized from underlying verbal processes, or actions turned into objects. The ways in which this process of nominalization could be distinguished from an (assumed) reverse process in which a noun is expressed as a verb (to color, to message, to email, etc.) were not made clear. Similarly, a consistent, ‘systematic’ use of nominalization in a text could be interpreted consistent with an ideological motivation of the author,
although the criteria for distinguishing ideological motivations from stylistic conventions, etc., were not clearly stated.

To take an example of nominalization as analyzed in early critical linguistics, consider the following from Kress and Hodge (1979, p. 21):

1. *Picketing...curtailed coal deliveries.*

This sentence, taken from a 1973 Guardian editorial, was highlighted for the fact that it compresses information into nouns like *picketing* (someone pickets some event or organization) and this deletion of participants (the picketers and the picketed), the writers argued, diverted readers’ attention away from the causes of the picketing. The absence of these social actors in the nominalization was seen to hide them from view, such that “although we know that there was an actor and an affected, the specific identities of both have been lost. We can guess about their identity, but we can never be certain.” (Kress & Hodge 1979, p. 21, my emphasis)

This latter comment is the key to the ideological significance of nominalization and agentless passives in critical linguistics: since the writer has expressed information via a grammatical structure that does not provide direct reference to the actors and affected participants of an action, the absence of these elements is considered to be a deletion, a transformation not only of a proposed underlying structure, but of a sentence which should have been there. To remedy this situation is to re-write the existing sentence much more explicitly in order to account for many more details of the situation. In their analysis, Kress and Hodge (1979, pp. 17-28) offer the following:

1. *...picketing...curtailed coal deliveries.* (from original text)
2. [Miners] *picket* [mines and coal-depots so that rail drivers do not] *deliver as much coal as before* [the start of the dispute to power stations]. (proposed underlying ‘full’ form of the sentence)

Notice the ellipsis in sentence 1, from the original text. Kress and Hodge (1979, p. 21) shorten the form of the actual sentence in the text, which appears in full on page 18:

3. *The government knows that in early 1972 it was caught out by picketing of power stations which curtailed coal deliveries.* (original as it appears in the editorial, reproduced sections underlined)

This alteration to the sentence is relevant since the original sentence includes the affected participant of the picketing (power stations), a participant Kress and Hodge argue is ‘lost’ by the nominalization of *picketing*.

Even setting such details aside, the argument presupposes that the lack of explicit inclusion of participants affects reader comprehension: “Showing less means someone else is seeing less. And seeing less means thinking less.” (Kress & Hodge 1979, p. 22)

The actor deletion argument is essentially this (see Kress & Hodge 1979, pp. 25-26):

The agents which are deleted via nominalization and passives (most of which are agentless) require the generation of inferences by readers. These inferences may vary, and even in cases when the actor is easily recoverable by inference, the existence of the (human) actor is suppressed: “The effect of the deletion is to take these people entirely for granted…This is not a trivial omission…The ‘economy’ of not mentioning these agents has the further effect of suppressing their existence. It takes a stand on the issue being described.” (Kress & Hodge 1979, pp. 25-26)

Even if the Guardian was editorializing on behalf of the striking miners’ position (the agents of the picketing), it was argued, by using nominalization and passives “the result inevitably is mystification
of these processes” (Kress & Hodge 1979, p. 28), referring to the physical processes whose actors are deleted or simply backgrounded. It is the (presumed) lessened cognitive prominence of these participants on the part of the reader which underlie arguments of mystification in these critical linguistics studies from the 1970s. As the next section describes, a parallel argument was made in these studies about the role of passives.

2.4.1.2 Passive transformations in early critical linguistics

Early critical linguistics borrowed the concept of transformations from Chomsky, for whom passives represented the classic example. The active form of a sentence is assumed to be the more basic form (John kicked the ball), and the passive is assumed to be produced by a series of grammatical transformations (placing the object in subject position, adding an auxiliary verb, converting the active verb to its participle form and adding a preposition to end with the subject, to produce the longer and more complex sentence The ball was kicked by John).

The association of abstract terms, complex sentences, and passive verbs with people in structures of power who most often use them—scientists, academic researchers, and other elite members of society—suggests, particularly to a more critical class-conscious mind, that these linguistic techniques might be involved in deluding the public. Certainly one can appreciate the potential political power of metaphor (for example, anti-immigrant or anti-Semitic comparisons of people with pests as used by the Nazis), and an increase in abstraction (e.g., ‘the Jewish question’) can possess the rhetorical power of obscuring the concrete reality of horrific actions in certain cases.
Yet it was not their potential uses in politically charged contexts, but their inherent qualities of agency deletion (most passives appear without a stated agent; see Leech & Svartvik 1994, p. 330) that gave passives the power of mystification in critical linguistics. The ‘deleted agent’ of passives was said to be “coyly, ‘someone’ or ‘everyone’” (Fowler & Kress 1979, p. 31), leaving the reader to infer the agent from this mystifying form via context clues, an issue discussed later in this thesis.

Two more qualities of the passive which critical linguists cited as significant in mystification were the transformation which moved the object to the more thematically prominent subject position, and the addition of the auxiliary verb be which can transform the process to a state, as in posted rules such as seatbelts must be fastened. This transformation was seen to imply a loss of any potential negotiation or alteration: “The point is that processes, being under the control of agents, imply the possibility of modification, decision; whereas states are perceived as unalterable and thus to be put up with. All ‘be’ forms classifying process as state are open to suspicion and should be inspected…” (Fowler & Kress 1979, p. 31, my emphasis).

From this perspective, even a list of swim club rules can be seen as a problematic exercise of power over readers by leaving participants unspecified. ‘Reduced passives’ such as instructed class and untrained children left the agents of instructing and training unstated. On the effects of these absences, it was argued, “[t]he uncertainty about agency spreads a general vagueness through the rules, and a vagueness precisely in the area of who does what. The readers of the rules are left in a situation of helpless ignorance: apparently the knowers know, but seem to keep the ignorant from knowing” (Fowler & Kress 1979, p. 32, my emphasis). This use of passives in posted rules is
described as a form of “style as censorship” which “allows the details of the exercise of the mechanisms of control to be obscured, mystified” (Fowler & Kress 1979, p. 41).

Another notable case of passives in early critical linguistics is presented in Trew (1979a) which, as noted above, focuses on British and local newspaper reports of violence at a political protest in Rhodesia. Police officers killed some of the protesters, and Trew (1979a, pp.98-99) finds the following distinction between active and passive descriptions meaningful as a key to the news writers’ ideological views:

4. *Rioting Blacks Shot Dead by Police as ANC Leaders Meet* (Times headline)

5. *Eleven Africans were shot dead and 15 wounded when Rhodesian police opened fire on a rioting crowd of about 2,000.* (Times text)


   (Guardian text)

The absence of police in subject position in the headline and opening clause of the Times text, Trew argued, was significant because, “in purely syntactic terms, with the deletion of the agent there is no longer any direct reference to who did the action and there is a separation of the action from whoever did it.” (Trew 1979a, p. 99) These passive verb expressions, in combination with local protesters described as *Rioting Blacks*, Trew argued, produce a description that implies the police were using deadly force legitimately, putting the blame for the violence on the black protesters. “By itself it [this description] doesn’t legitimize ‘armed’ intervention, or killing – but it is a step which opens a way to justifying it.” (Trew 1979a, p. 99)
As with nominalization, mystification is the key to the argument regarding passives: since the passive verb moves the agent of the action to a prepositional phrase or deletes it, this agent becomes less prominent in the clause and therefore ‘backgrounded,’ or less salient to the reader, so their role is concealed or legitimized. Passives, in these early studies, were seen as transformations of more simple active wordings—wordings which the author sees as preferable for their explicit inclusion of agency—which may be chosen, even subconsciously, due to their use in describing events from the perspective of a particular ideology. In this case, a description of violent protest which blames black protesters and legitimizes police violence, and by extension the white British colonial government, is seen as an expression of a racist ideology that sees black people as uncivilized and needing discipline from white people.

Nominalization and passives are mentioned together, then, because they are seen as working in parallel ways: both features have the potential to mystify the role of social actors in clauses, and this is seen as the key to their ideological underpinnings and potential effects on readers. The next section will discuss how nominalizations and passives have been handled in more recent work in CDA.

2.4.2 Nominalizations and agentless passives in later CDA work

Since the publication of the early work described above, critical linguistics has grown in popularity and diversified into a multidisciplinary field known as critical discourse analysis (CDA) or critical discourse studies (CDS), though I shall use the former term here. CDA draws on a diverse array of fields within and beyond linguistics, and is concerned variously with, for example, the uses of language to enact power dynamics in social relationships, construct social identities, and build public support for
government policies. As it has evolved, CDA has also received criticism for, among other things, ignoring context and pragmatic meanings, leading to overinterpretation of linguistic data (Widdowson 2004, see especially Chapters 3 and 6), for failing to support its claims about texts’ effects on reader cognition with reader response studies (Stubbs 1997), and for continuing to make use of nominalization and passives in the texts of CDA studies despite a lack of consensus within CDA about their possible negative ideological effects (Billig 2008).

This criticism has had some impact. Despite bold claims like “[a]nything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a particular ideological position” (Fowler 1991, p. 10), and “[i]deology affects—as does discourse—textual and syntactic form” (Kress 1985/2002, p. 240), linguistic analysis alone has come to be seen by many scholars as an insufficient means of identifying ideological positions and motivations. CDA seems to have generally adopted the view that “meaning cannot be ‘read off’ from syntax alone” (Richardson 1987/2002, p. 365), and by extension, “ideologies cannot simply be ‘read off’ text and talk” (van Dijk 1998, p. 210). The role of cognition has become an important issue for CDA, as has the potential of large language corpora to substantiate claims about discourse norms, although space limitations prevent discussion of those issues here. This section will discuss more recent work in CDA on nominalization and passives in order to consider how these structures have been discussed since the early days of critical linguistics.

2.4.2.1 Nominalization in more recent CDA work

Perhaps the most noticeable theoretical change in CDA’s descriptions of nominalization in recent decades is its move away from Chomskyan grammatical
models. While a few critical linguists have continued to rely on adaptations of Chomsky’s early ideas on syntactic transformations of kernel sentences in more recent work (notably Fowler 2002), more recent studies have seen CDA descriptions of nominalization turn increasingly to Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), in which nominalization is described as a grammatical metaphor, a grammatical expression “whereby any element or group of elements is made to function as a nominal group in the clause” (Halliday 1994, p. 41). This type of metaphor, like a lexical metaphor (Halliday uses the term ideational), is described as either ‘congruent’ or ‘non-congruent’, a description which rests on the assumption that a nominalization represents a ‘non-congruent’ expression of a more ‘congruent’ non-nominal expression, although Halliday (1994, p. 348) cautions, “[t]here is no very clear line to be drawn between what is congruent and what is incongruent”. Thus the text analyst may determine that a nominal group is expressed in a nominalized way, a grammatical metaphor that renders the nominal version less ‘congruent’ and therefore potentially ideologically suspect. This nominalization is linked to the SFL concept of a ‘rank shift’, where a clause may be downgraded in order to function as an element in another clause, as in embedded clauses, e.g., the man who is mopping the floor is singing. The loss of explicit agency in a nominalization allows the nominalized form to function as a “construction of unreality…inaccessible and remote” (Halliday & Matthiessen 1999, p. 271), which forces the reader to reconstruct the missing information, or simply fail to infer it altogether.

Nominalization is also seen as a way of expressing impersonality of style, which in textual analysis (Fowler 1991, pp. 124-129) allows a report on hospital conditions, supposedly written in sympathy with patients, to be seen as expressing “a covert
implication of disregard for the patients” (Fowler 1991, p. 129). This impersonality of style is said to background the role of social actors, in line with earlier claims. In this way, “the text does not tell the reader who is responsible for the activity”, and this can produce a bureaucratic effect of describing “impersonal procedures which, once put in place, are wellnigh impermeable to human agency” (van Leeuwen 1996, p. 60). Such a description essentially echoes the critique of the list of swim club rules provided by Fowler and Kress (1979) discussed earlier in this chapter. Even though social actors may be named elsewhere in a text, and thus recoverable by inference, these instances of backgrounding are still seen as significant for their role in “reducing the number of times specific social actors are explicitly referred to.” (van Leeuwen 1996, p. 41)

Overall, it is fair to say that nominalization, like ideology, is discussed in recent CDA in a more cautious and nuanced way than was the case in earlier work. This more circumspect attitude is encapsulated in Fairclough’s recent observation that “the social effectivity of nominalization depends upon what is nominalized…and on the specific social context in which it occurs...” (Fairclough 2010, p. 214) Including nominalization in a critical textual analysis is still seen as useful, but this analysis “must be combined with an account of meaning and how meaning is mediated in and through textual interpretations…this lack of one-to-one relations between formal features of texts, interpretations, and social effects implies that generalizations about semiosis are difficult.” (Fairclough 2010, p. 214) While this caution against overinterpretation is certainly necessary for CDA, the challenge of providing acceptable explanatory theories of the social world adds a great layer of complexity to the picture, complicated still further by the need to account for reader cognition.
Elsewhere, nominalization is cited as an obvious form of ideological expression, via the same argument about the backgrounding of social agency: “it need not be repeated what influence such nominalizations may have on the structuring of action roles in the [mental] models of recipients.” (van Dijk 1998, pp. 270-271) Van Dijk’s theory of mental models (most thoroughly detailed in van Dijk 2014a) provides a theoretically plausible interface between the worlds of discourse and society—essentially, texts are produced according to language users’ understanding of the world, represented and stored in memory in the form of mental models, and these texts are shared with other social actors whose mental models, and the ideologies which organize them into coherent systems, may be influenced by the descriptions of events and situations in texts.

This theory has not seen wide adoption in CDA, however, and has no connection to work which draws on theories from cognitive linguistics to account for language user cognition, although some of this research repeats the conclusion that nominalization and agentless passives “are identified as ideologically load-bearing” (Hart 2014, p. 30) for their role in mystifying the agency of social actors and therefore the responsibility for their actions as described in texts.

In summary, nominalization is no longer seen along roughly Chomskyan lines, but is still seen as a departure from a more preferable active clause with explicitly named social actors. This departure is understood as a grammatical metaphor, in SFL terms. Nominalization’s potential to mystify agency for actions is seen as key to its susceptibility to ideological uses and effects, although it is generally agreed that this is no simple process, and that discourse analysts cannot claim a particular nominalization has any particular social or cognitive effect without accounting for how this process
happens. As the next section will show, the thinking in CDA on agentless passives has followed a similar path of development since the 1970s.

2.4.2.2 Passives in more recent CDA work

The passive is typically coupled with nominalization in CDA, where the two are identified as offering ways of describing events such that “the text does not tell the reader who is responsible for the activity” (van Leeuwen 1996, p. 60). It is therefore perhaps not surprising to note that treatments of passives in CDA have developed along much the same lines as those of nominalization over the decades. Fowler (1991, p. 77) described them in transformational terms, but in a general sense of “syntactic variation of the type that is interesting to critical linguistics”, where the transformation of passives is simply understood as a transformation of a clause’s active counterpart, without any further use of Chomskyan concepts.

As was the case with nominalizations as discussed previously, more recent work has tended to theorize passives in systemic-functional terms, this time drawing on Halliday’s approach to the analysis of transitivity roles and relations.

In interpreting passives according to SFL, Hart (2014, p. 31) argues that the ideational and textual components of SFG interact in the case of passives: the Actor and Goal of a Material Process are identified (as interpreted by the analyst) as elements of the ideational component’s transitivity network, and placing the Goal (typically in object position) in subject position establishes it as Theme in the textual component of SFG. In a news account of London police shooting and killing a man mistaken for a suicide bomber in 2005, this passive clause was analyzed (Hart 2014, p. 32) as follows:
Hart (2014, p. 32) argues that the absence of the Actor leaves the agent of the shooting unspecified, and that passive clauses “allow speakers to conjure away social actors or keep them in the semantic background”, in the same way as nominalizations.

As for the reasons for a speaker/writer’s choosing the passive, Halliday (1994, p. 169) offers the possibilities of altering the Theme by moving a Goal or other participant to subject position, moving the agent to a less thematic position in a prepositional phrase, or simply leaving the agent out of the description. In the passive clause my bike was stolen, the Goal of the Process is in subject position likely because it is of more interest to the speaker than the Actor, whose identity may be unknown in any case. As noted in Fowler (1991, p. 78), agency “may be immaterial, or predictable from context, or unknown”, and so the use of agentless passives in news headlines, perhaps chosen to save space, need not be seen as necessarily motivated along ideological lines.

CDA interpretations of passives have been challenged by critics. Passives analyzed according to SFG’s transitivity network are analyzed semantically, which is an interpretive process that necessarily occurs in relation to the text analyst’s own knowledge, opinions, and ideological positions (Widdowson 2004, pp. 30-35). One can always argue about what a particular statement ‘means’. Widdowson (2004, p. 35) counters that discourse analysis “has not to do with what texts mean, but with what might be meant by them, and what they are taken to mean.” This argument is in line with statements from Richardson and van Dijk, quoted in Section 2.4.2 above, that one
cannot simply ‘read’ particular meanings or ideologies directly from texts, let alone from particular grammatical configurations (such as passives) within texts. With reference to known ideological positions and representations of social groups, social values, etc., one can argue that a particular linguistic choice may carry a certain meaning, and with reference to reader responses one can establish whether readers took that meaning from the text. In drawing from these sources of evidence, researchers can make an argument for the potential meanings and effects of a text, while attempting to avoid excessive subjectivity.

One recent study which explicitly avoids drawing overly narrow conclusions about textual meanings is Baker (2014). This paper draws on public comments and corpus data to support a textual analysis of possible homophobic or anti-gay meanings in news articles, but does not claim that this analysis exposes the texts’ ‘true’ meaning, or that this analysis ‘exposes’ readers’ correct or incorrect interpretations. Baker (2014, p. 28) is “wary of an emancipatory agenda”…and argued that “there is no such thing as a single ‘truth’ or correct interpretation of a text, but instead…there are potentially multiple interpretations.”

The particular appeal of such an approach, which incorporates reader response data and avoids claims to identification of a ‘correct’ meaning, is that it may establish that a particular text may well be interpreted as expressing meanings in line with a particular ideological position, but without ruling out the possibility that the text could be interpreted otherwise. From this perspective, supporting evidence may be used to judge whether the meanings identified in the analysis are likely to match the interpretations of a majority of readers, a judgment which may lend support to claims about a text’s potential political or ideological impact. In the case of passives, as with nominalization,
one useful line of evidence is reader response data indicating the likelihood of readers inferring a social agent’s role from context or background knowledge. It is this line of evidence which is explored in the following chapters.

2.5 Conclusion

Early work in critical linguistics drew inspiration from Chomsky’s ideas of transformations of kernel sentences, and described nominalization and passives as transformations of simple underlying sentences. Often, it seems, the issue at hand is the tension between a nominal or verb phrase as it appears in a text, and as the text analyst would prefer it to be written. Central to this conflict is the explicit inclusion of reference to the social actors responsible for the processes being described.

Although today’s CDA has largely adopted a Hallidayan view of these structures as grammatical metaphors within the transitivity network, the view that a preferred clause or phrase—one which includes the desired information—has been transformed into another form, one which omits this information, remains. Strong claims about ideological motivations of writers for choosing these structures, and their ideological impacts on readers, have generally given way to more nuanced treatments which acknowledge the possibility of multiple interpretations and the importance of context.

As stated in Chapter 1, the deeper questions of authors’ and audiences’ worldviews, and how texts function in the shaping of these, are beyond the scope of this thesis. Focusing on formal language features such as agency deletion, however, can at least produce some empirical evidence on the question of agency mystification. Since nominalizations and passives are said to be significant due to their potential to mystify agency, this thesis offers a pair of analyses to consider the evidence for these effects.
Before considering these ‘absences’ from the texts, however, Chapter 2 offers an SFL analysis of the ‘presences’ in the texts to consider how they function to create portrayals which may be taken to reflect authors’ political stances.
Chapter 3: Textual Analysis Part A – SFL Analysis

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of how two selected newspaper editorial texts—one from the American center-left newspaper The New York Times, and one from the American center-right newspaper The Washington Post—represented the same news event, a national referendum called by the Greek government in the summer of 2015 in response to Greece’s ongoing financial crisis. SFL’s transitivity network was used to characterize and compare representations of three main groups of social actors involved in the crisis: Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and the Greek government, the EU creditor institutions with whom the Greek government was negotiating debt payments, and the Greek people. Textual representations of these groups are compared in terms of frequency, active vs. passive participant roles, and the positive or negative connotations they impart to these social actors. The analysis finds that, although the two editorial texts openly support the same position on the referendum, their textual representations of the social actors form patterns of meaning which construct contrasting portrayals of the same situation for their readers.

Comparing the two portrayals of these individuals and groups allows analysts in the functional tradition of SFL and CDA to highlight the role of linguistic choices by writers which can then be subject to critique in terms of the potential ideological interpretations of the resulting textual representations of events. Since these are both high-circulation newspapers which are widely quoted in news reports and media analysis, their stances on political issues carry potential political and cultural influence and are thus subject to critique. Before focusing on the specific issues of agency
inferences and mystification, it is necessary to consider how the texts’ contrasting portrayals of the major actors in the crisis may be seen as reflecting, and expressing, differing ideological assumptions regarding responsibility for the crisis.

3.2 The functions of editorial texts

Newspaper editorials are a unique genre within the broad register of newspaper journalism; unique in that they drop all pretense of objectivity and allow newspaper editors, the authorities writing in the name of the paper itself, to openly declare their stance (or perhaps the stance of the newspaper’s owner) on controversial topics. Text analysts may expect the ideologies of the editors to be reflected in the opinions expressed in editorials: the statements of position published daily by newspaper editors function not simply as one more set of opinions on issues, equal to any other, but as authoritative and influential statements by those who report on the issues and supply the public with information. Editorials often take on a persuasive quality which functions as an effort to persuade the public at large to support a political position, e.g., ‘our country should/should not go to war because…’, etc. These arguments should place ideology on plain display, and readers may be expected to be quite clear on the thinking of the editors who produced the editorials.

There may be a role for subtle grammatical features to play here, however: in the process of argument, the role of certain social actors may be exaggerated and that of others backgrounded or eliminated, much as in the speech of a prosecutor or defense attorney to the jury at a trial. The editors determine the bounds of debate and, in their nominalizations and passive verbs, their ‘presences’ (a discussion of Saddam Hussein’s brutality against political dissidents, or claims regarding his aggressive capability) and
‘absences’ (a discussion of America’s obligations under Article 51 of the UN Charter, which expressly forbids the invasion of a foreign country without Security Council authorization), editors shape the discussion to favor the position they support. In order to contextualize the linguistic analysis to be reported later in this chapter, the following section summarizes the Greek financial crisis leading up to, and just after, June 29, 2015, when the editorials analyzed here were published.

### 3.3 The Greek financial crisis and the July 2015 referendum

As many modern nations do, Greece has long helped maintain its economy through borrowing from foreign lenders, although Greece’s debt in relation to its GDP reached levels which threatened its ability to repay creditor institutions. Greece’s heavy public debt burden was partially relieved by bailout loans in 2010 and a second bailout and ‘private sector involvement’ deal in 2011, in return for increased austerity in the form of tax increases and cuts to pensions, benefits, and salaries aimed at increasing its “economic competitiveness” (Blanchard 2012, p. 1). As a member of the EU and the Eurozone, Greece carried out debt negotiations with the ‘troika’ of lenders: the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Commission (EC) and the European Central Bank (ECB). Previous IMF research indicated that long-term sustained economic growth, which was essential to help Greece pay its debts, was “robustly associated with more equality in the income distribution” (Berg & Ostry 2011, p. 3), which was a goal difficult to achieve through policies which depressed incomes and weakened domestic demand. In the case of Greece, this long-term sustained growth would not be achieved without debt relief. As one IMF economist put it, “debt had to be restructured” (Blanchard 2012, p. 1), although “there was a political limit to what official creditors could ask their own citizens to contribute,” and as such, “the Euro area
face[d] a political choice” (Blanchard 2015, pp. 1-2) between relieving Greek citizens’ suffering and satisfying European creditors, a conflict which ultimately threatened to fracture the Eurozone itself.

In the years following the 2010-11 bailouts, which may have been designed to benefit European banks more than the Greek people (Evans-Pritchard 2015a), Greece’s economy failed to grow and its citizens continued to suffer under, and protest against, austerity measures. In January 2015, the left-wing Syriza party was elected on an anti-austerity platform, although Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and finance minister Yanis Varoufakis came under immediate pressure to accept the austerity demands of the troika, precisely the opposite of the party’s public mandate, in exchange for much-needed further loans and debt relief.

The crisis had already reached serious levels by late 2014, even before the Syriza election victory in January 2015: public debt was near 180% of GDP (Khan & Holehouse 2015), youth unemployment reached 50% (The Economist July 4, 2015), and food and medicine shortages threatened (Smith et al. 2015) as the banking system neared collapse. “The whole economy is shifting to cash” (Evans-Pritchard 2015b, p. 3), said a Greek business advisor quoted in The Telegraph. A June 26, 2015 draft debt sustainability analysis by the IMF concluded that “it is unlikely that Greece will be able to close its financing gaps from the markets on terms consistent with debt sustainability” and that debt was likely to remain high for decades (IMF 2015, p. 10). As it appeared Greece would default on an upcoming July 20 payment deadline owed to the ECB, and Greece’s membership in the Eurozone hung in the balance, and with it the future of the Greek economy, on June 26 the Syriza government called a public referendum for Sunday, July 5 on the question of whether Greece should accept the troika’s austerity
measures in exchange for new loans and securing Greece’s membership in the Eurozone.

The wording of the referendum question was criticized for being difficult to understand, as was the fact that the referendum was called and staged in only a matter of days (Gunter 2015). The referendum question, a yes-or-no question which ran to two paragraphs in the Greek text, asked voters if the Greek government should accept the austerity terms detailed in two proposal documents by the troika (the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund). These two documents (European Commission 2015; IMF 2015), which together total 37 pages in their English versions, were issued by the troika on June 25. The referendum was announced the following day, to be held on July 5. The documents assess Greece’s debt situation, as described above, and detail proposals for privatizing Greek airports, raising the retirement age, reducing pensions, and raising corporate income taxes (see World Economic Forum 2015 for a summary). At the very least, the government’s expectation that voters would have read and carefully assessed these documents—with the fate of the nation’s economy at stake—could be described as ambitious, even without making comparisons in hindsight to the 2016 UK referendum on leaving the EU and the 2016 US presidential election.

Despite their ongoing suffering and the threats to their economy, Greek voters voted ‘no’ by a 60-40 majority (Traynor, Hooper & Smith 2015). Unfortunately, that very night Prime Minister Tsipras was given an ultimatum by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande: yield to what the Telegraph called “draconian austerity terms” (Evans-Pritchard 2015b, p. 1), or face economic collapse and immediate withdrawal from the Euro. Tsipras was forced to accept the troika’s
terms within days, after what an EU official called an “exercise in extensive mental waterboarding” and what Syriza officials called “utter blackmail” (Traynor, Rankin, and Smith 2015, pp. 1-2). In the end, despite the Greek people’s resounding ‘no’ vote, [German finance minister] “Dr. Schäuble and the Eurogroup…succeeded in overthrowing our government by asphyxiating us enough for Prime Minister Tsipras to surrender…”, in Varoufakis’s (2016, p. 232) terms.

Greek finance minister Varoufakis resigned on July 6, and on July 11, the Syriza government voted to accept a set of the troika’s austerity terms, even harsher than those previously discussed, by a vote of 251-32 (Evans-Pritchard 2015b), in a dramatic display of the power of financial institutions and foreign governments to dictate fiscal policy to sovereign democratic nations.

Before beginning the textual analyses, in line with CL/CDA practice, I must declare my political positions relative to the issue summarized above and the text to be analyzed below. I am sympathetic to Varoufakis’s account of the Greek crisis, suspicious of the motives and critical of the actions of the troika, and feel that the crisis was represented in certain major western media outlets in a manner unsympathetic to the reasons for Greece’s debt and the suffering of the Greek people. I am critical of both editorials discussed below, but disagree more strongly with the characterization in the Washington Post text. Despite this political stance, the analyses described below offer some indication that a commitment to systematic analysis on explicit principles can allow politically committed text analysts to overcome personal biases and avoid the traps of cherry-picking data and over- or under-interpreting results.
3.4 The New York Times and Washington Post editorials

These texts were chosen for analysis because, unlike hard news reporting which makes claims to objectivity, newspaper editorials make ideological and political stances quite plain. The editors take the freedom to lay out their views of world events and their opinions of who is to blame for social problems and what should be done. To a critical linguist, “what is distinctive about newspaper editorials is not that they offer values and beliefs, but that they employ textual strategies which foreground the speech act of offering values and beliefs.” (Fowler 1991, pp. 208-209) The opinions of the editors on the Greek referendum are expressed quite plainly, and in this case, both newspapers urged the Greek voters to vote ‘yes’. In presenting their positions, however, the two texts represent the situation quite differently, and a comparison of their various textual representations illustrates how even editorials taking the same position on an issue may make use of different portrayals, which may be seen as reflecting and instantiating the ideologies of the editors.

The actions of the EU leaders in the Greek crisis drew strong criticism from the Telegraph’s Ambrose Evans-Pritchard (2015a, p. 1) who described this episode as a “cruel capitulation forced on Greece after 31 hours on the diplomatic rack”, and from Nobel economist and New York Times columnist Paul Krugman, who argued the troika’s terms amounted to “pure vindictiveness, destruction of national sovereignty, and no hope of relief” (Evans-Pritchard 2015a, p. 2). On June 29, however, as the referendum and the fate of Greece and possibly Europe hung in the balance (the July 4 issue of the Economist ran the headline ‘Europe’s future in Greece’s hands’), the editors of the New York Times and Washington Post were clear on which way they wanted the Greeks to vote: ‘yes’.
In the run-up to the referendum, these two major US newspapers, long held within political studies to represent the ‘left’ (The New York Times) and ‘right’ (The Washington Post) of mainstream American news discourse, sought to influence American, and potentially Greek, opinion by openly supporting one side in the referendum: both papers in their editorials urged the Greeks to vote ‘yes’ and, as The Economist (2015, p. 18) put it, “stick with the European project”. The following sections present a brief critical comparative analysis of these editorials using SFL’s transitivity network. Of particular interest in the analysis is the representation of the Greek government, the troika and EU leaders, and the Greek voters, and in which Participant roles they appear in the two texts. This brief comparative analysis of the meanings realized in the two editorials reveals the contrasts between how the crisis and its major social actors were represented in each, in order to illustrate how these patterns of representation align with the respective newspapers’ traditionally understood political and ideological orientations.

Please note that for the purposes of this analysis, the treatment of ideology must be limited to the discussion of representations of social actors and their role in the Greek crisis. The two editorials discussed here agree on their expressed political view—both support a ‘yes’ vote in the referendum—though they differ on assigning blame for the Greek crisis. It is in these differences of representation that ideological differences may arguably be evident, but many issues regarding the identification of these differences are beyond the scope of the current thesis.
3.5 SFL analysis: Experiential meaning in the New York Times editorial

The New York Times editorial (The New York Times 2015, all quotes in this section taken therefrom), entitled “Greece’s future, and the Euro’s”, describes the referendum as “a bad idea”, but strikes a relatively sympathetic tone toward the Greek people, described as “a nation already so confused and battered” by austerity measures which had so far “only served to destroy Greece’s economy and its ability to pay back its gargantuan debts”. The article clearly states the editors’ position on the referendum: “the answer should be a resounding commitment to keep Greece in the euro”, they wrote, since a ‘no’ vote would threaten Greece’s euro membership, which in turn could threaten “a global contagion” of currencies losing the trust and confidence of investors.

The vote is represented as a choice between continued euro membership, “with all the continuing sacrifice that entails”, and withdrawal, which would bring “near-term calamity and long-term unknowns”. The article concludes by stating “the power to make things better ultimately lies with the eurozone and the IMF”, and advocates debt relief, suggesting that the Eurozone creditors should “start ripping up their i.o.u.s.” Consistent with the New York Times’s establishment-left ideology, the editorial asks Greek voters to act in favor of international stability and submit to powerful European banks, while asking these powerful institutions to forgive unpayable debts on humanitarian grounds.

To take a more systematic look at how this editorial constructed meaning, the article was divided into 36 clauses, treating independent and dependent clauses as separate units, while grouping subordinate embedded clauses with the superordinate clauses in which they are embedded. This was done in order to take a relatively simple bird’s-eye
view of the article’s transitivity structure, as Participant roles in embedded clauses are
given less prominence in the clause structure and may be less cognitively salient to
readers reading for gist (although see Langacker 1991, p. 435 on the uncertain status of
subordinate clauses).

These clauses were then broken into Participants, Processes, and Circumstantial
Adjuncts following the model presented in detail in Halliday & Matthiessen (2013).
The distribution of Process types in this text is shown in table 3.1 below. Both editorial
texts appear marked with their transitivity labels in Appendix A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relational</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Verbal</th>
<th>Existential</th>
<th>Mental</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Process type distribution in the New York Times text

In terms of Process type distribution, Relational Processes dominate, followed by
Material Processes, with Verbal, Existential, and Mental Processes occurring much less
frequently. In its use of Processes the editorial differs from news reporting, in which
Material processes tend to dominate and Verbal Processes are more prominent than in
this text. This use of Processes may well be a consistent feature of the editorial register
(cf. the Process type distribution of the Washington Post article below), in which
editorials describe the editors’ views of what things are, in contrast to news reports
which focus on what things happened and what was said.

In the editorial’s transitivity structure, three major social groups are represented in
Participant roles: first, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and his Syriza government, then
EU leaders and the institutions in which they act, along with European investors and
the financial institutions in which they act, and finally the Greek voters. One reference
to Greek banks was classed with EU banks and institutions because in the context of the vote, such institutions were not assumed to share goals with the Greek people, although grouping this with Greek voters is also a valid interpretation. The EU leaders and EU lenders are grouped together because EU leaders are shown to be acting on the financial institutions’ behalf, and since in the coverage of the vote, membership in the EU was represented as contingent on acceptance of the troika’s demands.

These groups were tallied when they appeared in Participant roles, not simply as Participants by themselves, but also when they were named within the nominal structure of a Participant, as in the example below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The referendum [[called by Greece’s prime minister]]</th>
<th>is</th>
<th>a bad idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant: Carrier</strong></td>
<td><strong>Process: Material</strong></td>
<td><strong>Participant: Attribute</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.2 Transitivity structure of a clause in the New York Times text

In the above example, *Greece’s prime minister* was recorded as occurring within a Carrier role, despite not functioning as the head noun or nominal group itself. In clauses of the type *Greece’s prime minister is a bad leader*, nominal groups functioning as *Greece’s prime minister* does here were recorded as appearing as Carriers themselves.

When these representations were tallied, the three major groups were represented in Participant roles, identified by the number of clauses in which they appeared in those roles, as follows:
The distribution of Participant roles as shown in table 3.3 above reveals that EU leaders and associated banking institutions occupied a majority of Participant roles in the New York Times editorial. The only group to be significantly represented among the Actors and Sayers in the text, this group occupies a prominent place, which suggests that the editors felt that the power to act in this situation was not so much in Greek voters’ hands, who are represented as rather passive participants caught in a struggle between the Syriza government and the powerful institutions of the EU and the troika. Greek voters, the editors write, “deserve a chance to say” whether they want to accept the troika’s terms, but the vote “doesn’t really matter”, in the editors’ view, because “the power to make things better ultimately lies with the Eurozone and the I.M.F.” The issue at hand is not a particular agreement, the text implies, but the eurozone membership and the potential consequences of Greece leaving the EU. The EU leaders and their
institutions are seen as holding the power to act, regardless of the outcome of the referendum, a view that is represented in the distribution of Participant roles. This focus on the actions, options, and decisions of the powerful, along with the lack of focus on Greek voters’ opinions and experiences, is consistent with an establishment-media perspective in which powerful elites are represented as the actors in society, while representatives of the population at large, particularly the most vulnerable groups, are often not represented.

The focus on the vote’s consequences on the credibility of the euro and on world finance is also consistent with an establishment perspective in which preserving the integrity of the international financial system is likely to take precedence over finding an outcome which best represents the interests of the citizens of the world’s oldest democracy. Although the editors clearly favor a ‘yes’ vote, they argue that the troika should forgive Greek debts to allow that to happen. The following section examines how the Washington Post editorial compares in terms of its transitivity structure and the representations of the major social actors in the story.

3.6 SFL analysis: Experiential meaning in the Washington Post editorial

The Washington Post editorial, titled “The only prudent way forward for Greece” (The Washington Post 2015, all quotes in this section therefrom), also advocates a ‘yes’ vote early in the text, where the editors write “the only prudent course…for Greece, Europe, and the rest of the world—would be ‘yes’.” The editorial strikes a very different tone than the New York Times editorial, however, as illustrated in its representations of the major social actors within the transitivity structure. The Process type distribution of the
Washington Post text (WP) is compared with that of the New York Times text (NYT) in table 3.4 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Relational</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Verbal</th>
<th>Existential</th>
<th>Mental</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NYT</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 Process type distribution in the New York Times and Washington Post texts

In terms of the distribution of Process types, the two editorials are similar in that they are dominated by Relational Processes, followed by Material Processes, with other types occurring only rarely, though recall that Processes in embedded clauses were excluded from the count in both cases. Beyond these formal similarities, however, distinct differences in the representation of social actors are apparent.

Compared with the New York Times text, in which the EU government and financial institutions dominated in Participant roles, the Washington Post text focused more heavily on the Greek government. The Greek government, the Syriza party, and individuals like Prime Minister Tsipras occur in Participant roles in 13 instances, compared with 11 occurrences of the EU government and European creditors and 7 occurrences of Greek voters. The reason ‘instances’ is used here is that occasionally a social group is represented in two Participant roles in the same clause, as both Actor and Goal, for example, and so counting the clauses in which these groups appear would give a less accurate count of their representations in the text.

The Participant roles in which the three major social groups appear in the text are shown in table 3.5 below.
Both the Greek government and the European government and financial institutions each occur in Actor roles in 3 cases, while the Greek voters do not occur as Actors at all. This is similar to the New York Times editorial in which EU leaders and creditors occur as Actors in 4 clauses, compared with one Actor occurrence each of the Greek government and the Greek voters. In these two editorials on the topic of the Greek referendum, in which Greek people were asked by their government to express their opinions on a serious matter in a crisis situation, it is perhaps significant that the attention of the writers of these texts appears to be focused on the other two powerful social actors in the political drama, and not on the opinions and actions of Greek people themselves (Greek voters do not occur as Sayers in either of the two texts). It is also
perhaps notable that the New York Times editorial, which strikes a somewhat sympathetic tone toward Greek people, refers to them in 7 of 9 Participant roles in relatively personalized terms as the Greeks or Greek voters, in contrast to the Washington Post which describes them in 4 of 7 Participant roles as Greece or modern Greece, a more abstract way of representing the people as a nation.

While this could be taken to imply an ideological disregard for the suffering of Greek people on the part of the Washington Post editors, there is reason to reject such a conclusion, apart from the principle, which I support, that such simplistic interpretations should be avoided. The Washington Post also refers to EU leaders impersonally as Berlin in two cases, using no personal names to represent this group, where the New York Times editors name German chancellor Angela Merkel in three cases, along with other EU and IMF figures who are personally named. In this case the use of abstract location nouns by the Washington Post editors appears to reflect a simple difference of style, although perhaps a notable one.

Such differences may be cognitively significant for either writers or readers if they represent a pattern of representation, since the metonymy of referring to the top leadership of a government by the name of the city or country it represents could be taken to conflate the views of the population of a country with those of a small number of its leaders, such as by saying America is hostile to action on climate change or Britain favors the continuation of the nuclear submarine program. Such questions, however, are beyond the scope of the current analysis.
The reason for the prominence of the Syriza government in Participant roles in this text is made clear when examining the ways in which this group is represented, as illustrated by the following examples:

3. …Mr. Tsipras’s populist insurgent party…(in Token)

4. …Greece and its excuse-making politicians…(in Attribute)

5. The extreme elements of Mr. Tsipras’s political coalition (Senser)

Prime Minister Tsipras and his Syriza government are represented as “excuse-making politicians” in a “populist insurgent party” who “ha[ve] now decided to play games with the fate of Europe and the global economy” by calling the referendum, which the editors describe as “this stunt’. Tsipras is held responsible for the Greek people’s suffering, and the editors, who offer a nod of sympathy to “the recession-wracked, over-demagogued Greek electorate” believe Tsipras should have accepted creditors’ terms, which were “softened…somewhat”, although still those terms still included “trims to pensions on which many Greeks depend” and cuts to “unsustainable pensions”. It is questionable whether further pension cuts would be seen as “trims” by the Greek people who rely on them, of course.

This editorial, like that of the New York Times, focuses on the options and actions of state and international-level actors rather than Greek citizens, a focus which reflects a view that is broadly consistent with the Washington Post’s understood establishment-right ideology. Global finance is also a key concern in this editorial, like that of the New York Times, in contrast to more activist-oriented media, which would be expected to focus more on citizens’ views, options, and actions. While this may be seen as a perfectly natural area of focus for such a critical moment, the Washington Post editors’
focus on the role of state and international actors in the crisis reflects a choice: rather than focus on major voting blocs in Greek society and their views, opinion polls, etc., to support an argument for a ‘yes’ vote—why ‘yes’ was the better choice for Greek people, in the editors’ view—the referendum is seen instead as a political stunt by a disobedient leader, and the argument is supported by pointing to the potentially catastrophic consequences of leaving the euro, for Greeks themselves, and—likely of greater importance to the editors—for the international financial system.

The general picture of the situation created by the Washington Post editors is one of clear blame of the Syriza government for the undisputed suffering of the Greek people, but as shown in the text’s Participant role distribution, the referendum is represented as a power struggle between the Greek government and the EU’s leaders and powerful banks. This is a view shared by Greece’s then-finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, who described the troika’s approach to Greece from 2010 on as “fiscal waterboarding” (Varoufakis 2016, p. 160) and said of the decision to call the referendum, “[w]e had called for a referendum to support us to carry on fighting” (Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 2016). Varoufakis is mentioned only once in the Washington Post editorial, as “an academic expert in game theory”, described by implication as similar to Tsipras, a game-player toying with the future of Europe and the world, in the editors’ view, although his views, like the views of the Greek people, were not represented in these editorials.

3.7 Summary of SFL analysis

The overall picture that emerges from this comparative analysis is that of a bird’s eye view of the situation: unlike news reporting on the Greek crisis, which included
statements from Greek citizens and details of their suffering under the EU-imposed austerity, these editorials represent the moment of the referendum as a clash between great powers, the EU and the troika vs. the Greek Syriza government, with the Greek population, despite their decisive role in the referendum, largely powerless to act. The New York Times, consistent with an establishment-left ideology, refrains from blaming the Tsipras government in favor of advocating debt relief in return for a ‘yes’ vote. The Washington Post takes a scolding tone, blasting Tsipras and his Syriza party for irresponsible toying with the troika, and advocates a ‘yes’ vote, even at the potential cost of Tsipras’s power to head Greece’s anti-austerity government, a development the Washington Post editors, consistent with the newspaper’s establishment-right ideology, may have welcomed.

3.8 The problem of ideological interpretation

While the SFL analysis above showed differences in terms of the texts’ focus and portrayals of the various social groups involved, as well as differences in their attributions of blame for the Greek crisis, I make only tentative comments here about the connections between these textual representations and political ideologies.

Attempting to go further in terms of characterizing texts’ expressed political positions and characterizations of events as reflections of underlying ideologies of the authors, and attempting to describe these ideologies, is in effect to claim to know the mind of the author in detail, a claim I do not have evidence to make here. Indeed, the nature of editorial texts makes it unclear which individual editor may have written the text, so that even if in-depth interviews with an individual editor were available which detailed the editor’s political views and understanding of the role of nation states, the
responsibilities of governments regarding national debts, and other questions relevant to this analysis, the lack of individual author attribution would make such an exercise fruitless. As such, I can offer only brief speculation as to the assumptions and values expressed in these texts.

This is not to say that questions of underlying ideological meaning are not interesting; indeed, the popularity of these questions is a major reason why the critical linguistics of the 1970s expanded into the established field of CDA, with its own journals, conferences, and various research programs. On this point, George Lakoff’s (2002) work on political attitudes could be seen as offering a plausible psychological hypothesis to explain the results presented above: if people with left-leaning views view the state as a nurturing family whose main responsibility is to care for its weaker members (through large social welfare programs, equal access to education, higher taxes on the rich and more support for the poor, etc.), this worldview could be seen as consistent with calls for forgiveness of Greek debt as an expression of a large ‘parent’ nation or international body (the EU and troika lenders, and Germany specifically) sympathy and care for a weaker ‘child’ nation (Greece). Conversely, if those with right-leaning views view the state as a strict family whose main responsibility is to enforce discipline among its members, then this worldview could be seen as consistent with views of Greece as an errant ‘child’ nation who needs the strong discipline of ‘parent’ governments and institutions if it is to remain a member of the EU ‘family’, the question very much at issue in the editorials. In summer 2015, the editors of both newspapers might have accepted a metaphor of Greece as the prodigal son asking for mercy from his EU ‘parents’; they would have only differed on what should be done with him.
While this Lakoffian hypothesis is plausible, it is far from proven, and CDA authors are right to caution against ‘reading’ ideology off of the (newspaper) page. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is no theoretical consensus on description of ideologies, despite impressive efforts in this direction. With no reliable way to clearly identify empirically which ideologies any person, no matter how well understood their views, may be said to hold, the common urge to characterize statement A as an expression of ideology B must be resisted so as to focus on what is clearly observable. As this chapter has described, what is clearly observable in the texts is their contrasting portrayals of the Greek crisis and the role of the troika and the Syriza government.

As for the terms used above, please note that ‘establishment-left’ and ‘establishment-right’ are only loose terms meant to characterize ideologies in terms of general sets of assumptions, beliefs, and values: the values of democracy and the assumed necessity of nation-states and neoliberal capitalism may be described as both ideologies’ ‘establishment’ qualities within 21st-century American society, i.e., these assumptions are virtually universally held in the spheres of government, business, and major academic and religious institutions. These ideologies’ differences in terms of ‘left’ vs. ‘right’ may be understood through their differing portrayals of responsibility for the crisis: the New York Times editors represent the troika lenders as unnecessarily harsh, demanding debt repayment even at the expense of much suffering on the part of the Greek people. These characterizations may be seen as proceeding from assumptions about the role of national debts: the United States government has long operated at a deficit, borrowing large sums from other countries for some time, the New York Times editors may argue, and carrying national debt is not inconsistent with a successful economy. Such assumptions may underlie the New York Times editors’ calls for some
form of debt forgiveness, consistent with the left-wing Democratic Party’s preference for strengthening domestic spending on social services, even at the cost of increasing America’s national debt.

By contrast, the Washington Post editors may reflect assumptions consistent with the right-wing Republican Party’s expressed preference for deficit reduction and balanced budgets. According to this view, Greece’s debts must be paid, even at the expense of the Greek people’s suffering. Insofar as the editors express any sympathy for the Greek people’s pain, it is expressed in terms of blame for the Syriza government’s ‘irresponsible’ actions in favoring populist stances over submission to the troika’s austerity demands, implicitly characterizing the crisis as the fault of the Syriza government.

In this section, I have suggested some possible connections from the texts’ representations and political stances to larger sets of values and political differences expressed within American society. These proposed connections may help provide some explanatory socio-political context, but they can only be speculative in nature.

3.9 Conclusion

Having noted the caveats about ideological interpretations of texts, the transitivity analysis presented in this chapter has revealed contrasting portrayals of the major actors in the Greek crisis: while both newspapers’ editors called for a ‘yes’ vote on the Greek referendum, the texts expressed different views of responsibility for the crisis, and of a satisfactory outcome. The New York Times text represented Greece’s Syriza government with relative sympathy, focusing on the draconian austerity terms demanded by the troika creditors, arguing for debt forgiveness. The Washington Post
text placed clear blame for the crisis on the irresponsible grandstanding of the Syriza
government and made no secret of the editors’ distaste for Greece’s prime minister and
his ruling party, advocating acceptance of the troika’s austerity terms, even at the
expense of Syriza’s public support among the Greek public.

This SFL analysis has considered how the ‘presences’ of the authors’ characterizations
of the social actors involved, as well as the authors’ opinions on which way they should
vote and what might constitute a more favorable outcome, may be interpreted along
loosely-identified political or ideological lines. These ‘presences’ are relevant to the
idea of ideology as worldview, and so some speculation has been offered in Section 3.8
above as to what type of worldview these editorials may be said to reflect. Moving
from a broad view of the linguistic content of the editorials to a more focused look at
linguistic form, the original (nonmodified) editorials are now subjected to an analysis
of nominalization and agentless passives. If these editorials are effectively transmitting
a particular ideology to readers, in the view of CDA research, it may simply be through
the clearly positive and negative characterizations described above. Yet agency
mystification via nominalization and passives is regularly highlighted in CDA as a key
means of potential ideological transmission. As an initial step to identifying whether an
agency mystification has transmitted a particular ideological position—a complex
question beyond the scope of this thesis—the following two chapters examine whether
a particular agency mystification has actually taken place.
Chapter 4: Textual Analysis Part B – Mystification Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a detailed look at the two textual features of interest for this thesis, nominalizations and agentless passives, as they occur in the editorials described in the previous chapter. The chapter begins by discussing nominalization as understood in the functional tradition of SFL and as applied in CL/CDA, and describes the methods by which nominalized text has been identified in the texts analyzed here. (Individual instances are referred to as nominalizations). The chapter continues by describing how passives were identified in the texts, and then discusses how semantic ambiguity in perfective expressions was resolved in this analysis.

This discussion is followed by a mystification analysis of the editorial texts described in Chapter 3. As discussed in Chapter 2, arguments about these features’ susceptibility to ideological uses focus on their capacity to remove or ‘background’ agents—the social actors performing the actions referred to in nominalized or passivized form. In other words, these features omit agents that would be identified in active verbal constructions, or move them to a less cognitively prominent part of the clause, which, it is argued, reduces the reader’s awareness of these agents and their responsibility for their actions. To test such claims, it is necessary to begin by examining some cases from actual texts and determining whether and on what grounds text analysis can predict readers’ ability to recover the missing or backgrounded agents. This analysis examines the instances of nominalization and agentless passives in two editorial texts and focuses on the question of whether readers reading for gist are likely to be able to recover the identities of the missing or backgrounded agents. If readers are likely to
infer such information automatically, then agency is not considered to be mystified in those cases. In cases where such inferences are not likely to be generated by gist readers automatically, however, agency is said to be mystified. Any arguments about the potential ideological nature of such agency deletions must not rest on the simple assumption that information not present in the text is also absent from the mind of the reader.

In making such determinations of mystification from actual texts, and in theorizing a hypothesized reader reading for gist, this analysis makes use of the idealized reader (IR) framework described in O’Halloran (2003), which applies evidence from cognitive psychology and psycholinguistic studies to text analysis in order to distinguish on explicit empirical grounds whether agency is likely to be mystified in particular instances to a casual reader.

4.2 Nominalization in SFL

This section discusses how nominalization has been described in functional terms in SFL, briefly summarizes some of the interpretation challenges which arise when one attempts to identify nominalizations in authentic texts, and outlines the steps which were taken in this study to find practical solutions to these challenges.

4.2.1 Nominalization as transformation and grammatical metaphor

Nominalization is described in SFL as a feature “whereby any element or group of elements is made to function as a nominal group in the clause” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2013, p. 94). The conceptualization of nominalization as a transformation is generally consistent with previous definitions from Sapir (1915) to Chomsky (1970).
As discussed above, CL/CDA work on nominalization shares this transformational view, although it now draws more on Halliday’s version of transformation than Chomsky’s.

This transformational conceptualization attributes an implied temporal element to nominalization: first an element or group is one thing (perhaps in the lexicon), then a language user transforms it into another (in a spoken or written text). The resulting nominal group has been nominalized, and it differs from other nominal groups by what in early Chomskyan terms would be its transformational history, while in Hallidayan terms it is one type of grammatical metaphor (Halliday & Matthiessen 1999). SFL’s concept of grammatical metaphor involves one grammatical element/group being expressed in terms of another element/group, in this case a nominal group. In SFL terms, it is made to function differently. Consider the following examples:

1. **Bulls run in Pamplona**
2. **the running of the bulls in Pamplona**

The clause in example 1 is expressed as a nominal group in example 2, which functions as other nominal groups do, as in the clause *Steve saw the running of the bulls in Pamplona*, where it functions as the object of the verb *saw*. In structural terms, the nominalized group may take articles, be expressed as a plural, etc.

Definitions of nominalization often summarize this type of transformational or metaphorical conceptualization in one sentence and go no further. When looking more closely at nominalization or noun phrase structure, however, (see Chomsky 1970; Levi 1978; Koptjevskaja-Tamm 1993; Siloni 1997; and Rijkhoff 2002 for more detailed discussion), the complexity of nominalization and the resulting nominal groups quickly
becomes apparent, as does the difficulty of identifying nominalized forms in authentic texts. The present study adopts an approach to identification of nominalized forms which provides some practical solutions to these difficulties, which are described below.

4.2.2 How nominalizations were identified in the editorial texts

To identify instances of nominalization in texts, it is necessary to adopt one particular set of theoretical conventions and proceed along more or less functional terms—even a transformational approach requires the use of functional labels like noun and verb, and so such an exercise involves an element of interpretation. The complexity increases greatly when using SFL, which distinguishes between structurally similar elements using a vast network of functional labels. In previous versions of this thesis, I attempted to remain somewhat neutral as to the theoretical nature of nominalization, and endeavored to identify nominalizations partly by structural criteria. The grounding of this thesis in CDA, however, makes SFL a logical choice, since consensus on theoretical and especially structural descriptions of the feature remain elusive.

As noted above, SFL describes nominalization as a grammatical metaphor (GM). Halliday and Matthiessen (1999, pp. 246-248) offer a description of 13 types of GM. Four of these (#1-4) involve a shift from a different grammatical class to a noun, and were considered nominalizing grammatical metaphors (Jalilifar, Saleh, & Don 2017, p. 66). A shift from head noun or Thing to noun modifier, e.g., [x] → the fact of [x] (GM type #11), was also available as a nominalizing GM, but this type begins with a noun form, not a constituent of a different grammatical class, and as such was not considered a type of nominalization.
For the purposes of this thesis, the four types of GM (examples taken from Halliday & Matthiessen 1999, p. 246) which were considered nominalizing are:

1) adjective → noun (unstable → instability; quick(ly) → speed);

2) verb → noun (transform → transformation; can/could → possibility/potential);

3) preposition(al phrase) → noun (with→accompaniment; [dust is] on the surface → surface dust); and

4) conjunction → noun (so → causelproof; if → condition).

Since this analysis is focused on mystification of agency in cases where a Process meaning is compressed into a nominal group, it is the verbal GMs of type #2 that will be of interest.

In addition to these four types of nominalizing GM, Halliday and Matthiessen (2013, pp. 491-492) identify certain cases where an embedded element or clause, indicated by double square brackets, is made to function as Head of a nominal group, e.g., [[what Jack built]] was wonderful; [[for Jack to build a house]] was kind. In these examples, the embedded clause, e.g., Jack built something, has been rankshifted, a shift whereby “a clause or phrase comes to function within the structure of a group” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2013, p. 491).

Embedded clauses can also take the form of Postmodifiers or Qualifiers, e.g., the house [[that Jack built]] (Halliday & Matthiessen 2013, p. 492), in which the embedded clause functions to define the head noun apart from the larger class of nouns which it represents. In SFG, apart from embedded prepositional phrases such as Jim sings better
than John (suggested ellipsis = than John sings), “[a]ll other embedding in English is a form of nominalization, where a group, phrase or clause comes to function as part of, or in place of…a nominal group” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2013, p. 422). This might seem to suggest that Postmodifiers are also nominalized, but embedded clauses are distinguished by their functions in SFG. Example functions are described as Postmodifier in a nominal or adverbial group as well as “Head of a nominal group (i.e. as a nominalization)” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2013, p. 492). This distinction between the Postmodifier function and the function of Head of a nominal group suggests that clauses of the type the house [[that Jack built]] are not nominalized. Similar distinctions among embedded clauses are described elsewhere in SFL (Bloor & Bloor 2004, pp. 164-165; Thompson 2004 pp. 213-214), and so for this analysis, only embedded clauses functioning as Head of a nominal group were considered nominalized.

Both editorial texts were separated into clauses, and each was examined according to the criteria described above in consultation with the major SFL sources cited above to resolve classification problems. Individual instances of nominalization were then sorted by type. Verb → noun shifts comprised the large majority of the total, accounting for 20 of 28 instances in the New York Times text and 14 of 17 in the Washington Post text. Embedded clauses functioning as Head of a nominal group accounted for much of the remainder, with 4 in the New York Times text and 3 in the Washington Post text. These two types of nominalization which compress Process meanings into nouns or nominal groups were then examined along with their co-text to determine whether each individual instance mystified agency for Processes to readers, as described in the following section.
4.3 Analysis of mystification of agency: Nominalization

Whereas a single instance of nominalization may be considered mystifying in CDA studies for its deletion of agency, the interrelation of information in a text required for coherence, via means such as development of a topic or pronoun reference to prior information, suggests that instances of nominalization must be examined in relation to their co-text to determine if the information required to draw an agency inference is present or not (Bloor & Bloor 2004, pp. 214-215). Consider the following examples from CL/CDA work:

| picketing | contributions | the draining |
| coal deliveries | development | removal |
| coal production | (your first) look | the shooting dead |

(Kress & Hodge 1979) (Fowler & Kress 1979) (O’Halloran 2003)

Table 4.1 Nominalized elements and groups in CL/CDA

The examples in table 4.1 each have an identifiable verbal element or clause which may be ‘unpacked’ as a more ‘congruent’ expression of the condensed nominal elements/groups which appear above, e.g., (to picket; to contribute); (someone delivers coal; someone shoots someone dead). In SFL, active verbal expressions which concretely identify participants are considered more congruent than GMs, which may compress meaning, potentially mystifying agency. (Halliday & Matthiessen 1999, pp. 270-272). In mystification analysis, the presence or absence of a named agent of an action, co-text which establishes coherence such as a pronoun reference to an agent named in a preceding sentence, as well as selection constraints on possible inferences, all must be considered.
Regarding the ‘unpacking’ of nominalization and the identification of more ‘congruent’ expressions, SFL offers the following examples of proposed non-metaphorical, here meaning non-nominalized, groups or clauses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>proposed non-metaphorical form</th>
<th>nominalized form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>is impaired by alcohol</td>
<td>alcohol impairment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they allocate an extra packer</td>
<td>the allocation of an extra packer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they were able to reach the computer</td>
<td>their access to the computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technology is getting better</td>
<td>advances in technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 Nominalized groups with proposed non-metaphorical forms
(Source: Halliday & Matthiessen 2013, p. 729)

The proposed non-metaphorical or more ‘congruent’ forms on the left of table 4.2 require some interpretation of the nominalized form as it would appear if expressed more directly using active verbs and naming or suggesting required participants, e.g., alcohol must be impairing a person or aspect of a person.

Here I must add a brief note on the classification of noun phrases such as those on the right of table 4.2. Nominal groups considered nominalized in this way proceed from the identification of a nominalized verb (e.g., impairment from the verb to impair). Nominal groups of this type must be distinguished from technical terms such as conversation analysis, which refers in its academic context to a recognized set of methods. Additionally, nouns such as government and election were not considered nominalized here since they do not condense meaning in a way that can be ‘unpacked’ into a more concrete form like the examples above (Jalilifar, Saleh, and Don 2017, p. 68). For agency mystification to occur, some element of compression of meaning must be identifiable as well as the backgrounding or deletion of an agent, so the loss of they...
in the allocation of an extra packer could be considered potentially agency-mystifying, whereas alcohol impairment construes alcohol as the impairing agent, and would not.

To consider whether the individual instances of nominalization or passives mystified agency for readers reading for gist, each instance was examined along with its co-text. Information available in the co-text was examined in order to determine what type of inference was necessary to recover information absent in the nominalized text. This study draws from aspects of the idealized reader (IR) framework described in O’Halloran (2003), in which work on sentence processing in psycholinguistics and cognitive science is developed into an application suitable for CDA.

The IR framework provides CDA with a set of empirically grounded assumptions about an imagined reader of a text regarding which inferences they are likely to generate automatically and which inferences are less likely without extra effort or specialized knowledge. Some inferences likely to be generated automatically are considered necessary for coherence, including by non-specialist readers reading for gist (see O’Halloran 2003, pp. 135-136). This thesis adopts the minimalist hypothesis (McKoon & Ratcliff 1992) such that inferences requiring additional effort are not likely to be generated.

The IR framework’s key principles are outlined in O’Halloran (2003, pp. 189-191). In brief, they include the assumption that the idealized reader (IR) is not particularly focused on a text, and expends only the minimum of effort necessary to understand it. This reader is predicted to be able to use background knowledge and easily available textual information to generate inferences to fill in ‘gaps’ in the text in some cases, but not others. This distinction allows text analysts to make predictions about which
information is likely to be mystified for such readers—excluding readers expending above-minimum effort—and which is not. These inferences can occur across clauses and sentences, so that in a case such as ‘The dog was run over. He was buried the next day’, the reader can use information from the two sentences to generate the inference that the dog died as a result of being run over. In a case such as ‘Mary saw a dog. He was buried the next day’, however, such an inference is not assumed to be generated since the information in the first sentence (the action of seeing a dog) does not have the logical consequence that the dog may die, as the action of being run over does. A causal antecedent inference in this case is not predicted to be generated automatically because the text is not sufficiently constraining, making the cause of the dog’s death in the second example mystifying. In both cases, the dog’s cause of death is absent from the text, but in the first, the available co-text is sufficiently constraining (and familiar, i.e., describes a situation the reader understands well from everyday life) that the reader is predicted to automatically generate the necessary causal antecedent inference that the dog died as a result of being run over.

Such assumptions about the capability of readers to use background knowledge and co-text to generate inferences were applied to the texts to determine if agency was mystified, as the examples quoted below illustrate.

Regarding background knowledge, the hypothesized reader of the texts discussed below is assumed to be familiar with the existence of the euro and the IMF, and the fact that at the time Greece was in an economic crisis, but the reader is not assumed to have any detailed knowledge of how the crisis came about, or knowledge of the various details of high-level financial and political institutions and their research and discussions.
4.3.1 Mystification analysis of nominalization: The New York Times text

The New York Times editorial was found in this analysis to contain 28 separate instances of nominalization in a 574-word text. Of the 24 cases where verbal meaning was construed as a noun or Head of a nominal group, none were found to mystify agency. The instances of nominalization found in the New York Times text require agency inferences which are likely to be generated automatically by lay readers by reference to the information available in the co-text.

To illustrate how co-text aids in the generation of agency inferences, a pair of semi-adjacent clauses is reproduced below (embedded clauses were kept together with the clause in which they were embedded). The text considered nominalized is highlighted in grey, and all extracts in this section are quoted from The New York Times 2015):

17. The question before the Greeks is [[whether they are prepared to abandon the euro.]]
19. The answer should be a resounding commitment to keep Greece in the euro.

There is a logical lexical pairing of the question named in clause 17 and the answer named in clause 19. The reference to the answer in clause 19, along with its close proximity to the question named in the two clauses preceding it (the question is referred to again in clause 18), makes a set of coherence inferences likely. Clause 19, which does not name the agents who should make the commitment to keep Greece in the euro, is likely to be processed via a connection to the question before the Greeks named in clause 17. If the question is before the Greeks, in the context of a national referendum, then the agents who would be making the commitment to keep Greece in the euro are
the Greek voters, and thus the agency of the nominalized process *to commit* referred to in clause 19 is not mystified.

This type of inference of agency, produced for coherence with reference to information in the co-text, was found to be likely in all instances of nominalization in this editorial, at least at the general category level, e.g., ‘Greek government’, ‘Greek voters’, etc.

There are agency inferences, however, which are likely in at the general category level but unlikely at a more specific level, since the latter requires an elaborative inference and application of more detailed knowledge. This is the case in clauses 33 and 34:

32. The power to make things better ultimately lies with the eurozone and the I.M.F.

33. They have already started an unofficial campaign to influence Greek voters to stay with the euro by making public their terms for maintaining the bailout.

To interpret clause 33, a number of connections are necessary. The agents responsible for maintaining the bailout are the agents who are making public their terms, which by extension must be the same agents who have started the campaign to influence Greek voters. These agents, identified in clause 33 only by the pronoun *they*, will likely be inferred by readers to be the Eurozone and the IMF as named in clause 33. The broad term eurozone, an international economic entity managed through various layers of international bureaucracy, and the IMF, a large institution whose managing director might be known to readers (Christine Lagarde is named in clause 18 and has been the subject of media attention), but beyond this general level a casual reader is unlikely to make an inference in which *they* in clause 33, by coherence inference the Eurozone and IMF, is filled in with more specific information, e.g., which department, which levels
or organs of these institutions, and which agents in them, are campaigning to persuade
the Greek public. Such inferences, referred to as instantiation inferences in the IR
framework, are not predicted to be generated automatically by readers reading for gist.

If certain relevant actions or statements of powerful actors in this case, like political
statements made off the record by German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble and
IMF managing director Christine Lagarde to Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis,
were known to the public (beyond the readers of Varoufakis’s book or the viewers of
his lectures), the motives and interests of these powerful actors, which appear to go
beyond simple debt repayment, might be more clear to readers of editorials like this one,
and might allow them to generate elaborative inferences about the specific agents
which are named in the nominalizations only at the general category level of large
institutions.

Closer examination of individual nominalizations found that, whether or not a text
analyst argues for a clear left-wing interpretation of the editorial’s pattern of meanings
which construct a suffering-Greeks-vs.-unfairly-harsh-creditors depiction of the
financial crisis, and despite the open calls for a ‘yes’ vote and debt forgiveness by the
New York Times editors, closer examination of nominalizations revealed that for gist
readers agency was found to be recoverable in all cases by application of information
available in the co-text with clear logical and referential connections to the
nominalizations in question. Whatever may be said of the ideological character of this
text (see Section 4.6 for discussion), this analysis found no evidence that agency was
mystified in the case of nominalizations. The following section presents a mystification
analysis of nominalization found in the Washington Post text.
4.3.2 Mystification analysis of nominalization: The Washington Post text

The Washington Post text was found to contain 17 separate instances of nominalization in a 532-word text. As in the New York Times editorial, co-text information and application of background knowledge is likely to provide sufficient grounds for non-critical readers to infer missing agents in most instances. In all, only one of the 17 nominalizations (6%) was found to mystify agency. This instance and other examples are discussed below.

As indicated above, this study does not assume specialized knowledge on the part of non-critical readers, but does assume some level of basic knowledge of government functions, e.g., that police have the power to arrest people or that national budgets and taxes are enacted by national governments.

A few example clauses from the text (quotes in this section from The Washington Post 2015 unless otherwise cited) will illustrate the high likelihood that agency will be inferred in cases of nominalization (nominalized text highlighted):

1. GREEK PRIME Minister Alexis Tsipras chose an academic expert on game theory as finance minister.

2. so it’s fitting [[that his left-wing government has now decided to play games with the fate of Europe and the global economy]].

The that-clause embedded in clause 2 was considered an example of extraposition or postposition, where a ‘dummy’ it in subject position serves to move the embedded clause outside the subject position, creating a discontinuous subject (Bloor & Bloor 2004, p. 167). This embedded clause was analyzed as Head of a nominal group which could fill the subject position if the ‘dummy’ it was removed (That his left-wing
government...is fitting). Considering the experiential equivalence of these clauses (Bloor & Bloor 2004, p. 167), and the embedded clause’s role as Head of a nominal group, clauses of this type were considered nominalized as described in Section 4.2.2.

Clause 1 introduces Prime Minister Tsipras as the agent responsible for choosing the unnamed finance minister—Yanis Varoufakis, who is not discussed further in the text. Continuing with clause 2, the reader is likely to infer by reference to clause 1 that Tsipras is the one who is referred to by the possessive pronoun his in the phrase his left-wing government. Specific governmental administrations are typically referred to as possessions of a singular head of state (e.g., Thatcher’s government), and so the logical agency inference required to make the pronoun coherent is that the agent in clause 2 who is named as deciding to play games with the fate of Europe is Tsipras and not the finance minister, who is identified by neither name nor gender. Applying the assumptions of the IR framework to this instance, this type of coherence inference is likely to be generated automatically even by a reader reading for gist, and in this case, his left-wing government is named as the agent of the decision named in clause 2, and so no further cognitive effort is required from the reader than to identify the agent referred to by the pronoun his.

Embedded clauses were often found to contain a named agent in subject position, such as in the adverbial group in clause 18 below. The sole instance of nominalization in which agency was found to be mystified is in a subtle reference to political support in clause 19:
18. German financiers are more complicit in Greece’s debt bubble [[than Berlin admits,]]

19. but the same is true for Greece and its excuse-making politicians — [[which is [[why there is so little support*M for Mr. Tsipras in the rest of Western Europe]]]]. *M=1

The embedded clause why there is so little support… was analyzed as Head of a nominal group and therefore nominalized as in the example finite clause what Jack built (Halliday & Matthiessen 2013, p. 492). The process compressed into the nominal group here is the Existential there is, which appears along with the Existent so little support..., and so there is no mystification of agency in relation to this Process. In the case of support—counted separately as a verb → noun nominalization, there is a compression of the agent of support, i.e., who supports Mr. Tsipras? The following prepositional phrase in the rest of Western Europe suggests something like western European heads of state, but I suggest here that this inference may be problematic on political (and potentially ideological) grounds.

On the surface, the meaning of clauses 18 and 19 seems clear. The authors admit in clause 18 that Berlin’s financial institutions are at least partly complicit in the debt crisis, but revert quickly to blaming the Tsipras government in clause 19. This is in line with other representations of the Tsipras government in the editorial which blame the Greek government for their own crisis, and so clause 19 carries more rhetorical force than the brief and unexplored admission in clause 18 (for a critical view of Berlin’s role in the crisis, see Varoufakis 2016). The reason why there is so little support for Tsipras is, by this account, because Greek politicians are guilty of adding to Greece’s debts. Yet the brief and unexplored term support carries particular connotations in this case.
In this case, the use of an existential expression *there is so little support for Mr. Tsipras* nearly conceals the nominalized action of supporting, which may be relevant to readers here. The question of lack of support is stated as a simple fact; support for Mr. Tsipras simply does not exist in any substantial amount in Western Europe.

When the nominalized *support* is viewed as an action, however, the question of agency becomes significant. The prepositional phrase *in Western Europe* functions to indicate where there is little support for Tsipras’s position. The question of support in Eastern Europe is not raised. It is possible that some East European people, either politicians or citizens, would be more sympathetic to Tsipras’s position, but their opinions are not indicated here. Only Western Europe is described in the clause. Here the reader may infer that Western European political leaders do not support Tsipras—as his political peers, other heads of state may be inferred as refusing to support him—but what about the number of former Soviet satellite nations that had become EU member states by the time of this editorial? Or Italians, Portuguese, or Irish people, who had their own financial crises during which to form perhaps critical views of the EU institutions? Since the text does not indicate a source of information for the claim of lack of support, it is not clear why only Western Europe was named in this instance, or whether the lack of support is on the part of heads of government, the general public, or both.

The question of agency is relevant in this case in view of the possible perceptions of Washington Post readers, since sweeping statements about (possibly) millions of people (but not millions of other people) failing to support Tsipras’s position may obscure considerable conflict and debate. The relevant point is that “there is no such thing as ‘the Germans.’ Or ‘the Greeks.’ Or ‘the French’ for that matter. …there is a
great deal more divergence in character, virtue and opinion among Greeks and among Germans than there is between Germans and Greeks.” (Varoufakis 2016, p. 139)

Readers familiar with American claims about the views of the ‘international community’ would do well to view broad statements about ‘support’ in the mass media critically. Assuming a reader here reading for gist, a reader inferring ‘Western European governments’ or similar as the missing agents who failed to support Tsipras takes a potentially problematic meaning from the text. The failure of the authors in this text to state exactly who does not support Tsipras mystifies agency, since support in Western Europe requires an elaborative instantiation inference. A critical reader may infer from previous political knowledge that the authors referred to heads of state in Britain, France, and Germany by the term support...in Western Europe, but even if this was the intended meaning, there is a tension between official support by heads of state and large financial institutions and popular political support among the public. There may in fact be a suppressed conflict here between this lack of (official) support and public support (if not for the Tsipras government, then more broadly for reducing harsh austerity measures). If indeed official support is the intended meaning and such a political conflict is thereby suppressed, this unexplored use of support may be a case where a subtle omission of agency is carried out according to assumptions and political worldviews of the authors. In any particular case of agency mystification, there may not be grounds for a charge of ideological bias (where ideology is understood as worldview), but perhaps this example can be taken as the kind of potentially problematic everyday use of language that early critical linguists aimed to expose. See Section 4.6 for more discussion of these issues.
It should be noted here that in this analysis, I consider the absences—mystified information—in these texts to be more significant from an empirical point of view than the presences—characterizations and participant roles as described in the SFL analysis. Presences and absences may work together, as noted in O’Halloran (2003, p. 225), as the absence of focus on Greek people’s experiences and opinions is reinforced by the dominance of the EU-vs.-Tsipras narrative, but readers may focus on different aspects of a text, and so the presences may be read more subjectively than the absences. The detection of the latter by the application of the IR framework is likely to be more methodologically sound, since it is judgments of the reader’s likely failure to infer relevant information that can be grounded in data from psycholinguistic studies, not the reader’s likely acceptance of the editors’ characterizations of the Greek crisis.

4.3.3 Mystification analysis of nominalization: Summary

The mystification analysis examined individual instances of nominalization along with their co-text, while applying assumptions and predictions regarding inference generation described in the IR framework (O’Halloran 2003). The analysis found that while nominalization was observed in several instances in both editorials, in all but one case information was present in the preceding text or within the nominalized text itself which is likely to be applied by readers reading for gist in the generation of automatic inferences, so that agency was not mystified in the majority (98%) of cases, as summarized in table 4.3 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Nominalizations</th>
<th>Agency Mystifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Post</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 Nominalizations and agency mystifications in the NYT and WP editorials
It is perhaps unsurprising that agency was not found to be mystified in a majority of instances in these texts, since nominalizations which omit agency entirely, with no information suggestive of agency in the co-text, are likely to require readers to invest greater effort and may result in the texts becoming less intelligible. Studies of text reception have suggested increased abstractness in texts makes them more difficult for readers to comprehend and recall (Sadoski, Goetz, and Rodriguez 2000), and the short length and persuasive character of editorials, not to mention the commercial nature of newspaper journalism, indicates that comprehensibility is a priority for editorial writers. Within this text register, nominalization is likely to function as an indicator of formality or ‘seriousness’, although it is reasonable to expect that agency should not be made unclear to the point of hampering comprehensibility. From a CDA perspective, it seems likely from these results that, while nominalization may occasionally obscure agency in politically or ideologically relevant ways, the ‘presences’ of characterization, evaluation, topic choice and framing, are more prominent in texts than the ‘absences’ of obscured agency. Having applied the IR framework to an analysis of nominalization in these texts, it is time now to turn to a companion mystification analysis of the passives in these same texts.

4.4 Identification of passives in the mystification analysis

Compared to the complexity of analysis required for nominalization, identification of passives in texts is more straightforward, and structural elements are more reliable indicators. The commonly accepted structure of a verb in its past participle form, which may or may not be preceded by the auxiliary be, was taken as the standard identifying feature of a passive verb for this study. The auxiliary get occasionally appears with passives (Huddleston and Pullum 2002) as in Ken got found by the rescuers, but such
passives appear infrequently. The auxiliary *be* may not always appear with the participial verb, as in *Kim saw Ken hit by a bus*, and so a past participle-form verb alone may be recorded as a passive. Standard forms of passives are simple enough to explain, but when identifying them in authentic texts, some areas of ambiguity arise, and these are discussed in the following sections.

4.4.1 Semantic ambiguity between passive and adjectival meanings

One area of difficulty in identifying passives in authentic texts lies in the semantic similarity in some cases between past participle-form verbs which indicate an action expressed as a passive, and those which indicate an adjectival aspect of a noun. Consider the following examples, based on Langacker (1982):

3. *The dish is broken.* [aspectual]
4. *Tokyo was destroyed when John arrived.* [adjectival/stative]
5. *Tokyo was destroyed in one night.* [passive]

Example 3 indicates that the state of being broken is an aspect of the dish, and does not express the meaning of an action expressed in the passive. Example 3 does not accept a *by*-phrase which indicates the agent such as *the dish is broken by John*, and as such in its current form the past participle-form verb does not indicate a passive meaning. If the auxiliary *be* is expressed in the past tense, as in *the dish was broken* (by John), the presence of a *by*-phrase naming the agent indicates a passive meaning referring to the action of breaking the dish.

Examples 4 and 5 illustrate the semantic distinction between a past participle verb which indicates an adjectival or stative meaning and one which indicates a passive
meaning referring to an action. The participial *destroyed* in example 4 indicates a meaning which describes Tokyo’s being destroyed as a state the city was in. Adding a by-phrase naming an agent changes the meaning. *Tokyo was destroyed when John arrived by the US Air Force* is either unacceptable to a fluent speaker, or at least ambiguous in meaning: either the destruction occurred at the time that John arrived, or had been destroyed previously and was in a destroyed state. Adding a by-phrase to example 5, as in *Tokyo was destroyed in one night by the US Air Force*, does not change the meaning, and so only the verb in example 5 can be regarded unambiguously as a passive.

4.5 Mystification analysis of agentless passives in the New York Times and Washington Post editorials

Passives appear in the editorial texts without a by-phrase naming an agent in a majority of cases, with 6 of 9 (67%) passives occurring this way. Stubbs (1996) has estimated that 88% of passives in his corpus of textbooks were agentless, and Leech and Svartvik (1994, p. 330) estimate that 80% of passives in English are agentless since an agent “is only required in specific cases.” This statement implies that agents need be stated directly with passives only in cases where multiple inferences are possible, co-text is not highly constraining, and readers are not presumed to have sufficient background knowledge to generate these inferences automatically. If readers are in fact generating these inferences automatically, this would render direct statements of agency unnecessary in most cases.

To the question of mystification in the case of passives, it is worth noting a few caveats: first, the pronouncements of early critical linguistics that readers are “left in a
situation of helpless ignorance” (Fowler and Kress 1979, p. 32) when agency is omitted in texts underestimate readers’ capacity for inference generation. As noted by Widdowson (2004, p. 31), “the significance of the structure depends on how it relates to others in a text”, and so a passive structure by itself is not evidence of mystification of agency. Readers make use of information previously provided in a text to draw inferences from passives (as noted in O’Halloran 2003, pp. 154-155), as well as previous knowledge. When a resident of New York City asks about his neighbor and is told that Sam was arrested, this resident will not be helplessly ignorant of who arrested Sam. Logically speaking, the New York Police Department has the authority to arrest people within New York City, and so the logical inference is that one of their officers is responsible. Text analyses must theorize the reader in ways that reflect this capacity so as to avoid overestimating a text’s power to mystify.

At the same time, one must bear in mind that there are several possible types of inference readers can make, and the likelihood of these depends on the availability and cognitive salience of information (information must be seen as relevant to be applied to the current situation), as well as the perception that a given inference is likely to be accurate. In the example above, while it is possible that Sam was arrested by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, if Sam is a native-born citizen of the United States, the resident who is told that Sam was arrested is unlikely to make this inference, even if, in this particular case, it happens to be true. Other inferences, such as why Sam was arrested, will vary in their likelihood depending on the listener’s knowledge of the situation.

Since newspaper editorials about world events are directed at a mass audience of news readers who are not assumed to be subject experts, the IR model’s assumptions of
inference likelihood apply when analyzing these texts’ mystification of agency in readers reading for gist. The following sections describe the passives in the New York Times and Washington Post editorials. When considered in relation to available information in the co-text, under the assumptions outlined in the IR model as described above, these passives are analyzed to determine whether they mystify agency for readers reading for gist.

4.5.1 Mystification analysis of passives: The New York Times editorial

The New York Times editorial contains 21 instances in which a word appears in the past participle verb form, of which 8 are passives, the rest being perfect verbs or functioning as adjectives. Adjectives were distinguished from true passives following the examples in Langacker (1982) as discussed above. Occasionally these adjectives appeared to imply a passive meaning in which agency was unstated and possibly significant, as in the following from clause #9:

9. Putting so complex and fateful a question on such short notice to a nation already so confused and battered is fraught with danger.

The adjectives confused and battered carry stative meanings, i.e., the Greek people are in a confused and battered state at the moment. These adjectives appear with the structural characteristics of past participle verbs which appear to imply a passive action as a precondition to the state in which they now appear: the people have been confused and battered by something. This ‘something’ which confused and battered the Greek people prior to the referendum is not stated in this clause, and so even these adjectives could be taken as mystifying agency in a politically relevant way: the harsh austerity programs that crippled Greece’s economy, along with various propaganda campaigns.
for and against the referendum, have confused and battered the Greek people, who are now asked to make the decision as to whether to accept the creditors’ terms.

This image of the Greek people is not spelled out in detail in the eight clauses prior to this sentence, but readers are told in clause 3 that Greek banks have been shut down, in clause 4 that bailout talks are frozen, and in clause 5 that the Greek government was unable to make the payment due to the creditors. Even a reader unfamiliar with the Greek crisis could refer to this information in order to draw an inference that the Greeks were confused and battered by the economic crisis they were living under, which in general terms would be correct. Any elaborative inferences as to why the Greek people were made to suffer like this, or what agents were responsible for imposing austerity on a depressed economy would require more detailed information, and are unlikely to be retrievable from the information in this editorial alone, although it is reasonable to expect that readers of a newspaper editorial on a current topic will have read sufficient news coverage of that topic in order to understand the editors’ opinions. Such an assumption requires that readers will be familiar with various aspects of the crisis and its major social actors, however, and any detailed knowledge of such topics was not assumed in this analysis or the reader response study.

Of the eight passives in this text (highlighted in grey), only one was found to mystify agency. In three of the other seven cases, a prepositional phrase (underlined) named the agent explicitly:

1. The referendum called by Greece’s prime minister is a bad idea
16. the relentless austerity demanded by Germany and other lenders
29. Under the policies currently demanded by the eurozone leaders
In four other cases, information available in the co-text made an automatic inference likely among readers reading for gist:

13. *The referendum question, released on Monday,*
16. *At this point, the long-running accusations filling German and Greek tabloids—that the spendthrift Greeks should be taught to live by European rules*
20. *Ms. Merkel on Monday revived a phrase not heard in many months*
31. *Mr. Tsipras may well be compelled to call for new national elections*

In the case of clause 13, the passive *released* appears in the context of the Greek referendum, which was introduced in clause 1 as having been called by Prime Minister Tsipras. With this information available in readers’ short-term memory, the question of who released the referendum is likely not to arise: the likely inference is that some agency in the Greek government released the text, since the reader knows from previous information in the text that the referendum was called by the Greek prime minister only days before. Even assuming minimal effort, this inference is likely to be generated in reference to available co-text, and thus agency is not mystified.

In clause 16, a pair of embedded clauses describes two accusations in German and Greek tabloids, one that *the spendthrift Greeks should be taught to live by European rules,* the other that *the relentless austerity demanded by Germany has destroyed Greece’s ability to pay its debts.* The pairing of mutual accusations from two different sources, each accusing the other, requires a reader reading for gist to understand this sentence by connecting each accusation to one of the countries whose tabloids have printed them. It is unlikely that the New York Times editors intended to confuse the readers with a puzzling matching exercise, and given the context of the crisis and the information in the previous 16 clauses, an inference will likely be generated here in
order to connect the accusations with the correct countries: German tabloids accuse Greece of needing to be taught European rules, and Greek tabloids accuse Germany of wrecking Greece’s economy. Germany has not been named specifically up to this point, but as discussed in the SFL analysis, the editorial constructs an image of the crisis as a tug-of-war in which the European creditors place demands on the Greek government, and so a reader is likely to connect this information to the pair of accusations in order to infer that German tabloids are accusing Greece of being irresponsible and Greek tabloids are accusing Germany of destroying their economy. The description of Greece, a European country, being described as at odds with ‘Europe’ is likely a political use of the term, reflecting an identification of the troika institutions as representing the will of Europe itself.

In clause 16, Greece is to be taught to live by European rules, and the agent of the teaching is unstated in the clause. As before, the question of who is to do the teaching is unlikely to be confusing to readers given the information in the previous 16 clauses and the tug-of-war narrative, and so the likely inference is that it is the European creditors who are in the position to teach Greece a lesson in this case. Agency is not likely to be mystified, given information in the co-text.

Clause 20 (Ms. Merkel on Monday revived a phrase not heard in many months) includes the agentless passive heard, which does not state who heard the saying ‘if the Euro fails, Europe fails’. The agent in this case may be inferred by logical inference that it is anyone (or no one), at least anyone concerned with the Greek crisis and the existence of the eurozone: no one has heard this saying in many months. The possibility of many people in Europe and elsewhere saying and hearing this phrase is immaterial, since the implication from this statement is that no one has heard this saying from
In clause 31 (Mr. Tsipras may well be compelled to call for new national elections), the previous 30 clauses explained that the crisis had reached a quite serious stage. Clauses 27 and 28 warn that the crisis will not end even in the case of a ‘yes’ vote. Clauses 29 and 30 begin the sentence ending in clause 31. These clauses state that the austerity policies which had already been imposed would increase Greek people’s suffering, in which case Mr. Tsipras may be in the position to call new elections. Given the relevance of the information in the previous four clauses, a non-critical reader may be expected to infer that Mr. Tsipras may be compelled by the circumstances described in clauses 29 and 30 (more suffering for Greek people, an unchanging bleak situation) to call new elections (due to an ensuing political crisis). In this case, the agent compelling Tsipras to possibly call new elections is inferred to be a potential post-‘yes’ vote crisis situation, which is not a reading which offers a detailed analysis of the situation, but in the question of agency with the passive compelled, in this case agency is not found to be mystified.

The one clause found to mystify agency is the following:

3. Greek banks have been shut down to avoid a meltdown;

In the case of clause 3, the action of shutting down the banks appears with no reference to possible agents in the co-text. The fact of the banks having closed functions in the opening lines of the editorial to add details of the extent of the crisis: the clauses following this one state that bailout talks are frozen, and that the government in Athens lacked the money to meet a looming payment deadline to satisfy the creditors. The
question of who may have closed the banks is not clear in the co-text, nor do Greek banks appear later in the text.

The verb phrase *shut down* can be used transitively or intransitively, though in this case, its appearance in the passive perfect *have been shut down* makes it clear the action referred to is transitive: someone has shut down the banks. In some cases, a reader may make a logical inference of agency from general knowledge of the world, as in the case of police acting as agents in an arrest, as noted above. In this case, a reader may infer that bank directors have shut the banks down, since the agent—in an case such as this where the closing of the banks was not challenged as illegitimate—would necessarily be someone with the authority and power to close banks in Athens, a serious and drastic action.

As noted in the nominalization sections above, however, if multiple agency inferences are possible, casual readers may infer agency quite differently, if indeed they infer it at all. In the context of the Greek financial crisis, issues of sovereignty are quite serious, and as the Athens government was faced with demands about how to run its economy by its foreign creditors, the extent of the power that these creditors had may be unclear to readers. Could, for example, German finance minister Schäuble, Chancellor Merkel, IMF managing director Lagarde, or any other foreign agent order the closing of the banks? If the banks were closed by government order as an emergency measure, then was it Prime Minister Tsipras, finance minister Varoufakis, or another authority who gave the order? In the crisis situation of Greece in 2015, the issue of who may have ordered the banks closed is not clear in this editorial. In fact, Varoufakis (2016, p. 190) identifies the powerful agents who closed Greece’s banks as the Eurogroup and the ECB, although this information is not included in the editorial text. Because this clause
seems quite open to interpretation in the absence of this key piece of information, in clause 3 agency was found to be mystified: potentially recoverable to readers with detailed prior knowledge, but not easily recoverable to non-expert readers reading for gist, and so their understanding of agency in this case was reduced.

4.5.2 Mystification analysis of passives: The Washington Post editorial

The Washington Post editorial contains 15 past participle verbs, as identified by their structure. Fourteen of these are either perfect verbs or function as adjectives. Some of these (the recession-wracked, over-demagogued Greek electorate) contain implications of a passive action (Greek people have been wracked by recession, over-demagogued by politicians), as discussed above, although in functional terms they express stative meanings and are recorded as adjectives for this analysis. Even among those adjectives which imply a passive action in the past or present that causes the current state or grants the current aspect, agency for that implied action was occasionally stated in the co-text (recession-wracked, state-run). In this analysis, only true passives were examined for mystification.

The only true passive in the Washington Post text appears in clause 17:

17. Mr. Tsipras’s proposed alternative, which would tax Greece’s already crippled private sector even more to preserve unsustainable pensions, is even less likely to jump-start growth than the creditors’ plans.

The structural similarity of Mr. Tsipras’s proposed alternative to Greece’s already crippled private sector might seem to suggest that both proposed and crippled are functioning as adjectives, although there are semantic and functional differences between the two. The private sector is said to be in a crippled state at the time of
writing. This construal of the private sector as being *already crippled* serves to emphasize the weak economy in conjunction with the reference to Mr. Tsipras’s proposed alternative—to increase taxes in order to maintain pension payments—implying that the increase in taxes would harm the private sector still further.

In the case of *Mr. Tsipras’s proposed alternative*, however, the relation of *Mr. Tsipras* to *proposed* is functionally distinct from that of *Greece* to *already crippled*. *Mr. Tsipras’s proposed alternative* identifies Tsipras as the agent who proposed the alternative. This configuration appears to have a semantic similarity to a phrase such as *Mr. Tsipras’s wise/reckless alternative*, although *proposed* functions differently in relation to *Mr. Tsipras* than such adjectives, where the adjective simply modifies the noun. In this case, propose is construed as an action, not a stative adjective: the alternative is not in a proposed state like the broken bottle, it has been proposed. The phrase *Mr. Tsipras’s proposed alternative* requires a simultaneous association of Tsipras as both possessor of the alternative and, more significantly for coherence’s sake, the agent of the action of proposing. If the reader were to infer that some unnamed person had proposed the alternative, the conflict between the agency of proposing and the implied connection to Tsipras would render the phrase confusing. The dual relation of *Tsipras* to *alternative* as possessor (or associated) and agent is required to make the phrase coherent. Thanks to this close association with the stated agent, agency is not mystified in this case.

In the case of *Greece’s already crippled private sector*, Greece is the possessor of the private sector, and *crippled* functions as a stative adjective, as explained above. The issue of who or what may have crippled the private sector—a relevant question, as noted above—is not inherent in this type of structure: a phrase such as *the ruined castle*
may imply a transitive action as part of its stative meaning (something, such as a bombardment, has ruined it) although it may not (buildings naturally fall to ruin in time, in which case transitive action is not an inherent part of the meaning). Such similar structures upon inspection reveal distinctions in meaning and function, and in teasing out the true passives from the adjectives, words must be considered in terms of their relations to their co-text.

4.6 Mystification analysis: Potential ideological interpretations of the results

As the title of this section suggests, and as should be clear from the discussion at the end of Chapter 3, at this point I can offer only tentative comments on any potential ideological interpretations of the results of the mystification analysis. The general comments made in Chapter 3 discussed the evidence in both texts of assumptions of the values of democracy, the need to safeguard European ‘unity’ under a neoliberal capitalist framework as enforced at the economic and political levels through the mechanisms of EU and other creditor institutions, and the concern for the financial consequences of a ‘no’ vote, upon which the Greek government would have had domestic political support to reject the austerity terms demanded by the troika. In the end, this was in fact the result, although the wishes of the majority of Greek voters were swiftly overruled, and Prime Minister Tsipras capitulated to harsher terms than had been previously imposed.

As discussed above, the agency mystifications which the analysis found related to background issues in the development of the crisis: The New York Times editorial did not indicate who shut down Greek banks, while the Washington Post editorial did not elaborate on what ‘support’ for Tsipras in Western Europe actually meant, nor did it
identify who or what had crippled Greece’s private sector or who had been
demagoguing the Greek electorate. In the latter case, it could be argued that a pattern of
representations of Tsipras as an irresponsible leader playing games with his country’s
fate and failing to live up to his responsibilities regarding debt payments throughout the
Washington Post editorial could support an interpretation that the one who is implied as
over-demagoguing the Greek people was Tsipras himself. On the other hand, this
absence of agency appears in clause #5 of the text, and multiple interpretations are
possible, especially if a reader had previously read in the New York Times editorial
that the troika institutions themselves were campaigning to influence Greek voters. In
this case, multiple agency inferences are possible, and the only clear conclusion to take
from the analysis is that readers are not likely to infer who the editors had in mind as
the missing agent.

As to whether either of these agency-mystifying absences could support an
interpretation that the editors consciously or unconsciously downplayed the role of the
troika creditors in the crisis, such arguments would have to account for the multiple
presences in both texts identifying recession and a debt-ravaged economy as the cause
of Greek people’s suffering. Since the focus of each text is the referendum in response
to the ongoing debt negotiations between the Greek government and the troika creditors,
whose power to enforce Greek debt payments is clear in each text, the multiple
presences simply do not support an argument that such absences obscure the role of the
creditor institutions in Greece’s misery: The New York Times text accepts the
centrality of the debt as the source of the problem, but recommends mercy from the
troika to ease Greek people’s suffering. The Washington Post text blames the Syriza
government for failing to obey the troika’s demands, and argues for a ‘yes’ vote that
would have shown public support for continuing Greek obedience to their creditors. These contrasting characterizations have potential ideological interpretations, although this can only be speculation: the mystification of agency in the case of support, one could argue, rests on an understanding of international support as defined by the support of foreign leaders, which may be very distinct from or opposite to the views of the general public. Public political support in Western Europe, if polls were consulted, might show a less favorable view of the troika’s handling of the Greek crisis, and a more favorable view of the Syriza government, than the Washington Post editors implied. It is not necessary to make this claim, however, since the point is simply that terms such as political support, political will, the international community, etc., are used in politically-grounded ways, which it can be argued express particular ideological stances.

Interesting as such cases are, an argument that the small minority of agency absences which mystify agency in either text are doing ideological work would have to take into account the large number of ‘presences’ in the form of repeated and mutually consistent construals of the major social actors involved. Any attempts to read the few mystifying absences as grounded in a particular ideology would be quite tenuous, as should be clear from the discussion in Section 3.8, and the more relevant observation here is that agency was found to be mystified in only a small number of cases.

4.7 Mystification analysis: Summary

In this analysis, passives were observed in eight cases in the New York Times text and one in the Washington Post text. Of these, only one passive in the New York Times text was found to mystify agency. These findings are similar to the analysis of
mystification regarding nominalizations. Results of the two are compared in table 4.6 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total nominalizations</th>
<th>Nominalizations which mystify agency</th>
<th>Total passives</th>
<th>Passives which mystify agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Post</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 Mystification analysis results for nominalizations and passives

As shown in table 4.4, passives and nominalizations were found on close inspection to mystify agency in only a small minority of cases. Despite the clear political stances indicated in these editorials (both explicitly favored a yes vote in the referendum), and the differences in characterization of the crisis as discussed in Chapter 3, neither text was found to use nominalization or passives in a way which mystified agency in a significant number of cases. It is likely that a high degree of mystification would render texts difficult to read (Sadoski, Goetz, and Rodriguez 2000), and a lack of information from which a casual reader could draw inferences automatically would make the texts quite confusing.

This mystification analysis has made use of the IR framework (O’Halloran 2003) to theorize a reader reading for gist, and make predictions about the inferences that such a hypothetical reader is likely to draw regarding agency in specific cases of nominalization and agentless passives. Despite the potential of these texts for ideological interpretations, the key area of interest for this thesis is the question of the role nominalizations and agentless passives play in deleting or backgrounding agency, and the empirical grounds for establishing such claims about the effects of text
absences on readers. The results of the analysis described above suggest that, whatever these texts’ meaning potential in a socio-political context, when a clear set of predictions is applied to text analysis, the likelihood that any particular nominalization or passive mystifies agency is low. Such results suggest a testable hypothesis, that actual readers reading these texts for gist would be able to infer deleted or backgrounded agents in a majority of cases. This hypothesis is put to an empirical test, which is described in the following chapter, but first a word about the methodology applied here, and its potential to correct for researcher overinterpretation.

As stated in Chapter 3, I am sympathetic to the suffering of the Greek people, sympathetic to the narrative of former finance minister Varoufakis, whose views more closely align with the descriptions in the New York Times editorial, and I am critical of the motives of both the creditor institutions and the political assumptions of the editors of the New York Times and Washington Post. While I am critical of both editorials, I am much more critical of the stance and characterizations of the Washington Post editorial, with which I disagree strongly. Despite this clear political preference, the analysis offered here found similarly low evidence for mystification of agency in both texts. These findings suggest that empirically grounded, clearly stated assumptions regarding hypothesized readers, when applied consistently to text analysis, can correct for individual CDA researchers’ potential to select textual evidence that favors their political stances and overinterpret this evidence in line with their prior assumptions (Widdowson 2004). Methodologies that can correct this potential and provide more objective evidence of textual features’ likely effects on readers, or the widespread and systematic nature of particular textual representations, have potential to strengthen CDA claims regarding what texts may be taken to mean by readers (O’Halloran and
Coffin 2004; Coffin and O’Halloran 2005), and can help further research into how these processes occur.

A more direct way of investigating the inferences readers are likely to take from texts is to present texts to readers in a reader response exercise. Such an exercise involving the two editorial texts discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 is presented in the following chapter.
Chapter 5: Reader Response Study

5.1 Introduction

One common criticism of CDA methodology is that its adherents interpret texts on behalf of actual readers, who are argued to be (perhaps unconsciously) influenced by the very political or ideological content that the text analysts, through their critical analysis of the text’s meanings, have uncovered. But is this actually the case? Are lay readers really less sensitive to, or more easily swayed by, ideological bias in texts than critical discourse analysts are? One approach to resolving conflicts over how actual readers receive and respond to texts is to carry out a reader response study, in which researchers present readers with one or more texts and study some aspect of their reading process or response to the texts. The aim of this chapter is to consider the merits of this approach, and to present and discuss the findings of a reader response study that was carried out as part of the present research.

The issue of how readers construct meaning from texts has drawn sustained scholarly attention since the latter half of the 20th century in a number of fields from literary theory to cognitive science (see Sadoski & Paivio 2007 for an overview), yet reader response approaches have not seen widespread use in CDA studies. With notable exceptions (Murata 2007a; Baker 2014; Fuoli 2016), CDA studies generally do not incorporate direct or indirect investigations of readers’ reading processes or their responses to texts into their methodologies. This thesis incorporates a reader response exercise as a means of testing the hypothesis presented at the end of Chapter 4, namely that in most instances, readers reading newspaper editorials for gist would accurately generate inferences of agency by applying background knowledge and information in
the co-text, even when agents were omitted or backgrounded by the use of nominalization or agentless passives. For this thesis, examining directly whether agency mystification has in fact taken place is considered a key initial step in examining CDA claims about agency mystification, before considering deeper questions about the transmission of worldviews from authors to readers.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of a variety of approaches to investigating reading and reader response, with a focus on some key theoretical differences of these approaches which impact study design and practical application. The chapter then discusses the methodology of the reader response study carried out for this thesis and explains how this study design aims to avoid methodological hazards while keeping focused on the issue at hand. As in Chapters 3 and 4, a final section (5.6) discusses the issue of ideological interpretations of the results.

5.2 Approaches to Reader Response Theory

Whereas CDA research interprets texts on behalf of potential readers, reader response research does the opposite, by directly investigating what meanings readers take from texts. This is not a simple affair, as a text analyst’s reading of a text may be quite different from that of lay readers, whose interpretations differ from one another. As with responding to a painting, interpretations of meaning from narrative, expository, or other texts involve a degree of subjectivity, and reader response research investigates the reading process to examine how this occurs.

To that end, reader response research generally involves two main aspects: some sort of theoretical account of the reader’s interaction with the text, and a methodology in which research subjects read texts and provide some sort of response to them. These
responses provide data for analysis, which can take the form of broadly-focused qualitative studies of what features increase texts’ readability and improve readers’ recall of textual information, as well as narrowly-focused quantitative scientific investigations of brain function during the reading process. Although strictly speaking they are grounded in different academic disciplines than the pedagogically focused studies of literary theory, I include these sentence processing studies here under the umbrella term of ‘reader response studies’ because they have directly influenced the present study. The data gathered for analysis can range from in-depth discussions of texts and individual interviews with readers to sentence read times and eye movement data. Theoretical differences within reader response research are summarized in this section, while the following section reviews methodological applications relevant to the present study.

The issue of how theory can account for the reader’s interaction with the text is a complex one, and research in a wide variety of fields has produced quite different theoretical treatments of the reading process. Beginning with early-20th century studies in literary theory, which were concerned with the teaching of literary texts, and continuing to modern studies within cognitive science and psycholinguistics which investigate brain activity during reading, several distinct strands of research have emerged which attempt to account for various aspects of the reading process. The ways in which readers interpret texts are complex enough, in fact, that reader response has been called “perhaps the most difficult aspect of reading to define, theorize, and empirically test” (Sadoski & Paivio 2007, p. 348).

One of the key areas of debate which emerged in 20th-century reader response studies concerns the point where a theory locates meaning in the reading process, an issue
which affects the theory’s understanding of the role of the reader (see Connell 1996 for a comparison of these approaches). At one end of the spectrum, the New Criticism school of literary theory held that meaning is located essentially in the text, and as such the reader’s role is simply to interpret the text correctly. Such an understanding of the reader’s role can be found in the work of Iser (see Davis 1989 for a summary). In this theory, the key concern for a teacher of literary texts is to teach students to interpret a text ‘correctly’ by applying background knowledge in order to fill in the ‘blanks’ in the text: a text is not a description of the real world, the theory holds, so the reader is ‘guided’ through the text via textual constraints on interpretation, although some inferences must be drawn from the reader’s personal experience and world knowledge.

This theory assumed that, while no reader would interpret a text precisely as its author intended, an idealized ‘implied reader’ could “decode the instructions and produce meanings from the blanks perfectly” when participating in a study (Davis 1989, p. 422). Such a theory allocates an active role to the reader, although the idealized ‘implied reader’ may be too restrictive a construct: readers differ widely in their personal experience and worldviews, and are likely to apply background knowledge in ways which complicate the evaluation of inferences. A theory which locates meaning essentially in the text and presumes a single ‘correct’ interpretation of texts, therefore, was considered inappropriate to the present study.

At the other end of the spectrum are theories influenced by psychoanalysis which hold that meaning is largely located in the individual reader’s mind. Such theories take a highly subjective view of the generation of meaning, and describe the reader’s task as interpreting (literary) texts to suit their own desires and problems as an aspect of an ongoing identity formation (Alcorn & Bracher 1985). While such a theory avoids the
overly restrictive view of meaning found in Iser’s theory and allows individual social
experience to shape the interpretation of texts, it lacks appropriate attention to
(especially non-literary) textual constraints on those interpretations. As discussed in
Chapter 3, the present study is influenced by a view of reading which is informed by
scientific studies of how textual constraints and differences impact readers’ inferences
during the reading process, and so a psychoanalysis-inspired theory is too subjective for
the purposes of this study.

Between these two extremes is the transactional reader response theory (RRT) of
Rosenblatt (1982, 1988, 1993, 2004), which locates meaning at the point where readers
interact with texts. In this view, reading is a ‘transaction’ between reader and text, each
of which play a role in the construction of meaning. This theory holds that texts “can be
validly read in a number of ways” (Connell 1996, p. 398), although not every reading is
equally valid, i.e., supported by textual information. Such a literature-focused approach
is more applicable to the teaching of reading (Brooks & Browne 2012) or English
language teaching (Probst 1994; Hirvela 1996) than to the present study, and it was not
applied directly here. Rosenblatt’s RRT is worth noting, however, since it is the theory
whose treatment of meaning and the role of the reader are most compatible with the
understanding of the reading process applied in the present study. The judgments of
inference correctness used in this study allowed for various responses to be considered
correct—e.g., responses similar to the actual missing information but which did not
replicate it exactly—while criteria were nonetheless established which rejected some
inferences as incorrect, i.e., insufficiently supported or contradicted by textual
information. While some studies advocating scientific theories of reading openly reject
literary theory (e.g., Sadoski and Paivio 2007) as too ideological, on the question of the
location of meaning—an issue which more scientifically-based theories may not engage directly—it provides the most compatible account with the present study.

Another reason why Rosenblatt’s transactional view of reading was not applied to the present study is that, although it incorporates an active role for the reader and does not overemphasize the influence of the text or the reader, “it provides few insights into the role language plays as the reader, the text, and the larger social context transact during the reading experience” (Connell 1996, p. 409). Such relationships are explored in Van Dijk’s theory (Van Dijk 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2014a, 2014b), but this theory features a view of the language user which relies on hypothesized cognitive functions in a way that does not permit sufficiently empirical application to studies of inference generation.

Additionally, while Rosenblatt herself was critical of deterministic neo-Marxist theories of reading, calling them ideological (Connell 1996, p. 410), some theorists in cognitive science go further and dismiss literary theory altogether, along with neo-Marxism as well as critical and postmodern theory, stating “these schools of thought are primarily ideological, not scientific.” (Sadoski & Paivio 2007, p. 337) In cognitive science, theories such as what is now known as construction-integration (CI) theory (Kintsch & van Dijk 1978, p. 365) predict that readers apply background knowledge to “interpolate missing propositions that may make the sequence coherent”, a position compatible with the view of coherence inferences in the IR framework. Although CI theory may advance certain aspects of research into inference generation, its predictive capacity is low, relying on cognitive processes that are hard to observe, such as schemata and propositions (Sadoski & Paivio 2007). Dual coding theory (DCT) is more focused on observable phenomena (Sadoski, Goetz, & Rodriguez 2000), and while it
was not applied to the present study, it offers interesting methodological points of comparison, as discussed below.

As may be clear by this point, the present study was most directly influenced by research which investigates observable phenomena such as inference generation (the data analyzed here) and focuses narrowly on the role of textual constraints on the relative likelihood of particular inferences. The debate over the role of the reader and the location of meaning in the reading process has been outlined because it bears both on the theoretical understanding of readers’ inference generation and on the methodology by which these inferences are analyzed. Drawing from sentence processing studies, the IR framework (O’Halloran 2003) provides a narrowly-focused, empirically-supported way in which critical discourse analysts may judge the likelihood of particular inferences in textual analysis. This theory allows texts to be interpreted on behalf of an idealized reader, but unlike the reader who perfectly applies background knowledge in order to correctly interpret a text, as in Iser’s theory, this theoretical reader is either likely or unlikely to draw particular inferences. When evaluating the inferences readers drew from texts, as discussed below, some theoretical position must be taken in order to establish a standard of ‘correctness.’ As this section has discussed, the reader response theory whose position on this question most closely fits the present study’s assumptions is that of Rosenblatt’s RRT.

5.3 Reader Response Studies in CDA

As noted above, there is a tension to resolve when applying reader response methodologies in CDA, since traditional CDA studies attempt to interpret texts on behalf of readers, and individual readers’ responses must not themselves be ‘cherry-
picked’ in order to support the analyst’s preferred reading of a text. Although CDA has been criticized for failing to properly theorize the readers of its texts, the IR framework permits certain areas of textual analysis to proceed from an empirically-based theory of reader capabilities. Although questions of texts’ ideological impact are compelling, this study rejects the assumption that (even subtle, ideological) “meanings somehow exist as inherent properties of textual signification” which makes them available to “a sufficiently powerful or sensitive ‘reading’” which could then be used as a basis for judgments about “the character and strength of audience response or of probable ‘ideological effects’.” (Richardson & Corner 1986, p. 486) I share the view of Richardson and Corner that reader responses should be investigated directly before any judgments can be made about texts’ meanings for actual readers, and make no claims to a ‘correct’ reading of the texts in question—the transitivity analysis in Chapter 2 is presented to provide socio-political context and to compare the texts’ representations of the situation. This should not be read as an attempt to interpret the text on behalf of other readers.

Richardson and Corner’s (1986, p. 486) study aimed at identifying “particular interpretative conventions” which, when applied to texts and images, produce meaning according to particular conventions. Their methodology involved detailed interviews with subjects about their interpretations of a TV program, and such qualitative data may be useful in identifying such conventions. While the present study is much more narrowly focused, the transitivity study in Chapter 2 offers a socio-political reading of two editorials and their presentations of social groups. It is suggested that this reading is in line with left- and right-wing political opinions, although this is not offered as a ‘correct’ reading of the text. As Richardson and Corner (1986, p. 490) note, “readings
could be offered as ‘givens’ about the program’s meanings or as the result of inferences on the reader’s part. While the transitivity study offered a more detailed look at social actor presentation, neither the political interpretation of this data nor the inferences of agency discussed in the mystification study in Chapter 3 are considered ‘givens’ about the texts’ meanings. In an attempt to avoid the danger of assuming a privileged position in terms of the texts’ ‘true’ meanings, this study modified texts in such a way that readers’ inferences could more objectively be evaluated as ‘correct’, even if their political interpretations—considered beyond the scope of this study—may not.

Richardson and Corner’s view that media studies should investigate readers’ receptions of media texts directly, rather than attempt to interpret the texts on their behalf, has seen some acceptance in more recent CDA studies, although reader response CDA studies are rare. Murata (2007a) carried out a questionnaire study of Japanese and Western readers of news texts on whaling which found that cultural assumptions influence readers’ interpretations of texts. This study argued that CDA research should do more to recognize the variability of text interpretation, a view that in essence applies the variability recognized in RRT to nonfiction news texts. As part of this study, readers were asked to infer agency from agentless passives or nominalizations in texts such as the killing of whales by answering a question such as “Who was responsible for killing whales?” This type of question is the focus of interest for the reader study discussed below, but a questionnaire format was not employed because such a format places the inference question after the reader has read the entire text, making more information available for use in references. Additionally, the questionnaire format invites a higher investment of effort by asking readers to reflect in various ways on the texts they have just read. This study’s design aimed at investigating a lower level of
effort, and so the document distributed to readers was made to look more like a normal editorial text, with the difference of underlined text and numbered prompts inserted between paragraphs. Instructing the readers to skip the prompts and continue reading in cases where agency was not clear, as well as keeping the inference task the same in each case, permitted readers to process the text in a way more closely resembling a gist reading than a questionnaire format would allow.

The aforementioned study found also that cultural assumptions may impact the ways in which readers employ information available in texts to generate inferences. While a number of ‘presences’ in the text could be used to logically infer that Japan was responsible for the killing of whales in question, Japanese students generated this inference less often than Western readers, possibly since it contradicted certain cultural assumptions common in Japan that they were presumed to hold. The readers in the present study all come from countries outside the European continent, though some were from countries that were EU member states at the time of the study, and so cultural assumptions may have played a part in how background and text knowledge were employed in inference generation. With small numbers of readers representing each country, however, and with readers having varying levels of interest in political issues, it was not considered practical to attempt to connect readers’ native countries’ political cultures (most readers had experience living abroad) to their inferences, based on assumptions that, for example, British readers’ inferences would reflect their country’s dominant values and views, such as employed in Murata (2007a).

A comparison of how a country’s dominant values and views may be reflected in the writing of news texts was offered in a related study (Murata 2007b). While offering an admirably even-handed comparison of how British and Japanese news articles on
whaling made use of different strategies, including the use of passive verbs, in order to present the issue in accordance with dominant cultural values—British accounts framed the issue in terms of animal cruelty while Japanese accounts referenced the economic impacts of a whaling ban, etc.—Murata (2007b, p. 741) argued that patterns in representation may enact dominant media discourses, the “cumulative effects” of which may influence readers. While a corpus methodology such as that employed in Murata (2007b) is useful in identifying these dominant media discourses, Murata (2007a, p. 52) is correct to argue against offering a textual analysis as a “unitary interpretation” without examining reader responses directly.

More recently, Baker (2014) also used a corpus approach to identify dominant media discourses on a news topic, and noted Fairclough’s (1989) warning about cumulative effects of discourse. Notably this study avoided assuming what these effects might be on readers: it may be worth noting here Fairclough’s (1995, p. 61) caution that “it is easy to overstate the objectivity of linguistic analysis”. In this spirit, Baker (2014, p. 28) does not “set out to ‘prove’ that the text under question represents a particular ideological position…[but aims] to make sense of the different ways that the text was interpreted by readers”. This study collected reader comments posted in the comments section under particular British newspaper articles as one means of investigating the ways in which readers responded to the articles. In analyzing these interpretations for trends, Baker (2014, p. 28) did not assume a privileged view of the text, or that there was one necessarily ‘correct’ interpretation, rather that “there are potentially multiple interpretations”. Such a view is generally compatible with the flexible view of reader interpretation in Rosenblatt’s RRT, as noted above, and with the assumptions in the present study. Such a methodology involves the interpretation of highly complex
response data, however, which go far beyond inferences of agency, and so a more focused approach was taken in the present study, as discussed below.

Since reader response studies are rare in CDA, it is worth noting the example of Fuoli (2016). This study used a pair of fabricated news stories about fictional companies and a Likert-scale style opinion survey design to investigate readers’ perceptions of trust in companies described as accused of wrongdoing, with the key variable being whether the company was depicted as denying or apologizing for the misdeeds. Such an approach was not feasible in the current study since the number of readers available (27 vs. 282 in the Fuoli study) made statistical analysis of responses unreliable. I also decided not to work with artificial texts since this would have moved my research away from readers’ responses to authentic texts which refer to real-world people and events about whom the readers have background knowledge. This would have raised the problem of distinguishing readers’ (potential) responses to the actual news texts they read in daily life with their (actual) responses to artificial texts in an experimental environment. The texts used here were kept as close to their original form as possible, as described above, with the only modifications of text made for the purpose of generating inferences of agency that were measurable by comparison to the original texts.

In a number of ways, this study’s approach attempts to avoid or minimize problems encountered in previous reader response studies. Graves et al. (1991), though focused on improving the clarity of instructional texts and not a CDA study, attempted to improve on an earlier study’s design limitations, limitations avoided in the present study. The first problem to avoid was in dividing readers into groups, each of whom read a different text. While this approach may seem practical by comparison to medical
trials with control and experimental groups, it also runs the risk of confounding the reading text version with the reader group, and so differences in reader responses may arise due to the fact that readers may differ in numerous ways relevant to their responses. This study’s design presented identical texts to all readers, and so comparisons of responses to the two texts come from the same reader group. An additional danger to avoid is that of asking readers to read two different versions of the same text, which can invite the possibility of readers’ applying information in one version to their response to another version. In this study, readers were asked to read two different texts once each, and were never shown the original unedited versions, so that the inferences they generated about missing agents were not generated based on having previously read the original texts previously. The texts were approximately a year old by the time of this study, so the chance of readers having read the original published versions shortly before the study was greatly reduced.

Having considered a number of reader response methodologies and their potential dangers, the methodology applied in the present study is discussed below.

**5.4 Reader Response Study Methodology**

The following sections describe the methodology used in the reader response study, beginning with modifications made to the text (Section 5.4.1), then discussing the procedures carried out with volunteer readers (5.4.2). The analysis of results is discussed beginning in Section 5.5, with the issue of ideological interpretation discussed in Section 5.6.
5.4.1 Modifications to the texts

The mystification study described in Chapter 4 made predictions about whether readers would be able to infer the identity of agents omitted via nominalization or agentless passives. Initially it might seem logical, therefore, to attempt to test this hypothesis by giving readers the same texts, highlighting the nominalizations and agentless passives identified in the mystification study, and asking readers to indicate who they infer the missing agents to be. However, since the agents are missing from the original texts, readers’ inferences could only be compared to the analyst’s own inferences and not to any more objective information about the implied agents. Media reception studies have attempted to identify ‘preferred readings’ in texts, but these approaches have been criticized for assuming that an agreed reading of a text is therefore ‘present’ in the text itself, while downplaying the role of the reader in subjectively constituting the text’s meaning, noting “[t]he fact that many decoders will come up with the same reading does not make that meaning an essential part of the text” (Wren-Lewis 1983, p. 184).

This note of caution is especially important in the case of inferring agents absent from the text. While a pattern of information present in a text, e.g., evaluative information, may support a reading of a portion of the text (Coffin & O’Halloran 2005), the fact that multiple inferences of agency are possible when agents are absent from a nominalized or passivized portion of text—and that multiple inferences may be considered valid in certain cases, as assumed in this study—means that this analysis would become unnecessarily subjective if a reliable standard from which to judge which agents were ‘missing’ from a particular nominalization or passive could not be found.
To avoid falling prey to this issue, active clauses with stated agents in the two editorial texts discussed above were modified via nominalization or passivization so as to delete or background agents present in the original texts. These modifications (13 in the New York Times text and 14 in the Washington Post text for a total of 27 modifications) produced an alternate set of texts with fewer stated agents that were given to readers. Each instance of modified text was then underlined and numbered, and readers were asked to indicate who they inferred the missing agents to be (see below for details). Readers’ responses were then compared to the agents deleted from the original unedited texts. By not measuring the correctness of readers’ inferences by their similarity to my own, this approach reduced the element of subjectivity and did not rest on an assumption that my reading of the texts was a sufficiently ‘informed’ or powerful one, as noted above. This procedure allowed for a more objective standard from which to evaluate readers’ responses, since in this case, the missing agents were not agents that the analyst ‘expected’ to be present, but agents that actually were deleted from the original versions.

The issue of comprehensibility also arises when modifying texts to make them more abstract. Previous studies (Graves et al. 1991) have found that increasing concreteness, e.g., by reducing complex nominalization and increasing the number of active clauses, “promoted comprehension and recall over the original versions” (Sadoski, Goetz, and Rodriguez 2000, p. 87). It is likely that reader comprehension was reduced by the modifications to some degree, since some modifications resulted in lower percentages of correct inference responses, as discussed below. This is the purpose of the study, however: to investigate whether and under which conditions reader comprehension of agency is reduced, i.e., mystified. This question was considered a basic effect of
nominalization and passivization, which may then be considered in relation to more complex effects which relate to ideology. The question of ideological interpretation of these new deletions was considered a concern best left to later studies, as discussed in Section 5.6.

5.4.2 Procedures used with readers

A total of 27 volunteer readers were recruited from among the researcher’s colleagues and friends via social media. Responses were collected from 16 Americans, 5 Canadians, and 1 Australian, 2 Irish, and 3 British readers. Readers were all adult college-educated English speakers, and many had previous English teaching experience (22 of 27 readers). The modified editorials were distributed electronically in a handout which asked readers to read the texts and note the portions of underlined (modified) text. The instructions asked readers to indicate by filling in a numbered answer blank the identity of the agent (the term used in the exercise—see Appendix B) responsible for the event or process indicated in the underlined text. The term ‘agent’ was chosen here, most in line with its use in cognitive linguistics, although readers were not expected to be familiar with the term, so example answers were added to the instructions to demonstrate the meaning of the term for this study. This is because the grammatical term subject, the SFL term Actor, or the general term social actor were all seen as imprecise, inaccurate, or both in the context used here.

Readers were asked to record their responses only if the missing agent seemed clear to them. If the agent’s identity was not clear, readers were instructed to leave the numbered prompts blank and to “read at your usual speed”. This instruction was intended to elicit a level of effort as close as possible to that which readers would invest
when reading for gist, although the study format of the exercise asked for additional effort by the use of prompts. Readers were instructed in personal communications not to think of the exercise as a test of their reading ability, although individual effort likely varied to some degree, as discussed below.

Numbered prompts were added to the document after each paragraph, so as to elicit readers’ inferences as they read, and not afterward as part of a more effort-intensive processing exercise. Instructions which ask readers to read for total comprehension have been found to encourage very different reader strategies which can affect study results (Graves et al. 1991), and for this study, the inferences readers produced as they read, while investing a near-average level of effort, were the desired result, not the inferences they generated after careful conscious reflection.

In this way, the study design selected an object of analysis which did not require exhaustive questionnaires or interviews with readers as to their interpretations of the texts. Studies with such an approach (Richardson & Corner 1986) can illuminate the ways in which readers are able to engage with texts, but require such high levels of effort from readers that their receptions of texts cannot plausibly be taken as representative of casual readings. Richardson and Corner (1986, p. 490), while taking a detailed qualitative approach to investigate readers’ meaning-making processes, cautioned that audiences’ responses to a media text “could be offered as ‘givens’ about the [TV] program’s meanings or as the result of inferences on the viewer’s part.” The present study attempted to resolve this ambiguity by asking readers directly about their inferences of agency within the text, and noting the complexity of responses which indicate background knowledge and text evidence was quite sufficient in some cases.
but insufficient in others, in which case some readers produced inferences that acknowledged multiple agents were possible.

Reader response studies can be carried out with unedited authentic texts (as in Richardson and Corner 1986), or with edited texts, as is often the case (Graves et al. 1991). The present study also investigates readers’ text processing above the more idealized sentence-pair level (Halldorson & Singer 2002; Linderholm 2002). Such sentence processing studies offer insight into the inference generation process, but do not investigate readers’ processing of information “at the text or discourse level” (Murata 2007a, p. 39). Since it is readers’ processing of authentic and politically significant texts which are the object of CDA studies, the study design employed here aimed at keeping a tight focus on agency inferences while replicating normal gist-level reading processes as closely as possible.

Readers were not expected to have any detailed knowledge of the Greek crisis or referendum, and were given no additional information about the topic of the texts. Readers were not observed during the process of filling out the exercise. This aspect of the study is discussed further in the following section.

5.5 Reader response study: Results

This section presents the results of the reader response study, beginning with nominalization and moving on to agentless passives. The alterations to the texts are discussed first, followed by the criteria used to establish judgments of inferences’ correctness and the accuracy scores. Individual modifications are discussed separately in an attempt to identify any shared characteristics which distinguished relatively easy
modifications (those for which average inference accuracy was 60% or higher) from relatively difficult ones (those for which average accuracy fell below 60%).

5.5.1 Reader response study: Nominalization in the New York Times text

The New York Times text (574 words in its original version) was modified in a total of 13 places, with agents removed and the text altered by nominalization alone (3 instances), agentless passives (7 instances), or a nominalization which included an agentless passive (3 instances). Apart from these modifications and the insertion of numbered prompts, the original text was left unaltered. Examples of the nominalizations added to the text are shown along with the original text in table 5.1 below. In the original versions on the left, text that was deleted is marked with a strikethrough, while text added in the modified version is shown on the right in bold.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>original text</th>
<th>modified version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athens does not have the money</td>
<td>The need for money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece’s creditors should extend their payment deadlines</td>
<td>extensions of payment deadlines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But even if the Greeks vote to stay with the euro</td>
<td>But even in the case of a vote to stay with the euro</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 Examples of additional nominalization in the New York Times text

Readers given the modified version shown on the right of table 5.1 were asked to identify the agents who were ‘the doers of the action or process’ indicated by the text underlined in the handout. In the case of the need for money (modification #2 in the text), the readers were asked to identify the agent needing money, i.e., the deleted agent Athens. After responses were collected, the agents identified in the original text were compared with readers’ responses to judge whether readers correctly identified the
agent as named in the original, via inferences from background knowledge and the available co-text. In some cases this judgment of a correct inference was more difficult than in others.

5.5.1.1 Accuracy judgments of reader inference responses

In judging the correctness of readers’ inferences, some variation in responses was allowed, as readers could not be expected to guess the precise wording used in the original version. The deleted agents tended to be from one of the three main groups of social actors discussed in the SFL analysis, and so a reader response of, e.g., the Greek government, was recorded as a correct inference if the original text named, e.g., Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras or Greece’s prime minister as the agent.

In the case of modification #4, the agents deleted from the original were Greece’s creditors. Reader responses sometimes named financial institutions such as the IMF in cases where troika institutions or their leaders were deleted, and such responses were recorded as correct. Many readers named political institutions such as the EU, European diplomats, or simply Europe as the agents in these instances. These responses were also recorded as correct due to the complex organizational relationships through which the European lenders and political leaders worked together to exercise power over Greece in the crisis, such that the European Union and the lender institutions were understood as representing a collective institutional network. The metonymy of Germany and other lenders in the original text adds support to the perception that in this case, financial and political institutions could be seen as playing a joint role in the crisis.
Averages of reader inference accuracy for each modification using nominalization in the New York Times text are shown below in table 5.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominalizations</th>
<th>Nominalizations containing passives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>74% (#2)</td>
<td>74% (#3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67% (#4)</td>
<td>56% (#8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85% (#9)</td>
<td>33% (#12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average: 75%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average: 54%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 Percentage of correct agency inference responses

As shown in table 5.2, a majority of agency inference responses were judged correct in the nominalizations in this study, though modifications which included passive verbs proved more difficult for readers to infer correctly. This observation is consistent with the data overall. As the following sections will show, individual modifications showed a variation in average accuracy scores, and variation was observed across modification types. Overall reader inference accuracy was above the 60% level, with individual readers averaging 64% correct inferences per reader. Individual reader accuracy scores varied, but many scored high, with 13 of 27 readers inferring 75% or more agents correctly.

5.5.1.2 Characteristics of relatively easy nominalizations

Bearing in mind the distinctions between automatic and non-automatic inferences as discussed in O’Halloran’s (2003) IR model, as well as the role of co-text and background information in supplying the necessary information in many cases, the relatively high percentages of correct agency inferences in the reader response study should not be too surprising when examined more closely.
The instances of additional nominalization given to readers were divided into ‘relatively easy’ and ‘relatively difficult’ groups judging by whether 60% or more of readers generated agency inferences correctly for each instance. The 60% figure was chosen as a minimum standard for accuracy simply because this is the minimum passing grade given in classes at my university, and so by analogy it provided an acceptable cutoff point for this study. As shown in table 5.2 above, readers correctly inferred agents 60% or more of the time for 4 of 6 nominalizing modifications in the New York Times text, and so these four were judged ‘relatively easy’. The following example should illustrate how a combination of co-text and background knowledge likely contributed to correct inferences in these cases.

Modification #2 deleted the agent Athens from the metonymic expression Athens does not have the money to pay 1.6 billion euros due to the International Monetary Fund on Tuesday, threatening default and withdrawal from the euro. The modified sentence reads The need for money to pay 1.6 billion euros...threatens default... This modification was judged relatively easy, with average reader inference accuracy of 74%. The sentence contains the phrase specifying that the money was due to the IMF and the reference to a danger of default and withdrawal from the euro. Readers likely had some knowledge of the Greek crisis and the threat of ‘Grexit’, which had attracted wide media attention especially in 2015. The application of this long-term background knowledge in conjunction with information available in the sentence likely assisted readers in most cases to infer correctly that Athens, the Greek government, or similar was the deleted agent needing money.
5.5.1.3 Characteristics of relatively difficult nominalizations

The case of modification #8 illustrates how agent deletion which allows multiple plausible inferences, absent any significant selection constraints or other information suggesting the agent, can negatively impact readers’ ability to accurately infer the deleted agents. The original version appeared at the end of a paragraph listing the dangers of a Greek exit from the euro. The original and modified versions appear below:

*President Obama has called both Ms. Merkel and Mr. Hollande to make clear American concerns about the effect it ['Grexit'] would have on global finance.*

(original version)

*Appeals have been made* to both Ms. Merkel and Mr. Hollande to make clear American concerns about the effect it would have on global finance.

(modified version)

Modification #8 deleted the named agent *President Obama*, nominalized the action of calling with *appeals*, and expressed the verb via the passive (voice) present perfect (tense) verb *have been made*. This is an unusual situation in which a single mention of the then-US president was deleted from the text, leaving no other information which focused on American involvement or actions by US authorities. In the absence of this information, particularly in conjunction with the ‘presences’ of information elsewhere in the article which focuses exclusively on European actors, it is unlikely that readers would correctly infer that President Obama was the deleted agent. Even if asked to expend extra effort and consider who might have appealed to the German and French leaders, readers might conclude that American financiers, businesspeople, or other
European actors could have made the appeals as well as American government representatives.

This case is somewhat unusual, and may not be taken as representative of newspaper writing style generally. A pattern of such conspicuous absence of agency would render the text confusing. Yet this example serves to illustrate the importance of co-text information and background knowledge in inference generation: without detailed subject knowledge, readers have only their world knowledge and the co-text from which to make inferences. When these are not sufficiently constraining, it is predicted by the IR framework that correct inferences will not be generated automatically by readers expending average levels of effort. Average reader response accuracy in this case was 56%, and this modification was judged relatively difficult.

The results examined here suggest that most readers were able to use co-text and prior background knowledge to correctly infer agents, at least at the general level, in a majority of instances. Agency inferences appear to be more difficult when there is no further information in the co-text about a particular action or event, and when an alternative agency inference is plausible. The following sections will compare how these same readers inferred agency in the case of nominalizations added to the Washington Post text. This text is discussed separately since readers read both editorials when doing the exercise, both editorials are on the same topic, and the Washington Post text appeared after the New York Times text, so all information in the New York Times text must be considered potentially available in readers’ short-term memory, and may have aided them in generating agency inferences.
5.5.2 Reader response study: Nominalization in the Washington Post text

The 532-word Washington Post editorial was modified in 14 places by deletion or backgrounding of agency which moved actions and events into nominalizations (5 instances) and agentless passives (9 instances). The five nominalizations are shown in table 5.3 along with the original text. As above, text shifted from its original position is underlined on the left, text deleted from the original version is marked with a strikethrough on the left, and text added to the modified version is in bold on the right.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>original text</th>
<th>modified version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras chose an academic expert...</td>
<td>The choice of an academic expert...by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his left-wing government has now decided</td>
<td>the decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin has seemed intent on teaching modern Greece</td>
<td>At times, there has been an apparent intention to teach modern Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Tsipras’s proposed alternative</td>
<td>The proposition of an alternative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Mr. Tsipras’s proposed alternative] is even less likely to jump-start growth</td>
<td>[The proposition of an alternative] makes a jump-start in growth even less likely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3 Additional nominalization in the Washington Post text

In most cases, the alterations involved deleting the agent entirely. In the case of modification #1 (listed first in table 5.3), the agent was moved to a by-phrase which may put the agent more into the conceptual ‘background’ of the clause than the original version in which the agent appeared in the ‘foreground’ subject position. While this section focuses on nominalization, Section 5.5.4 below compares the accuracy of readers’ inferences involving nominalizations and passives so as to provide a more complete picture of the characteristics which appear to make accurate inferences more or less likely in cases of agency deletion or backgrounding.
5.5.2.1 Accuracy judgments of reader inference responses

As with the New York Times text, judgments of the accuracy of reader responses in the Washington Post text required some flexibility. In 5 of the 14 alterations, Greek Prime Minister Tsipras was the named agent who was either deleted or backgrounded, and in these cases responses such as Greek government or the Greeks (which could mean the people or the government) were recorded as correct. In instances where the deleted agent was Berlin (#7) or the German led creditor bloc (#6), responses such as Eurozone, EU, Euro politicians or Europe were recorded as correct, as in the New York Times editorial.

In the case of modifications #1 and #2 (nominalizations) and #3 (a passive), reader responses indicated that information in the co-text was utilized in ways which impacted inference accuracy. Instances #1-3 read as follows:

The choice\(^1\) of an academic expert on game theory as Greek finance minister by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras ensures that the decision\(^2\) to play games with the fate of Europe and the global economy is no surprise… Debt-restructuring talks with European creditors and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been broken off\(^3\)…

In the case of modification #1, Tsipras is moved from the prominent subject position he occupied in the original text to a by-phrase later in the clause, where he is explicitly named as the agent who chose the academic expert (a reference to then-finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, who is not named anywhere in the text and only mentioned in this clause). Most readers accurately inferred from this that the chooser was Tsipras himself, though it is notable that not all readers did. Seven of 27 readers failed to correctly infer Tsipras (or the Greek government, which was also accepted) as the agent in
modification #1. Moving the agent from subject position to a by-phrase much later in the clause appeared in this case to offer some support for arguments that this position is less cognitively salient.

Modification #2 deletes his [Tsipras’s] left-wing government as the agent who is described as deciding to play games with the fate of Europe. Only 59% of readers accurately inferred the Greek government as the deleted agent, and of these, a number inferred that it was the Greek finance minister who must be responsible for directing policy. This inference may have occurred since the Greek finance minister is named in the clause preceding modification #2, and possibly because readers connected the reference to the finance minister being an expert on game theory with the accusation that Tsipras’s government was playing games with the future of Europe, a connection that was most likely intended by the editors who make a clear comparison between the two ideas in this sentence. The fact that no readers identified finance minister Varoufakis by name (he is not named in the text and only referred to in the opening sentence) lends support to this interpretation.

In the case of modification #2, an inference that the Greek finance minister was playing games with the future of Europe was accepted as correct, but in modification #3, a passive which deletes the agent responsible for breaking off talks, a number of readers inferred that the Greek finance minister again was responsible for breaking off the talks. The original text names Mr. Tsipras as the one who broke off the talks, although both Tsipras and his finance minister had various powers to represent the Greek government in the crisis, and so either inference is plausible. Of the five nominalizations added to this text, three were judged relatively easy (60% or more readers correctly inferred agency), and two were judged relatively hard (59% or fewer accurate responses). These
instances are discussed in the next sections and compared with the results from the New York Times text.

5.5.2.2 Characteristics of relatively easy nominalizations

In the New York Times text, readers were able to accurately infer agents who were deleted or backgrounded, at least at the general level, in a majority of instances of nominalization, and this result was also observed in the Washington Post text. The example of instance #1, discussed above, indicated that moving the agent to a by-phrase may have reduced reader comprehension somewhat of that agent’s role in the event described in the clause, although 74% of readers were able to infer agency accurately.

In two other cases, instances #7 and #11, a majority of readers (89% and 70% respectively) accurately identified the deleted agents, likely by making use of the co-text and background knowledge. Instance #7 was altered to remove Berlin as the metaphorical agent which seemed intent on teaching Athens that ‘the strong do as they can; the weak suffer what they must’, in a reference to Thucydides. The agent Berlin is deleted entirely here, and this ‘lesson’ is referenced only once in the text, but 89% of readers accurately responded that the Eurozone, EU politicians or other references to EU officials were the agents attempting to teach Greece a lesson by imposing austerity measures through economic and political force. One reader identified history and history repeating itself as the agent, which shows the reader correctly understood the meaning of the reference but failed to identify the modern agents repeating history. Another responded, “Creditors? Doesn’t seem like their place”, which indicated a tension between the accurate impression and perhaps the role that these creditors should
be playing in the situation. Such evidence of tension between meanings can serve to indicate the variety of readings readers are capable of making, and how meanings written into a text may not be accepted by readers, though they may well be able to follow the author’s ideas.

Modification #10 deleted *Mr. Tsipras* as the agent who proposed an alternative plan, and modification #11 followed from that with the transformation of an active clause into a nominalization. Modification #10 was difficult for readers (48% accurate inferences), while #11 was easier (70%), and the two are discussed in the following section.

5.5.2.3 Characteristics of relatively difficult nominalizations

Of the five additional nominalizations given to readers in the Washington Post text, only two proved difficult (59% or fewer readers correctly inferred agency). The first, #10 (48% correct inferences), allowed for multiple possible inferences of agency given the context:

> Mr. Tsipras’s proposed alternative...is even less likely to jump-start growth…

*(original version)*

> The proposition of an alternative\(^{10}\)...makes a jump-start in growth\(^{11}\) even less likely…*(modified version)*

The modifications introduced here ask readers to identify the agent(s) responsible for proposing an alternative debt management plan between Greece and its creditors in modification #10. Modification #11 actually contains two nominalized verbal expressions, *a jump-start* and *growth*, and the judging of correct inferences reflected this. *Growth* in the context of this article is a clear reference to Greece’s economy, and
a number of readers supplied this as the agent for #11, responses which were recorded as correct. One reader identified the proposed alternative as the agent in this case, a response which was recorded as correct since it satisfies the agency deletion from the original version, a transitive clause in which the alternative is described as (not) jump-starting growth. Had the judging limited correct responses to this inference only, virtually no readers would have correctly identified it, although this would have been overly strict since readers were not asked to compare the two versions of the text and comment on the transformations, only to read the texts as they appeared. In all, 70% of readers correctly inferred either the proposed alternative or Greece’s economy as the missing agent in instance #11.

It was with modification #10 that a majority of readers did not correctly infer the deleted agent (48% correct responses). The altered sentence continues by contrasting the proposed alternative with the debt plans of the creditors:

\[
\text{The proposition of an alternative,}^{10} \text{ one which would tax Greece’s already crippled private sector even more to preserve unsustainable pensions, makes a jump-start in growth}^{11} \text{ even less likely than the creditors’ plans do. (modified version)}
\]

The contrast with the creditors’ plans can provide information necessary for an inference that, by process of elimination, the alternative plan must have come from the Greek government’s side. This instance appears near the end of the second editorial that readers saw, and so the conflict between the Greek government and the troika institutions and the EU would likely have been in readers’ short-term memory. The small percentage of accurate responses here, then, may be explained by the additional processing effort required to read this sentence to the end (past modification #11, which
also prompted readers for a response), deduce by process of elimination that the deleted agent in #10 was the Greek government, and record that answer. It is possible that readers read the editorials at something like a normal speed, investing only the minimal required effort to process the information in the articles in line with the assumptions in the IR model. Since it was not possible in this case to observe readers while carrying out the exercise, it is impossible to say whether this is the case (but see the summary section below for more comment on readers’ experiences of the exercise).

Five readers who generated incorrect inferences in this case inferred that it was the creditors who proposed the alternative plan, an inference which is in apparent contrast to the content of the sentence following modification #10, but importantly, this contrast only becomes clear on a careful reading in which readers read to the end of the sentence and make a logical deduction from all the available information. The fact that five of 27 readers made the same error suggests that at least these readers did not go to this extra effort, and simply stopped at each numbered prompt and made a guess as to the deleted agent. Such an approach would be in line with the instructions as given to readers and suggests only minimal processing effort was invested, but see the summary below for some caveats regarding the conclusions from this analysis.

The other difficult instance of nominalization in the Washington Post text was #2, as discussed above. The shift from an active clause reading *his* [Tsipras’s] *left-wing government has decided* to a nominalized version reading *the decision to play games with the fate of Europe* deleted the agent and left readers free to infer that various groups were the ones described as playing games. In this instance only 59% of readers accurately inferred that members of the Syriza government were the deleted agents.
5.5.3 Summary of reader inferences from nominalizations

This reader response study aimed to empirically test readers’ performance in accurately inferring the identity of agents deleted from a text when reading for gist. Overall, readers accurately inferred agency in a majority of cases, at least at the general level of large institutions or sides of a conflict, when agency was deleted or backgrounded via nominalization. Modifications that combined nominalization with passive verbs proved more difficult for readers, and average inference accuracy was lower. Results for the New York Times and Washington Post text for each instance of a modified nominalization are compared in table 5.4 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#2 (74%)</td>
<td>#3 (74%)</td>
<td>#1 (74%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 (67%)</td>
<td>#8 (56%)</td>
<td>#2 (59%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9 (85%)</td>
<td>#12 (33%)</td>
<td>#7 (89%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>#10 (48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>#11 (70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average: 75%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average: 54%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average: 68%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4 Comparison of reader inference accuracy in modified editorials (numbered by modification #)

Table 5.4 shows that in this study, the introduced nominalizations which deleted or backgrounded agents named explicitly in the original text were inferred accurately in a majority of cases by non-expert readers reading for gist. While deleted agents appear to be recoverable by readers in several cases, accuracy scores varied, indicating readers’ ability to infer missing agents was impacted by the textual variables in each case. A
combination of passives with nominalization appears to have resulted in the greatest
difficulty for readers, perhaps by a greater degree of abstraction.

Careful examination of reader responses indicates that the presence of a named agent in
a by-phrase later in the same sentence may aid in inference generation, although the
movement of an agent, or other information which might aid in identifying agency, to a
point later in the same sentence may reduce readers’ ability to accurately put this
information to use in automatic inferences when reading for gist. The existence of
multiple agents who may have carried out a particular action appears to permit a
number of inaccurate inferences, even when information is available in the sentence
that might contradict these inferences on a more careful reading.

The accuracy scores recorded here were for modifications to the original texts which
introduced additional nominalization and passives to those analyzed in Chapter 4 above.
While these modifications do not measure readers’ ability to recover agents missing
from the original texts—in which virtually no missing agents were predicted to be
mystified to readers—they do measure readers’ performance in recovering deleted
agents beyond the requirements of the original texts. The fact that 60% or more readers
accurately inferred even these additional deleted agents in the case of a majority of
nominalizing modifications (7 of 11) suggests readers have a certain facility with
applying textual information and background knowledge to interpret abstract
formulations when reading. Since these modifications were added to the texts as a more
objectively assessable test of how agency deletion impacted inference performance, it is
plausible that readers’ inference performance in most cases of nonmodified texts—
which must not be too confusing or abstract for readers to make sense of—is higher
than that which was observed here.
Before drawing any larger conclusions about ‘average’ readers, however, I must point out that 22 of the 27 readers in this study had professional English teaching experience at the time of the study, and so they may have read texts such as these, which were offered in connection with a linguistic study, with more attention to linguistic details than readers without such experience. Also, while some evidence as discussed above suggests that some readers invested something like a minimum effort while reading these texts, readers were not observed during the study and their effort cannot be assumed to be minimal in all cases. Further studies will need to be carefully crafted to minimize the uncertainty regarding readers’ effort levels, as well as to ensure that readers may ask for clarification more directly when needed. For comments on political and ideological interpretations of this study’s results, please see Section 5.6.

5.5.4 Reader response study: Agentless passives

As part of the reader response study discussed in Chapter 3, the two pre-vote editorial texts were modified in several places and a number of agentless passives were introduced by rewriting active clauses as passives and/or deleting the agents named in the original. The modified texts were distributed to volunteer readers who were asked to read both editorials and, when encountering a numbered prompt indicating a phrase or clause with a deleted agent, to record the likely agent who carried out the action described in the underlined text. Examples of the original clauses and the modified versions given to readers are shown in table 5.5 below.
In each case, the original text provides a named agent which can be compared to reader responses in order to judge whether readers accurately inferred the agent of the action expressed in the passive. As with nominalization, some flexibility was allowed in judgments of accuracy, e.g., if the original clause named Prime Minister Tsipras as the agent and a reader named ‘the Greek government’ as the missing agent, this response was recorded as correct.

In the New York Times text, agents were deleted in passive phrases which appeared alongside nominalizations, such as the relentless austerity being demanded of Greece, in three instances. A further seven agentless passives not involving nominalization were also introduced, for a total of ten instances where passives played a role in the deletion of agents who were named in the original text. Another nine agentless passives were introduced to the Washington Post text. Readers’ performance in inferring the missing agents in these 18 instances is discussed below.

5.5.4.1 Reader response results: Agentless passives in the New York Times text

The ten agents deleted from the New York Times editorial included three references to Prime Minister Tsipras, six references to Greece’s creditors including one reference to Chancellor Merkel, and one reference to then-US President Obama. The average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>original text</th>
<th>modified version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the relentless austerity demanded of Greece by Germany and other lenders</td>
<td>the relentless austerity being demanded of Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They would make a far stronger case</td>
<td>A far stronger case would be made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Tsipras is urging them to vote “no”.</td>
<td>Greek voters are being urged to vote “no.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creditors softened their terms somewhat</td>
<td>terms were softened somewhat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.5 Examples of new passives introduced to the editorial texts
accuracy scores of 27 readers in inferring and naming these agents is compared to their performance inferring agents in cases of nominalization in table 5.6 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominalizations appearing with passives</th>
<th>Nominalizations</th>
<th>Agentless passives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>74% (#2)</td>
<td>74% (#3)</td>
<td>78% (#1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67% (#4)</td>
<td>56% (#8)</td>
<td>19% (#5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85% (#9)</td>
<td>33% (#12)</td>
<td>81% (#6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>44% (#7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>89% (#10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>78% (#11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>56% (#13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average: 75%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average: 54%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average: 64%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.6 Percentage of correct agency inference responses (New York Times text)

The results in table 5.6 show that the average accuracy of reader responses in inferring agency was highest in the case of nominalization, while modifications involving passives proved more difficult. Given the small number of modifications in this study, it is better to consider the variations in the co-text which may have impacted each inference’s average accuracy score, rather than attempt to draw broader conclusions about agency deletion via nominalization vs. passives. The following sections compare the relatively easy instances to the relatively hard ones in order to make some observations about what may have contributed to the relative ease or difficulty of readers in inferring the missing agents.
5.5.4.2 Characteristics of relatively easy passives: New York Times text

Modification #1 reads as follows:

*The referendum called by Greece’s prime minister is a bad idea*…(original)

*The referendum that has been called¹ is a bad idea*…(modified version)

In the modified version the underlined text asks readers to identify the agent who called the referendum. Accepting responses like *Greek government* as correct, 21 of 27 (78%) of readers correctly inferred the agent. This particular agency deletion might have been difficult for readers given that the original names the agent in a by-phrase which has been deleted. Since most passives appear without such a phrase, as discussed above, it is plausible that writers only include them when they feel necessary to state the agent for clarity’s sake. This modification simply removed the extra phrase naming the agent that the writer originally included, and so we may infer that reader accuracy in the case of passives normally would be higher. Considering the extra difficulty of this exercise, it is notable that even in this case 78% of readers correctly inferred even a deleted agent which the author may have felt necessary to name. In this case, any background knowledge the readers had of the referendum or the Greek crisis may have helped fill in the gap, although a referendum is the subject of the sentence, something which can only be called by governments, and so it is likely that this selection restriction limited the number of plausible inferences. Readers did not receive the exercise containing this text until over a year after the 2015 referendum, but the headline ‘Greece’s future, and the Euro’s, along with co-text visible discussing Greece in the opening paragraph, likely provided the co-text clues as to which country’s government was likely responsible.
Background knowledge of referendums being popular votes called by governments would have sufficed to cue readers to identify the Greek government as the likely agent, since only this organization would have the power to call a referendum. The naming of Prime Minister Tsipras himself would have required perhaps more detailed background knowledge of the issue. The agent was correctly inferred at the general level in many responses, but identifying agency at the more specific individual level may have required an elaborative instantiation reference given the co-text. Such a distinction should be borne in mind when considering the high number of correct inferences in this reader study. A majority of inferences were judged correct, but at the general level since institutions were treated as identical to their leaders. On the other hand, describing agency at a general level is common in the original text itself, which names the Greeks, the eurozone leaders, Greece’s creditors and other groups as collective agents.

The highest percentage of correct responses was recorded for instance #10, which appears in the second-last paragraph of the text:

*Under the policies currently demanded by the eurozone leaders…* (original)

*Under the policies currently being demanded*\(^{10}\)…(modified version)

Instance #10 asks readers to infer the person or group demanding particular economic policies in Greece. In this instance, 24 of 27 (89%) of readers correctly inferred eurozone leaders, the EU, creditors, or similar as those demanding the policies. This agency deletion appears toward the end of the text, and it is possible that the discussion of the IMF and EU creditor institutions in the text prior to this, along with any previous knowledge of the Greek crisis, provided the necessary information for readers to
correctly infer that these institutions are the agents who are making policy demands of Greece.

Of the 27 volunteer readers, only 12 (44%) provided responses judged as correct for modification #7, which deleted Ms. Merkel as the agent described in the original text as having recently revived the phrase ‘if the Euro fails, Europe fails’ at the time of the editorial’s writing. These 12 responses were judged as correct at the general level. Reader responses described the inferred agent(s) as a group such as proponents of the euro or those with a vested interest in keeping the euro happening, responses which showed logical application of background knowledge but failed to specifically refer to the speaker referred to in the original text. Only one reader named EU politicians as the agent, which in this case is a more specific category which included chancellor Merkel. No readers identified Ms. Merkel individually as the speaker who had recently revived the phrase, which is unsurprising given the lack of mention of this detail anywhere else in the editorial.

Despite recording such general-level responses as correct (Ms. Merkel was acting as a leading European politician with a vested interest in maintaining the integrity of the Eurozone), this modification appears to have prevented a majority of readers from making even a vaguely correct agency inference, and only 44% of readers correctly inferred a pro-EU person or group was the likely speaker. It is likely that the lack of any mention of Ms. Merkel herself having made the pro-EU statement elsewhere in the editorial prevented readers from inferring that she was the deleted agent.
Readers inferred agency correctly at a rate over the 60% threshold in five of ten modifications which included passives in the New York Times text. In the case of modifications #1-3, Prime Minister Tsipras and his government were deleted as agents from the opening paragraphs of the editorial, depriving readers of the co-text which identified Tsipras as the man responsible for calling the referendum. Even in the absence of these three active roles originally naming the Greek government as agents, readers were able to infer them in modification #3, which read as follows:

So, confronted with conditions from the lenders that he dismissed as ‘insulting’,
Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras made the surprise announcement on Saturday…

So, confronted with conditions from the lenders that he dismissed as ‘insulting’,
a surprise announcement was made on Saturday…

Instance #3 modified the sentence in a way which violates the original text’s use of pronouns, by deleting Tsipras from the sentence despite the use of the pronoun he in the opening clause. In this particular case readers were given a sentence which not only failed to provide information about agency, but provided an unclear pronoun reference unconnected to any noun. The first few sentences of the modified text discuss Tsipras’s actions without naming him directly at all, and so his agency might have been mystified as a result.

When reading these sentences, however, a majority of readers correctly inferred the Greek government was the missing agent in modifications #1 and #2 (78% and 74%, respectively) and in #3 (74%). Absent any co-text which named agents for these actions, the co-text which described the crisis (Greek banks being shut, bailout talks frozen) along with the headline ‘Greece’s future, and the Euro’s’ likely provided enough
context to enable readers to indirectly connect this information to their prior knowledge of the referendum, or the fact that national referenda are called by governments, connections which enabled them to correctly infer agency in a majority of cases. As discussed above, when co-text provides information indicating or implying agency, and when alternate inferences of agency are excluded (only the Greek government could call a national referendum in Greece), then deleted agents are more likely to be inferred correctly.

### 5.5.4.3 Characteristics of relatively difficult passives: New York Times text

Three of the seven passives introduced to this text proved relatively difficult for readers, where inference accuracy was recorded at 19% (instance #5), 44% (#7), and 56% (#13). Instance #5 involved a transformation of an active clause into a passive which created an implication that *someone* or *anyone* may be the missing agent:

\[
\text{At the very least, Greece’s creditors should extend their payment deadlines long enough to hear what the Greek voters say. (original text)}
\]

\[
\text{At the very least, extensions of payment deadlines}^4 \text{ should allow what the Greek voters say} \text{ to be heard}.^5 \text{ (modified version)}
\]

The transformation from the active to the passive in instance #5 proved the most difficult inference in either text for readers to generate, with only 19% of readers accurately inferring that Greece’s creditors were the deleted agents. The option of another logical agency inference allowed many readers (10 of 22 incorrect responses) to infer that the Greek government was the likely deleted agent. This response shows that a significant number of readers felt the agent most responsible for listening to the voices of Greek voters was the Greek government, a quite logical inference. In this case,
however, the original text describes an unusual situation in which voters in a national referendum are seen as speaking directly to foreign powers, not simply to their leaders, since the referendum was seen by the Syriza government as a public call for support: although the power to accept or reject the troika’s terms lay in the hands of Tsipras and his government, Greek voters were asked to weigh in on a matter of great national importance.

The New York Times editors in this case wrote the original sentence in a way that implies that Merkel, Schäuble, Lagarde and company should be willing to change their demands based on the outcome of the Greek referendum, which briefly strengthened Tsipras’s negotiating position by showing his public was behind him. The fact that the creditors did not back down, instead imposing harsher terms on Greece after the vote, in a sense shows that in this case the readers’ incorrect inferences were closer to reality than the original text: perhaps the creditors should have listened, but in the end, those who heard the Greek people’s voices and acted accordingly (while they could) were the members of the Greek government. The presence of a compellingly logical alternate inference in this case prevented a large majority of readers from inferring the original text’s unusual attribution of agency.

The case of instance #13 (56% correct inferences) is similar to instance #3 (74%) in that modifications to previous sentences deleted other references to the same agents, removing co-text that might signal a likely agent to readers in the case of an agentless passive.

*The power to make things better ultimately lies with the eurozone and the I.M.F.*

*They have already started an unofficial campaign to influence Greek voters to stay with the euro by making public their terms for maintaining*
the bailout. They would make a far stronger case if they also vowed to do the one thing that would give Greeks a real incentive to stay and to initiate real reforms. (original text)

The power to make things better ultimately lies with the eurozone and the I.M.F. An already-launched unofficial campaign\(^\text{12}\) is attempting to influence Greek voters to stay with the euro by making public their terms for maintaining the bailout. A far stronger case \textit{would be made}\(^\text{13}\) if they…

(modified version)

In this case, the first sentence in the paragraph retains the clear reference to the Eurozone and IMF, which in the original version connects by coherence inference to the pronouns \textit{they} and \textit{their} in the following sentences. The modified version removes \textit{they} as the agent in the second sentence and expresses the action of launching a campaign more indirectly. It is no longer clear who launched the campaign, and only 33\% of readers accurately inferred that the creditors themselves were campaigning to influence Greek voters in instance \#12. In the second sentence, it is possible that readers were unable to infer that \textit{their terms} referred to the creditors named in the preceding sentence. The vague-sounding \textit{a far stronger case would be made} in instance \#13, although again followed by a pronoun \textit{they} referring to the creditors, appears without the original’s pronoun reference to the creditors as agents.

Judging from the drop in reader response accuracy in instances \#12 and \#13, the coherence inference that connects \textit{they} to the creditors appears to have been impacted by the transformation of the active \textit{they have already started} in the second sentence to an agentless phrase. This alteration to the original text’s pattern of textual reference, even when other uses of the pronouns \textit{they} and \textit{their} were retained in the modified text, appears to have reduced readers’ ability to infer the deleted agents and interfered with
the correct pronoun connections which would normally be generated. As noted above, the modified texts added extra difficulty to readers’ generation of inferences, so their success in retrieving absent agents in non-modified texts is most likely higher than that observed here.

One reader inferred that Greek officials supporting the euro were responsible for the campaign in instance #12 and making a case for the euro in instance #13. This reader’s detailed response made clear that the clear reference to the Eurozone and IMF in the sentence preceding instance #12 suggested that the creditors were the deleted agents. As mentioned earlier, such a thoughtful response reveals a greater-than-minimal investment of effort on the part of that reader, so for more casual readers, the deletion of agency in the case of instance #13 appears to have significantly reduced their ability to infer the creditors as the missing agents.

5.5.5 Reader response results: Agentless passives in the Washington Post text

Agents were deleted from the Washington Post editorial via modifications which included agentless passives in 9 instances. The average accuracy of reader inferences in response to each passivizing modification (AP) is shown and compared with those in response to the nominalization modifications (NZ) below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AP</th>
<th>NZ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>59% (#3)</td>
<td>74% (#1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48% (#4)</td>
<td>59% (#2)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>93% (#5)</td>
<td>89% (#7)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>81% (#6)</td>
<td>48% (#10)</td>
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<td>63% (#8)</td>
<td>70% (#11)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>81% (#9)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>52% (#12)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>37% (#13)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>78% (#14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.7 Percentage of correct agency inference responses (Washington Post text)
The results in table 5.7 show that overall inference accuracy was fairly equal between modifications involving nominalization and passives, even though accuracy varied among individual modifications. As was observed in the New York Times text, the characteristics of agentless passives in the Washington Post text that appear to distinguish relative ease from relative difficulty in agency inference generation are of various types. A detailed inspection of their features, however, reveals similarities in terms of the passives’ relations to their co-text which appear to show trends in relative difficulty of inference generation. The following sections consider the relatively easy and relatively difficult passives separately and consider whether any general observations can be made from comparing their relations with their co-text with observed reader inference accuracy.

5.5.5.1 Characteristics of relatively easy passives: Washington Post text

When relatively easy passives are defined as those for which 60%+ of readers correctly inferred the deleted agents, four of the nine modifications meet that definition. As in the case of the New York Times text, textual constraints and the presence of information in clauses preceding the modifications were likely factors in rendering the agents easy to recover in these cases. In the case of modification #9, for example, where 81% of readers accurately inferred the deleted agents (the creditors), the agents are named in a clause preceding the agentless passive:

*Though the creditors insist on further reforms, including trims to pensions upon which many Greeks depend, the Greek economy had started to perk up prior to Mr. Tsipras’s ascendance, and terms were softened somewhat in pursuit of an agreement with him.* (modified version)
The original wording—*the creditors softened their terms somewhat*—clearly identifies the creditors as those who set the terms of a proposed loan package. Though the agents were deleted in this case along with the pronoun reference to *their terms*, most readers successfully inferred that the creditors were those who were said to have softened the terms. This passive’s relations to its co-text are similar to the relatively easy instances discussed above: the agents are named in a preceding clause as agents of a related action. In this case the creditors are described as insisting on further reforms. This reference appears after the Eurozone and IMF creditors are named in the second paragraph as issuing a final offer to Tsipras, so that even in the modified text with all its agency deletions, the Tsipras-vs-creditors narrative still emerges as the text’s central conflict.

There are also restrictions on potential agency interpretations in this case: an agent capable of softening terms in debt negotiations with Tsipras must be the other party in the negotiations, which the preceding paragraphs have named as the European creditors. The following phrase showing that terms were softened *in pursuit of an agreement with him* (Tsipras) adds further information as to the reason for the softening of the terms. Readers who read this phrase before responding and identifying the agent may have connected the expressed purpose of the softening of terms with the previous identification of the European creditors as the other negotiating party and naturally inferred that these creditors were the ones who softened the terms. The fact that readers were not observed directly during this exercise prevents the exclusion of this possibility, and text appearing prior to, and even after the numbered prompts indicating deleted agents, may be assumed to have assisted readers in generating inferences.
One more factor that should be considered in relation to readers’ observed inference accuracy is the fact that readers read two editorials on the same topic in succession. This editorial appears second in the handout distributed to readers, and so readers encountered this section of text after having read the New York Times text on the same topic. Having read the New York Times text first may have brought the key players into readers’ short-term memory. Having done a bit of ‘pre-reading’ before encountering the second text might be assumed to have a beneficial effect on readers in inferring agents deleted from the Washington Post text, although readers’ average accuracy for agentless passives was not much higher in the Washington Post text (68%) than the New York Times text (64%). This observation applies also to the overall reader accuracy in all instances between the two texts. Readers achieved 64% overall accuracy for the New York Times text and 67% accuracy for the Washington Post text, and so any aid readers may have experienced by reading two texts on the same topic appears not to have greatly influenced their average accuracy in the Washington Post text.

5.5.5.2 Characteristics of relatively difficult passives: Washington Post text

Four of the nine agentless passives introduced to this text fell below the 60% inference accuracy threshold indicating relative difficulty: instance #3 (59%), #4 (48%), #12 (52%), and 13 (37%). As with the New York Times text, the absence of sufficient textual constraints and the availability of multiple plausible inferences were likely factors affecting the difficulty in inferring agents in these cases.

In the case of modifications #3 and #4, the possibility of multiple agency inferences appears to be an aspect of these passives’ relative difficulty:
Mr. Tsipras has broken off debt-restructuring talks with his European creditors and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)… (original text)

Debt-restructuring talks with European creditors and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been broken off…(modified version)

Mr. Tsipras is urging them [the Greek electorate] to vote ‘no.’ (original text)

Greek voters are being urged^{4} to vote ‘no’. (modified version)

In both instance #3 and #4, some readers inferred that European officials or creditors were the missing agents, instead of Tsipras, the deleted agent in both cases. As discussed in the SFL analysis reported in Chapter 3, the Washington Post text assigns blame for the crisis reaching such a dangerous point to Prime Minister Tsipras through repeated active clauses showing Tsipras being disagreeable and obstinate, and refusing to cooperate with the creditors. Clauses such as these are part of this pattern of negative representations: he is described as having broken off talks, walking away from the table when creditors were trying to negotiate, and is thus acting in bad faith, and he is urging his people to vote ‘no’ when the only sensible solution, according to the Washington Post editors, is to vote ‘yes’.

Yet in modification #3, readers were able to infer that either the creditors had broken off talks—perhaps in reference to the power of the creditors, perhaps in response to Tsipras’s ‘playing games’ with the fate of the euro—or that both sides had been responsible. The availability of a plausible alternate agency inference, with no co-text explicitly countering that inference, appears to have allowed some readers to draw the possible but incorrect inference that Tsipras was not the missing agent.
In modification #4, perhaps the creditors were urging the Greek people to vote ‘no’. The fact that two readers made this inference suggests that some readers indeed invested a minimum effort in this exercise, for this inference is clearly illogical if considered carefully: the referendum question asked Greek voters if their government should accept the troika’s terms for a bailout package. Creditors who urged Greek voters to reject those terms would have been acting to undermine their own position. Yet this text did not clearly identify the referendum question, simply referring to it as a plebiscite on the creditors’ final offer, in a phrase which appears after the prompt in instance #3. This indirect phrasing, in the absence of any clear explanation of the referendum—that task being left to the news reporters—allows an illogical inference to be drawn from a reader who demonstrates understanding of the parties involved in the crisis, but in this case misinterprets the position of the parties in a way that indicates a minimal level of effort consistent with the assumptions of a reader reading for gist.

Instance #12 also proved difficult, with just 52% of readers accurately inferring the missing agent. This passive also appears to allow multiple inferences and appears without any co-text explicitly eliminating the inference that other agents were those deleted. This modification appears to have also played a role in rendering the following alteration, instance #13 (37%), difficult. The opening sentences of the paragraph speculate on the disastrous possible consequences of a ‘no’ vote, including a collapse of the Greek economy. The agentless passive in instance #12 removes the mention of extremist Syriza politicians allegedly relishing this disastrous prospect:

_The extreme elements of Mr. Tsipras’s political coalition relish that…_(original text)

_That is relished¹² in Athens…_(modified version)
The deletion of the specific agency reference in instance #12, in conjunction with the following phrase *in Athens*, leaves open the plausible inference that someone or anyone in Athens relishes the prospect of an increase in the suffering of Greek people. The Washington Post editors allege in the following lines that these extremists planned to use such a situation as an excuse to align Greece politically and economically with Russia. These extremists are referred to as *they* in the clause *which they imagine would finance such an enterprise*. The removal of *they* in that clause and the alteration to *it is imagined* left open multiple plausible inferences of who might be imagining such things about Russia, and the elimination of the noun phrase describing these extremists, along with the pronoun references to this group, appears to have had a cumulative effect rendering both passives difficult for readers.

The readers who named ‘Greek citizens’ or ‘people in Athens’ as the missing agents who relished the prospect of increased suffering may be understood to be generating inferences based on the available text, without a deeper consideration of the implications of those inferences. If one is told that something is *relished in Athens*, it is perfectly logical to infer that it is people—people being the only agents capable of relishing something—in Athens who relish this thing. The responses of ‘Greek citizens’ or ‘people’ (which was inferred in accuracy judgments as referring to all, most, or any people in Athens) were recorded as incorrect. If readers were asked directly to consider or defend such an inference, it is likely that they would abandon it on further thought. The fact that these responses were recorded at all reveals an interesting aspect to the incorrect inferences readers may have drawn: rather than infer that some random agent was responsible, readers found it plausible that one of the main groups in the story was the missing agent, and the phrase *in Athens* appears to have influenced some readers to
draw the inference which was plausible and logical when reading for gist only, and without deeper consideration or application of detailed knowledge.

Modification #12 appears to have also affected readers’ interpretation of the passive in modification #13, in which the deleted agent was the extreme elements of Mr. Tsipras’s political coalition, a rather specific phrase not repeated in this form in the editorial. The original text claims that extremists in Tsipras’s political coalition relished the idea of a Greek exit from the euro and a collapse of the Greek economy, which, the editors claim, would provide an opportunity to ask Russia for help and align Greece more closely to Russia. The claim is quite a bold and (in the text) unsupported statement, one which may rest on a Cold War-style assumption of Washington conservatives that any step away from a German-led euro, even at the point of economic disaster for a democratic country, must inevitably be a step toward aligning politically and economically with Russia.

The modified version of instance #13 reads simply that it is imagined that Moscow would finance the Greek economy in such a case. In a form which resembles it is said or it is known, readers in some cases could logically have inferred that the missing agent from it is imagined was simply someone or anyone, although such an inference, if generated automatically by a casual reader, would likely not be examined more carefully unless the point was sufficiently interesting to the reader to demand more careful and conscious thought, at which point the reader’s effort takes him or her outside the parameters of the minimalist hypothesis.

In the case of instance #13, three readers inferred that the missing agent was the writer of the article, the Washington Post editors themselves. These readers assumed that the
passive *it is imagined* indicated a group which included the editorial writers, a logical assumption from the passive’s similarity to *it is said* (people say that, possibly including the writer) or *it is known/unknown* (people know/do not know it, by implication including the writer). In this case, the lack of a clear pronoun reference to an agent or a by-phrase naming the agent does not allow the automatic generation of a coherence inference by reference to information in the co-text. The idea of Moscow financing Greece’s economy is mentioned only once and without reference to any other information. The deletion of the agent in this case removes the possibility of any direct connections between information in the editorial text and the missing agent in the passive, and so readers in this case were left to their own background knowledge to infer who could be imagining such a thing. The only weak connection possible would be by indirect reference to the rest of the sentence including instance #13 and the preceding one, which appear in their full modified version below.

*A “no” could mean financial collapse and exit from the common currency — with a short-term decline in living standards, including unpaid pensions, even worse than that which Greece has already seen. That is relished in Athens, which senses an opportunity for Greece to reorient itself economically, toward a state-run economy, and geopolitically, toward Moscow — which, it is imagined, would finance such an enterprise.*

In instance #12, the accompanying phrase *in Athens* indicates that, in this political conflict, it is the Greek government, or certain of its members, who are said to relish the prospect of economic disaster, since Athens is the capital of Greece. Instance #12 could refer to the people of Athens, such as in the clause *good wine is appreciated in Athens*, but the following clause indicates that Athens is the agent which *senses an*
opportunity to reorient Greece economically toward a state-run economy, an option only open to the Greek government directly.

Instance #13, appearing at the end of these two sentences, allows for a weak connection backward from it is imagined to the notion of Greek politicians aiming to shift Greece toward Moscow’s orbit: considered logically, the politicians claimed to be contemplating this step might be the same ones imagining that Moscow would help them out. The absence of a pronoun reference to an agent, or an agent backgrounded but named in a by-phrase, does not permit any automatic coherence inferences to be generated. The fact that 10 of 27 readers accurately inferred that the deleted agents were (elements of) the Greek government may reflect an above-minimal investment of effort: indeed, the fact that a number of readers found the exercise difficult to complete indicates that these readers—all university-educated, most with English teaching experience, and many with graduate degrees—generated inferences that may not have been generated by readers investing less effort or with less background knowledge, a caveat that must be borne in mind when interpreting these results.

5.5.6 Reader response study summary

This exercise was carried out around 18 months after the Greek referendum, which was only one episode in the multi-year Greek crisis, and so readers may not have been quite clear on what the referendum was precisely about. Some certainly may have been, although what is at issue in this study is the information available in the text. Readers were not assumed to be subject experts, nor were they asked to invest a great effort to consider alternate agency inferences and explain their choices. The variation in accuracy scores, in fact, suggests that many readers did not have detailed knowledge of
the subject of the editorials, and found some inferences much easier to generate than others.

One of the features that appear to play a role in rendering some inferences more likely than others is the presence or absence of references in the co-text to the deleted agent which may allow readers to connect one action to another. If an agent is represented as an agent in an active clause, and a similar and causally or sequentially related event is represented following this in an agentless passive, then readers appear to be more likely to connect action A to action B, inferring that the agent of the first action is the missing agent of the second.

Another feature that appears to play a role is the constraints provided at the lexical level, e.g., if an agent is said to relish something, that agent must necessarily be human, as well as through co-text and socio-political context—e.g., that only a national government can call new elections. When an agency inference is necessary for coherence, as in causal relations or pronoun references, as demonstrated in O'Halloran (2003), this inference is likely to be generated even by casual readers. As the results of the reader study discussed here show, however, when an inference requires elaboration beyond the obvious constraints suggested by the text—who exactly broke off the talks, etc.—this inference is not as likely to be generated automatically.

When the lexical constraints are not very limiting—anyone in Athens can relish something in Athens—especially when alternate agency inferences are plausible in the given context, such as the creditors breaking off the talks, some readers will generate an incorrect inference. Ambiguity in passives, along with multiple agency inferences which appear plausible at a casual reading, appear to reduce readers’ chances of
correctly identifying the missing agent. Inferences also appear to be difficult when a reference to a missing agent is not supported by other references, as in the New York Times text’s single reference to US President Obama: when this reference was deleted, readers who did not encounter any other reference to any kind of US role in the texts were not ‘guided’ to make this inference. Even the co-text following the deleted reference to President Obama, which stated that appeals were made to European leaders to express American concerns, did not appear to ‘guide’ readers clearly enough (44% of readers did not correctly identify Obama as the agent), and the readers in any case may or may not have read that following text before recording an incorrect inference or abandoning that instance as unclear without further thought, as they were instructed to do.

Overall, the results of the reader response study provide empirical support for the hypothesis from Chapter 4, namely that readers are able to infer the deleted agent in most cases of nominalization and passives. The results also indicate that readers’ ability to correctly infer the missing agents is impacted by information in the co-text as well as the constraints on plausible interpretations. These findings are generally consistent with the predictions of the IR framework, and so this initial study may be understood as supporting more broad use of the IR framework in CDA text analyses in order to predict whether and on what grounds agency is likely to be mystified.

The texts provided to readers in this study were modified in ways which deleted agents present in the original texts, yet overall readers could correctly identify even these missing agents in a majority of cases, exceeding the 60% accuracy threshold chosen for this study. The fact that these agents were present in the originals suggests that in most cases in news writing, as hypothesized in Chapter 4, co-text constraints and the
availability of relevant information in the large majority of cases ensure that mystification is unlikely to occur. The readers in this study demonstrated their ability to recover agents at an above-average level of difficulty than that normally required of news readers. This result indicates the power of readers’ ability to apply relevant information to generate inferences, and supports the conclusion that the mystifying power of nominalizations and passives may have been overstated in CDA. The issue of how these findings relate to the more complex subject of ideology is discussed in the following section.

5.6 Mystification of agency and ideological interpretation

As discussed in Chapter 2, CDA research has long promoted the view that texts, mass media news texts especially, carry the power to influence their audience’s understanding of the world, including their assumptions about what is ‘natural’ or ‘common sense’. By promoting certain views over others, it is argued, power abuses and relations of domination are legitimized through processes of ideological reproduction. Such arguments typically rest on the Marxist assumption that ideology itself is constituted by such harmful uses of language. As Thompson (1984, pp. 130-1) argued, “I wish to maintain…that to study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning (signification) serves to sustain relations of domination.” This view presumes that ideology itself is defined by a distortion of reality which critical analysis can expose. It is implied that critical analysts have access to this unbiased view of reality from which these distortions can be exposed and critiqued. CDA researchers argue that ideologies are “constructions of practices from particular perspectives (and in that sense ‘one-sided’) which ‘iron out’ the contradictions, dilemmas, and antagonisms of practices in ways which accord with the interests and projects of domination. The effect
of ideologies in ‘ironing out’ (i.e., suppressing) aspects of practices is what links ideologies to ‘mystification’” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999, p. 26).

CDA researchers typically support these arguments by analyzing texts which appeal to readers’ own preconceptions about politically or morally ‘correct’ positions, e.g., anti-racist, etc., and so “it is therefore easier for these analysts to persuade a reader that their ideologically biased analysis is correct” (Murata 2007a, p. 39). For example, the oft-cited example (Trew 1979a) ‘Rioting blacks shot dead by police’ is used in an argument that nominalizations and passives are used in a way that de-emphasizes the responsibility of Rhodesian police officers killing black civilians during a political protest. Such an argument appeals to the widespread view that racism and police killings of political protesters are illegitimate and morally wrong, and from that view it is easier to accept that language may be employed in ideologically biased ways to present such violence in a more justified way. If critical discourse analysts argued that their research exposed ideological bias which exaggerated the virtues of democracy, say, or minimized the guilt of black victims of police violence, such arguments might not prove so popular.

Yet there is a question to resolve: is this ideological ‘bias’ the effect of researchers’ own views of reality, or are researchers themselves enacting ideological reproduction, which by the Marxist definition assumed in CDA, puts their analyses in the service of relations of domination and abuse of power? How can such a ‘bias’ be defined, and by extension, how should ideology be defined and discussed in CDA? I take the position that there is a tension in meaning over the term ideology in CDA that has received insufficient attention thus far, and this thesis is intended in part to highlight this tension as well as offer initial suggestions of how to resolve it.
This tension in meaning bears on the question of mystification: if ideology is a means of blinding people to the truth, then agency mystification—intended or not—must be doing the work of ideology. By this logic, a widow who states that her husband was arrested, tortured, and murdered, by virtue of the failure to clearly state the agent, may be judged on CDA terms as encoding an ideology which intends to build support for the actions of the actors. The fact that this agent may be well known to both author and reader, or may be unknown or irrelevant, has been noted in CDA, yet mystification is still regarded as key to ideological transmission.

If ideology is understood more broadly and neutrally as something like a worldview, then the question of whether mystification does the work of ideology acquires a more complex question of which ideology and to what purpose mystification is carried out. The findings of the reader response study suggest that, unless one adopts the Marxist view of ideology as mystification, and assumes a higher level of mystification occurs than is predicted by the IR framework or was observed in this study, one may find that CDA claims about nominalization and passives as ideologically ‘load-bearing’ rest on questionable grounds.

Researchers inevitably interpret texts from their own political and moral standpoints and try to persuade readers that the texts are suppressing alternative (i.e., their own) viewpoints or representations of events. Even research which explicitly aims to be “as fair as possible” (Murata 2007b, p. 742) when comparing different representations of events may conclude that texts are ‘one-sided’ by failing to represent alternative views. In the case of Murata (2007b), this involves British and Japanese news reports discussing whaling in terms consistent with majority views in these two societies.
Ideology, then, is described as the process by which alternative views (often in line with the researchers’ own) are suppressed by language use. As Chapter 2 argued, this argument presumes an Archimedian point from which an analyst can stand outside of ideology. As explained in Chapter 2, I reject the Marxist view of ideology as distortion of reality, and favor a more relativistic definition in which ideologies are more akin to worldviews, i.e., a set of assumptions, beliefs, values, etc. It must be conceded, however, that this definition is not unproblematic. In particular, it is limited not only by its lack of descriptive power, but by the problem of explaining the contradictions and inconsistencies in people’s views, not to mention the ways in which beliefs and values interact and conflict in cognition and social life. Despite these shortcomings, this more relativistic view of ideology is preferable because it resolves contradictions found in Marxist views of ideology as class-based manipulation in the service of power, as discussed in Chapter 2. From a methodological standpoint, a more relativistic view also allows texts to be understood as being both produced and interpreted in accordance with particular worldviews, and these processes may be studied separately from the question of how the views expressed in texts may influence—intentionally or not—the views of readers. The analyses offered in this thesis aim to investigate aspects of the former issues, without attempting to draw unsupported conclusions about the latter.

The arguments put forward in CDA regarding ‘mystification’ may be summed up as the suppression of alternative views and conflicts. These arguments raise serious issues of criteria of relevance, e.g., is it ideologically distorting to build a museum of African-American history without representing racist anti-black views? If not, then how is it ideologically distorting to mystify the agency of police in Rhodesia (or modern-day America) and not the former? Such questions highlight the problem of subjectivity in
analyses. Like the American students protesting a kimono-themed exhibit in a Boston museum as a form of ‘cultural appropriation’—the exhibit was actually organized in cooperation with Japanese national broadcaster NHK, see O’Dwyer (2015) for a response—those who argue that the message enacts ideology argue from their views, implicitly claiming that this meaning is ‘there in the text’, or an inherent process of signification.

Claiming that a certain meaning is ‘there in the text’, or a ‘preferred reading’, however widely a meaning may be shared, runs the risk of diminishing the reader’s role in decoding the text, and raises the risk of analysts simply comparing finished products (i.e., ideological arguments, political stances, interpretations) produced by readers of a text and thereby committing the intentional fallacy—that is, assuming the intention of an author and critiquing a text on that basis.

To sum up, the question of whether a meaning is truly ‘there in the text’ is beyond the scope of this thesis. Evidence from CDA research which incorporates a reader response approach (Murata 2007a, p. 52) calls into question the assumption that “a unitary interpretation can emerge from a textual analysis which can reveal the ideological significance of a text”, and argues that “such significance can only be a function of variable reader response.” Yet it is plausible that “readers may be influenced by the cumulative effects of…different discourses” (Murata 2007b). To resolve this difficulty, this reader response study has focused simply on the question of whether and under what conditions readers’ ability to correctly infer missing agents is impacted by textual features and the applicability of background knowledge.
In order to relate the present study to the questions of ideology discussed in this thesis, variations in readers’ performance in correctly inferring deleted agents were interpreted as a type of primary effect of textual and background knowledge limitations. Any ideological effects these inferences might have—such as inferring agents incorrectly and thus contributing to a mistaken view of events, or over/understating the role of certain agents in their situation models—are considered secondary effects beyond the scope of this thesis. The answer blanks were inserted into the texts to facilitate the investigation of readers’ online processing of the text. To go beyond this by asking readers about their opinions of the texts’ depictions of events would investigate second-order phenomena, that of the readers’ political positions on the Greek crisis and the EU, their views of the mass media, etc. To attempt to link readers’ failure to correctly infer a deleted agent from these texts to such broad secondary phenomena would require the assumption that the textual and contextual factors impacting an inference’s likelihood—however often a similar inference was/was not generated—also impacted readers’ ideological stances. Such an assumption would require more persuasive evidence than is available at present.

5.7 Conclusion

The reader response study found that readers were able to correctly infer the deleted agents in a majority of cases. The presence of information in the co-text appears to affect readers’ ability to generate inferences when reading for gist, particularly when this information appears in close proximity after, or previous to, the nominalization in question. The availability of multiple plausible inferences of agency was also found to be a factor affecting readers’ ability to correctly infer the agents deleted by nominalization, much in line with the IR framework’s descriptions of automatic vs.
non-automatic causal inferences in news texts. While individual responses varied, individual nominalizations or passives which allowed multiple plausible inferences, or where the text gave insufficient information to suggest agency, tended to decrease readers’ inference accuracy overall. The consistency of these findings suggests that distinctions between automatic and non-automatic inferences described in the IR framework extend to the case of agency inferences regarding agentless passives.

This study’s assumptions allowed for some flexibility in reader interpretation, but found that information present in texts affects which inferences may be generated, and how easily they may be generated. These results were not taken to indicate support for claims that such ‘mystifications’ as were found here can have clear ideological significance. Although the cumulative effects of repeated exposure to a pattern of presences or absences may shape the way individuals interpret experience and apply their values in constructing and maintaining their worldviews (closer to the term ideology in a more neutral sense), the ways in which this may be done are beyond the scope of this study.

Additionally, this study presents evidence that consistently applied, empirically sound methodologies offer a multidisciplinary check to the dangers of subjectivity and overinterpretation when studying authentic texts. Even when researchers hold clear political positions on a heated issue—I agree with the New York Times more than the Washington Post, yet found more mystification in the case of the former—the adoption of rigorous research methods may allow linguists to reveal ways in which ideologies are reproduced in texts while preventing their own ideologies from clouding their analyses, particularly in the description and interpretation stages.
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter discusses the theoretical and methodological implications of the results presented in the previous chapters. The chapter argues that the methods used in this thesis can aid in limiting the effects of researcher bias in CDA, and that the results presented here offer support for predictions of inference likelihood in the IR framework. The importance of robust empirical methods for critical linguistic studies is stressed, particularly regarding assumptions of reader cognition in relation to social actor mystification.

Selected theoretical and methodological issues related to addressing reader cognition are discussed in relation to the current study, and some current approaches to these issues are considered. The chapter concludes by identifying ideas drawn from cognitive science as offering a potential way forward for research on the potential ideological effects of particular linguistic representations, including the role of social actor mystification.

6.2 The importance of robust empirical methods in critical linguistic research

This section argues that the results presented here offer support for robust empirically grounded approaches to critical linguistic research, from claims about reader cognition to claims about patterns of representation of social actors.

6.2.1 Support for the IR framework’s assumptions regarding inference generation

As discussed in Chapter 2, CL/CDA has attracted criticism for failing to adequately theorize the reader in a way that prevents researchers from overestimating the cognitive
effects of surface features such as passivization. The passive construction serves many functions and may be chosen for many reasons, a point acknowledged in CL/CDA work (Fowler and Kress 1979, p.31; Fowler 1991, p. 78; Fairclough 2001, p. 104). The agentless passive may be chosen because agency is unknown or easily recovered from context, although there is some scope for agency to be mystified in particular cases. The question of how this mystification occurs deserves further study.

Whether mystification, i.e., reduced reader comprehension of agency, appears as the deliberate result of writer effort is a secondary concern if consistent, widespread cognitive effects of particular linguistic choices can be demonstrated. Even if, as the results of the reader response study indicate, agency is recoverable by casual readers in most cases, the potential for mystification to occur is what CL/CDA has stressed as important about nominalization and passivization. As Fairclough (2001, p. 104, my emphasis) puts it, “[a]gentless passives…leave causality and agency unclear. In some cases…this may be to avoid redundancy, if that information is already given in some way. In other cases, it can be obfuscation of agency and causality.”

When distinguishing between passives which meaningfully obscure agency and those which do not, researchers may choose examples which reflect their own biases, and overestimate the effects of agency omissions on readers (Widdowson 2004, p. 31). What is needed, therefore, is the development of methods that help the analyst avoid or at least minimize such overinterpretation of textual features. The findings of this thesis suggest that methods which make use of research on sentence processing in order to distinguish automatic from non-automatic inferences provide a more reliable basis from which researchers can estimate a given passive’s effects on reader comprehension.
The reader response study described above found that a majority of readers accurately recovered agents backgrounded or deleted from the text in a majority of cases of both nominalizations and agentless passives, although the apparent ease of these inferences varied depending on information available in the co-text and the availability of multiple plausible inferences, a finding broadly consistent with the IR framework’s predictions.

Even though the IR framework was developed in relation to non-critical readers’ processing of hard news text, particularly with regard to causal inferences, the findings of the current study suggest that textual constraints and the availability of relevant background knowledge also exert effects on inferences of agency. This finding suggests that sentence processing studies may also prove useful in making distinctions between automatic and non-automatic inferences of agency.

As discussed in the previous chapters, the possibility that multiple agents could be responsible for an action, especially when background knowledge and co-text did not provide sufficient constraints, was associated with reduced reader inference accuracy in several cases. Inferences assumed in the IR framework to be non-automatic in such cases, such as elaborative instantiation inferences, appear not to have occurred even in the case of responses considered correct, such as readers identifying creditors as the deleted agents but not Ms. Merkel, the actual deleted agent. The relation between correctness and mystification distinctions will be discussed below.

The IR framework’s assumptions about inference generation apply to readers reading for gist and investing minimum effort, not reading strategically, in which they may invest a greater than usual degree of effort. It could be argued that asking readers to identify missing agents, as this study did, asks readers to read strategically, investing
greater effort which might inflate readers’ accuracy scores. The possibility that readers invested a greater than usual level of effort in carrying out this exercise, beyond indicating their inferences as required, cannot be ruled out. The manner in which this study was carried out prevented direct observation of readers, as well as time limitations or other strategies to ensure minimum effort. The results, however, indicate that background knowledge or textual constraints provided sufficient information for readers to generate accurate inferences in a majority of cases. This result is consistent with the mystification analyses, which assumed minimal processing effort.

The reader response results suggest that backgrounding of agency, even when the agent is named in the clause, may have negative effects on reader’s ability to easily infer this agent’s role in the action described. Moving the agent from the initial active subject position to a non-initial prepositional phrase via nominalization, as in the choice of an academic expert in game theory as finance minister by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, may have slightly reduced reader comprehension of agency to 74%, compared to an average accuracy score of 80% or higher in 4 of 14 instances in the same text.

This slight reduction in inference accuracy may be explained with reference to the cognitive linguistic concept of cognitive salience: passive constructions, even those which include an agent, may render the direct object appearing in subject position more cognitively prominent to readers than the agent (Langacker 1991, p. 336). Cognitive linguistics argues that the passive ‘defocuses’ the agent (Shibatani 1985, p. 830). If the agentive role of a participant is less cognitively salient to readers by virtue of occupying a less-prominent position in the clause, this may help explain potentially ideologically significant effects attributed to passive constructions regarding responsibility for actions such as rape (Bohner 2001) and police violence (Hart 2014, p.
117), among others. If non-initial positioning of agents imparts a reduced cognitive salience to them in passives, this effect may be exerted by nominalization as well.

Other reader responses proved illogical upon careful consideration, such as inferring that the IMF was campaigning in Greece against its own position, and such results imply that minimal effort was invested in some cases. Insofar as they confirm certain predictions regarding readers’ ability to make inferences from background knowledge and textual information, these results indicate support for theoretical models and methodological applications which have a solid basis in evidence regarding reader cognition. If the evidence of such studies supports claims of large-scale cognitive effects of particular linguistic patterns, then this information would be valuable to ongoing discussions of mass media discourse.

6.2.2 The importance of clear and well-supported definitions of mystification

In CDA, acknowledgements that nominalizations and passives may not mystify agency appear alongside claims of the potential power of these structures to affect reader perception of events. SFL publications speak of grammatical metaphor in strong terms: the “loss of experiential meaning” in grammatical metaphor renders “the construction of reality…a construction of unreality, detached from ordinary experience and hence inaccessible and remote” (Halliday & Matthiessen 1999, pp. 270-271). Grammatical metaphors are said to be “dangerous…they have too much power” (Halliday & Matthiessen 1999, p. 271) because the reader of a text is made to construct relations and recover identities of social actors which have been omitted or backgrounded. It is argued in terms consistent with CDA that grammatical metaphors exert potentially serious effects. Grammatical metaphor is said to have a potential “for making meaning
that is obscure, arcane, and exclusive, …[which] makes it ideal as a mode of discourse for establishing and maintaining status, prestige and hierarchy” (Halliday & Matthiessen 1999, p. 272). Martin (1989, p. 62) warns of an “ideological conspiracy” enacted via grammatical metaphors which, he argues, mask the imprecision of knowledge or the subjectivity of authors’ opinions and inflate implicit claims about the truth of statements.

Yet arguments about the means by which language use helps to maintain this status, or garner support for state abuses of power, a traditional focus of critical linguistic studies, rest on largely untested assumptions regarding reader cognition, mystification being a key example for the current thesis. The evidence presented here simply does not support the claim that an agent not expressed in a text is absent from the mind of the reader in most cases. While it may be that nominalization and passives’ power to delete agency may prove politically significant in certain cases, CDA may have overstated the importance of these agency ‘absences’ while ‘presences’ such as evaluative characterizations may exert more serious and consistent effects. In my view, critics of news texts are right to focus on media practices like topic selection and framing, the treatment of information sources, and the simple lack of perhaps troubling questions. SFL analysis has contributed useful tools which help reveal patterns of representation of social actors and development of themes, which have contributed to these critiques. Yet it may be time to question the assumptions that equate the capacity to obscure agency with cognitively successful and politically sinister uses of this capacity.

Determinations about which inferences are likely to be generated automatically must therefore be grounded on a firmer empirical foundation if CDA is to clarify and improve its assumptions regarding reader cognition. Some approaches to critical
linguistic studies that make use of complex efforts to theorize reader cognition are discussed below, but first, the following section offers a cautionary word about approaching the concept of ideology.

6.2.3 Ideology in critical linguistic studies

The potential of public discourse to shape public opinion has been discussed for some time (Lippman 1922/1997; Bernays 1928/2005), as has the role of the mass media in reproducing popular representations which may have some ideological character (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 1998; Chomsky & Herman 2002). Yet the complex ways in which people interact with the texts they produce and consume, and the role of these texts in affecting people’s social and political views, are not well understood. It is worth bearing in mind the caution offered in Rose (2001, p. 15): “[i]t is meaningless…to speak of the ‘ideological work’ performed by Scripture or any other text. Texts do nothing by themselves. The work is performed by the reader, using the text as a tool.”

Such a position contrasts, but is not necessarily opposite to, the claim of Martin (1989, p. v) that language is “never neutral”, being simultaneously a medium in which experience is described and a part of that experience. Language in use is social action, in other words, and reflects values and assumptions on the part of authors. Without going to the extremes of a consumption metaphor in which the power of texts to shape people’s views is overstated (see O’Halloran 2003, pp. 252-254 for a critique of this metaphor), or a view which understates the role of texts’ imagery, metaphor, etc., critical discourse analysts can study carefully the means by which people’s beliefs interact with both their selection of texts and their processing of them. Perhaps by the
time a news consumer opens an article on their computer or phone, or selects a TV news channel, nonfiction book, or documentary, the ideological work has largely been done. But to what extent is the selection of these information sources dependent upon the work of previous texts whose messages were accepted as true by the news consumer? The capacity of people to consume news critically while still choosing among sources which vary widely in terms of their presentation of information and the views they express constitutes both a significant part of social life and a highly complex subject of study. While it is important to investigate the text-reader relationship from various angles, it is also important not to overstate the effects of texts on readers, or the capacity of theory to account for how these effects may be exerted. It is logical to reject both the assumption that readers are unaffected by texts and that they are ‘programmed’ by them, and attempt to identify how texts affect readers in careful and methodical ways.

Critical linguistics began by making bold claims about the ideological nature of language, yet the nature of ideologies is often expressed in simple terms such as “sets of ideas involved in the ordering of experience, making sense of the world” (Hodge, Kress, and Jones 1979, p. 81). Even recent studies which make use of cognitive linguistic models to describe conceptual differences in linguistic representation define ideology vaguely, as “something akin to ‘perspective’…a particular interpretation of the way things are or ought to be. Language is ideological when it is used to promote one perspective over another.” (Hart 2014, p. 2) Such vague definitions lack the explanatory power to support arguments that particular texts represent particular ideological expressions in a precise way. The persistence of current arguments over whether statements are racist, anti-Muslim, anti-gay, etc. is a case in point. As
politically engaged citizens, we may claim to ‘know ideology when we see it’, but as
researchers we must demand more precision in order to explain how ideologies may be
characterized and identified.

When reviewing work on ideology produced over the past two hundred years, as
discussed in Chapter 2, it is clear that no consensus has emerged as to what ideologies
are or where they occur: they are variously said to be everywhere and nowhere, limited
to particular social classes or not, historical artifacts or inescapable facets of modern
life. Absent any clear definition of what ideologies are, it is perhaps unsurprising that
CDA studies at present offer a brief definition and move on, though work must
continue on developing models to cope with questions of this complexity.

This thesis has focused chiefly on investigation of social actor mystification and
analyses of mystification in nominalizations and passives in texts, along with direct
examination of inferences generated by readers. The conclusions of the study are
necessarily limited in scope, but they nevertheless offer clear support for the
predictions of automatic vs. non-automatic inferences in the IR framework when
applied to inferences of agency. Establishing analytical grounds for identifying
meaningful absences from texts—those likely to mystify certain types of information—
is a necessary and important step for CDA. If evidence supports claims that certain
textual features have likely and predictable effects on readers under certain conditions,
critical linguists may make careful, well-supported predictions about the potential
effects of certain texts on readers. This is an important step toward addressing the
complexity of ideological meaning in texts.
As for the question of whether the mystifications themselves align with any particular ideology, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to outline with any precision what exactly an establishment left or right ideology—the terms used here—may be. The SFL analysis in Chapter 3 showed that the New York Times represented the Greek people more sympathetically, and the creditors more harshly, showing a pattern of blaming the harsh creditor-imposed austerity policies for the Greek crisis. The Washington Post, by contrast, represented the Greek government negatively and blamed them for the crisis, while downplaying descriptions of Greek people’s suffering, at least in their editorials. I have concluded that these differences align roughly with what are typically described as ‘leftist’ and ‘rightist’ ideologies, simply because of the values typically expressed in conjunction with these concepts: self-described ‘leftists’ tend to express a mistrust of powerful institutions and support for the poor, whereas self-described ‘rightists’ tend to express a trust in powerful institutions and value self-reliance in a way that tends to blame the poor for their suffering. Such commonly held views of ‘left’ (liberalism) and ‘right’ (conservatism) must not be taken too far, however, for not only are these views difficult to define, but self-described groups aligning with ‘left’ and ‘right’ themselves are highly varied in their views: “liberalism and conservatism are anything but monolithic” (Lakoff 2002, p. 283). Thus the consistency assumed here between the two newspapers’ representations of social actors and any coherent ideological views is rather subjective and certainly debatable. This is why this thesis has focused chiefly on the question of mystification as an initial step to addressing the mystification-ideology relationship, and provided a brief analysis of the editorials’ political context along CDA lines, without making any stronger claims about identifying ideology in texts.
In methodological terms, moreover, the editorial authors made their views rather plain through their representations of the Greek government as embattled, irresponsible, etc., and so the question of where exactly an ideological effect may take root in terms of surface features was simply set aside. In a phrase such as *the decision to play games with the fate of Europe*, does the nominalization of *the decision* carry more power to create ideological effects on readers through the backgrounding of the agent than the rest of the phrase, with its negative description of Tsipras’s decision? Such questions are beyond the scope of this study.

Before moving on, it is worth adding a final note on the conception of ideology within CDA. There appears to be a tension in CDA between Marxist views of ideology as distortion of reality and a more expansive conception of ideology as worldview. The critical engagement of critical discourse analysts is necessarily reflected in which ideologies (racist, sexist, authoritarian) they select for exposure in texts. A pattern of studies which argue that texts exert ideological effects building support for war, for example, consistently present the idea of ideological effects in a negative light. By claiming an emancipatory agenda, one of CDA’s chief purposes is presented as exposing the distorting ideological effects of texts which use features like metaphor and agency deletion to make power abuses more acceptable to the public. In this way, to expose ideology in texts appears equivalent to exposing manipulation of readers; essentially, equating ideological views expressed in texts with propaganda, a distortion of truth.

I favor the sense of ideology as worldview, but when a text makes a case for war, for example, this view of ideology raises significant questions: Which ideology is reflected in the text, and if it is successful in shaping the views of the public, e.g., building
support for war, then how do representations of truth (e.g., reports by UN weapons inspectors vs. US government claims of Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction) bear on this shaping of views? Did US President George W. Bush or UK Prime Minister Tony Blair mystify the reality of Iraq’s weapons (by reducing reader/hearers’ understanding of the situation) or misrepresent it? As Chapter 2 discussed, the relation of ideology to truth is not a simple one, but a key issue is the relation of mystification to ideology.

In Fowler and Kress (1979), signs at a swim club which expressed club rules in ways which deleted agency (No outside shoes will be worn, etc.) were described as indirect commands which attempted to control people. The modal will in the above example is described as transforming “a statement of authority (cf. ‘must’) to an assertion about an impending state” (Fowler & Kress 1979, p. 31). The deletion of ‘you’ or ‘everyone’, and the expression of a command as a description of a state in which the rules were obeyed, was described as implying that the situation already existed and was not subject to alteration or debate. From this “sneaky means of giving a command”, it was argued, effects were exerted which made the form of expression itself suspect: “All ‘be’ forms classifying process as state are open to suspicion and should be inspected”, Fowler and Kress (1979, p. 31) argued.

To this critique, I offer two responses. First, the question of mystification: Fowler and Kress (1979, p. 30) argue that, while the agent of imperatives (i.e., the addressee) is “instantly identifiable”, the deleted agent of passives is “coyly, ‘someone’ or ‘everyone’”. Since the latter group (‘someone’ is illogical; posted rules are directed to readers unless otherwise specified) constitutes ‘everyone’, this group necessarily includes the reader. The difference in tone of saying You will wear your shoes or Shoes
will be worn as opposed to Wear your shoes! may be that the former express confidence about the desired state, as Fowler and Kress argue, yet the meaning expressed is the same: readers are commanded, directly or not, to do something. Whether this meaning is successful in effecting compliance or not—consider signs reading No Smoking or Keep off the Grass—is a different question. If posted rules are effectively mystifying, they will be ineffective, therefore the agents must be recoverable.

Even if agency mystification occurs, as in a posted sign reading Trespassers will be Shot (by whom? Private landowners? Civil or military authorities?), if the sign is properly understood, the desired effect of communicating a command or warning is likely achieved. If mystification occurs, however, this need not be equated with expression of a particular ideological view. An assertion of authority on its own is not tantamount to an expression of support for neoliberal capitalism, for example, even if the authority is expressed in the service of such views. A sign near a group of tables and chairs in front of a shopping mall reading Customers Only may be taken as an assertion of authority by building owners. This in turn may be taken as an assertion of a capitalist view of individuals as consumers as opposed to citizens with a right to sit and talk without shopping. Yet this ideological interpretation does not emerge from a mystification of agency any more than in the case of a sign above a water fountain reading Whites Only. My own view, which I believe the results of these analyses support, is that the ‘presences’ of textual meanings have more to do with the expression of potentially ideological views than the occasionally mystifying ‘absences’ of agency, if for no other reason than their relative prominence and frequency, as suggested by the results of this study.
6.3 Approaches to reader cognition

One of the main implications of the empirical research reported in this thesis is that it suggests that CDA needs to take reader cognition much more seriously into account than it has done in the past. Fortunately, various approaches to incorporating evidence of reader cognition, directly and indirectly, into CDA research are already available, though all are underused at present. This section briefly reviews some advances in these approaches and argues for more widespread use of empirically grounded ways of accounting for reader cognition in critical linguistic research.

6.3.1 Reader response studies

Naturally it is preferable when possible to investigate reader’s understanding of texts directly. This study offers an exercise that directly investigates the issue of inference generation in the case of authentic editorial texts, providing evidence that generally supports available theoretical predictions regarding automatic vs. non-automatic inferences. Studies of reader reception of texts are rare in CL/CDA, but some examples are available which offer relevant results. A study of viewers of TV news on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Liebes & Ribak 1991) found that more cognitive effort is required for those who reject the characterizations of reality presented routinely in news coverage. Higher-effort processing is considered to be less likely under the minimalist hypothesis (McKoon & Ratcliff 1992) of inference generation, and this distinction likely applies to the choice of news texts as well. Rather than invest the higher cognitive effort required to read or view media messages critically, checking sources and debunking false claims, etc., news readers/viewers (including critical linguists
themselves) can invest less effort by simply choosing news sources whose reporting aligns with the views they already hold.

One recent study (Fuoli 2016) used reader reception data to test hypotheses regarding the effectiveness of various strategies used by corporations accused of wrongdoing, revealing that denials of wrongdoing proved more effective than apologies in retaining public trust, even when readers were confronted with strong evidence of corporate guilt. Such studies offer valuable insights into the ways in which actual readers interact with texts, and should be pursued more widely.

6.3.2 Studies from cognitive science and related fields

The need to address reader cognition more effectively has been increasingly recognized in CDA, and progress in various fields is relevant to the concerns raised here. The IR framework draws on research into sentence processing from psycholinguistics and cognitive science, adopting developments such as the minimalist hypothesis discussed above (McKoon & Ratcliff 1992) and the parallel distributed processing (PDP) or connectionist model of sentence processing (McClelland, St. John, and Taraban 1989; St. John 1992), which offers models of neural activity to explain the ready availability of certain inferences due to textual constraints and prior knowledge, e.g., that the clause the batter hit a home run in the fourth inning refers to the action of hitting a ball with a bat.

Other work on sentence processing (Federmeier & Kutas 1999; Federmeier et al. 2007) explores the cognitive effects of particular sentence constraints on processing times. Evidence from these studies confirms that sentences featuring more expected categories or category exemplars are processed more quickly than less-expected ones. These
results suggest that readers apply long-term memory to sentence processing such that highly constraining sentences create very high cloze probabilities. The high probability that readers will fill a gap in a constraining sentence with a certain word may also be independent of the strength of word association (collocation strength) between the gap word and the other words in the sentence. These results offer further support for the effects of textual constraints and background knowledge in rendering some inferences more likely than others.

Studies in cognitive science are exploring the ordering of particular constraint effects, e.g., lexical vs. contextual, which are involved in elaborative coherence inferences (Garrod & Terras 2000), while others report efforts to identify specific brain processes involved in sentence processing during reading (Jobard, Crivello, and Tzourio-Mazoyer 2003; Vigneau et al. 2006). Work in these areas can help shed light on the relation between particular linguistic structures and particular cognitive effects, which can be used to refine models of reader cognition. Such refinements offer ways to improve the reliability of critical linguistic judgments regarding the potential for particular textual features to affect readers’ comprehension of events.

6.4 Conclusion

This thesis represents a step toward addressing complex questions of how textual representations of the world may affect readers’ understanding of world events. Focusing on the property of mystification of social actors in nominalization and agentless passives, the results presented here offer support for the observations about automatic and non-automatic inferences in O’Halloran’s (2003) IR framework. Further investigations into these topics may be useful in developing further models and
methods by which to avoid researcher overinterpretation as well as underinterpretation (O’Halloran and Coffin 2004).

This thesis has also demonstrated how available methods from SFL and corpus linguistics may be used alongside more specifically targeted analyses of mystification, and has argued that empirically-supported theoretical models as well as reader response studies, when possible, should be incorporated more widely in CDA. I have also suggested that insights from cognitive science regarding reader cognition should inform future work in this area. Multidisciplinary approaches that make use of relevant research on reader cognition can help improve the reliability of CDA studies, and further efforts to map the ways in which readers interact with texts, while demonstrating that explicit political commitments need not be a hindrance to rigorous empirical investigation.

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD

JUNE 29, 2015

The referendum called by Greece’s prime minister is a bad idea,

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<tr>
<th>Participant: Carrier</th>
<th>Process: Relational</th>
<th>Participant: Attribute</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. but at this stage</td>
<td>it</td>
<td>‘s</td>
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Circumstance: Time

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<th>Participant: Carrier</th>
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<th>Participant: Attribute</th>
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<tr>
<td>2. Greek banks</td>
<td>have been shut down</td>
<td>to avoid a meltdown.</td>
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Participant: Goal Process: Material Circumstance: Cause

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<th>Participant: Carrier</th>
<th>Process: Relational</th>
<th>Participant: Attribute</th>
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<tr>
<td>3. bailout talks with European creditors</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>frozen</td>
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<th>Participant: Carrier</th>
<th>Process: Relational</th>
<th>Participant: Attribute</th>
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<tr>
<td>4. Athens does not have</td>
<td>the money to pay 1.6 billion euros due to the International Monetary Fund on Tuesday,</td>
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<th>Participant: Carrier</th>
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<td>5. threatening default and withdrawal from the euro.</td>
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<th>Process: Relational</th>
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<tr>
<td>6. So, confronted with conditions from the lenders that he dismissed as “insulting”,</td>
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<th>Process: Material</th>
<th>Participant: Actor</th>
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<tr>
<td>7. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras made the surprise announcement on Saturday that he was putting the matter before Greek voters in a referendum to be held July 5.</td>
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<th>Participant: Sayer</th>
<th>Process: Verbal</th>
<th>Participant: Verbiage</th>
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<tr>
<td>8. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras made the surprise announcement on Saturday that he was putting the matter before Greek voters in a referendum to be held July 5.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Putting so complex and fateful a question on such short notice to a nation already so confused and battered is fraught with danger.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant: Carrier</td>
<td>Process: Relational</td>
<td>Participant: Attribute</td>
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9.

| But given the huge consequences of what is about to happen, |
| Process: Existential | Participant: Existent |

10.

| the Greeks deserve a chance to say whether they want to stay in the euro, with all the continuing sacrifice that entails, or whether they are prepared for the near-term calamity and long-term unknowns of opting out. |
| Participant: Carrier | Process: Relational | Participant: Attribute |

11.

| At the very least, Greece’s creditors should extend their payment deadlines long enough to hear what the Greek voters say. |

12.

| The referendum question, released on Monday, will be perplexing to voters, |
| Participant: Goal | Process: Material | Circumstance: Time |

13.

| but it doesn’t really matter. |
| Participant: Carrier | Process: Relational |

14.

| The details of the demands over which the talks have collapsed, mostly dealing with pensions and value-added taxes, are not what the endgame is about. |
| Participant: Carrier | Process: Relational | Participant: Attribute |
At this point, the long-running accusations filling German and Greek tabloids — that the spendthrift Greeks should be taught to live by European rules; that the relentless austerity demanded by Germany and other lenders has served only to destroy Greece’s economy and its ability to pay back its gargantuan debts — don’t matter much.

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<th>Circumstance: Time</th>
<th>Participant: Carrier</th>
<th>Process: Relational</th>
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<td>16.</td>
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The question before the Greeks is whether they are prepared to abandon the euro.

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<th>Participant: Token</th>
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That is also the question that Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, President Francois Hollande of France, Christine Lagarde, the managing director of the I.M.F., and other members of the eurozone must decide.

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<th>Participant: Value</th>
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<td>18.</td>
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The answer should be a resounding commitment to keep Greece in the euro.

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Ms. Merkel on Monday revived a phrase not heard in many months:

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<td>20.</td>
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“‘If the euro fails, Europe fails.”

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<td>21.</td>
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A “Grexit” would seriously undermine the credibility of the euro currency, threatening a global contagion.

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<th>Participant: Goal</th>
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23.  

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<th>Participant: Goal</th>
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For Greece, an exit could mean losing the ability to borrow from foreign investors, the potential collapse of its banking system and a wave of litigation from creditors and suppliers.

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<th>Circumstance: Range</th>
<th>Participant: Token</th>
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<th>Participant: Value</th>
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<td>25.</td>
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President Obama has called both Ms. Merkel and Mr. Hollande to make clear American concerns about the effect it would have on global finance.

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<th>Participant: Actor</th>
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<th>Participant: Goal</th>
<th>Circumstance: Cause</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>26.</td>
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But even if the Greeks vote to stay with the euro,

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<th>Participant: Actor</th>
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<th>Circumstance: Cause</th>
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<tr>
<td>27.</td>
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the crisis will not be over.

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<td>28.</td>
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Under the policies currently demanded by the eurozone leaders,

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<th>Circumstance: Cause</th>
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<th>Participant: Actor</th>
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the Greeks will find their suffering worse and their prospects unchanged,

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<th>Participant: Senser</th>
<th>Process: Mental</th>
<th>Participant: Phenomenon</th>
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and Mr. Tsipras may well be compelled to call for new national elections.

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<th>Participant: Actor</th>
<th>Process: Material</th>
<th>Participant: Goal</th>
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<td>31.</td>
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The power to make things better ultimately lies with the eurozone and the I.M.F.

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<th>Participant: Attribute</th>
<th>Process: Relational</th>
<th>Participant: Carrier</th>
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<td>32.</td>
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They have already started an unofficial campaign to influence Greek voters to stay with the euro by making public their terms for maintaining the bailout.

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<th>Participant: Actor</th>
<th>Process: Material</th>
<th>Participant: Goal</th>
<th>Circumstance: Manner</th>
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<td>33.</td>
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They would make a far stronger case if they also vowed to do the one thing that would give Greeks a real incentive to stay and to initiate real reforms.

That is to start ripping up their i.o.u.s.
Text 2: The only prudent way forward for Greece [Washington Post]

By Editorial Board June 29 [2015]

Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras chose an academic expert on game theory as finance minister.

1. so it’s fitting that his left-wing government has now decided to play games with the fate of Europe and the global economy.

2. Alas, it’s no theoretical exercise.

3. Mr. Tsipras has broken off debt-restructuring talks with his European creditors and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in favor of a plebiscite on the creditors’ final offer.

4. Now, Europe’s common currency, the euro, and European unity itself may depend on the results of this stunt, which, in turn, hinge on the good sense of the recession-wrecked, over-demagogued Greek electorate.

5. Mr. Tsipras is urging them to vote “no.”

6. The only prudent course, though—for Greece, Europe and the rest of the world—would be “yes.”

7. We say this
8. fully cognizant of the price Greece has already paid for austerity measures the German-led creditor bloc has imposed in return for bailouts to date.

9. *[interpreted as incomplete finite clause w/absent Carrier and Relational Process, e.g., ‘and we are’ or similar]

At times, Berlin has seemed intent on teaching modern Greece the same lesson that, according to Thucydides, ancient Athens taught Melos: “The strong do as they can; the weak suffer what they must.”

10. The best measure of [how real the pain has been] is that it made the election of Mr. Tsipras’s populist insurgent party half a year ago not only inevitable but, under the circumstances, understandable.

11. On the whole, though, Mr. Tsipras’s defiant course is both unwarranted and unrealistic.

12. Though the creditors insist on further reforms, including trims to pensions upon which many Greeks depend,

13. the Greek economy had started to perk up prior to Mr. Tsipras’s ascendance,

14. and the creditors softened their terms somewhat in pursuit of an agreement with him.

15. Absent his gratuitous they might have yielded even more.
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<tr>
<td>16. Mr. Tsipras’s proposed alternative, which would tax Greece’s already crippled private sector even more to preserve unsustainable pensions.</td>
<td>is</td>
<td>even less likely to jump-start growth than the creditors’ plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant: Carrier</td>
<td>Process: Relational</td>
<td>Participant: Attribute</td>
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| Carrier: German financiers | are | more complicit in Greece’s debt bubble than Berlin admits, |
| Participant: Carrier | Process: Relational | Participant: Attribute |

| Participant: Carrier | Process: Relational | Participant: Attribute |
| but the same | is | true for Greece and its excuse-making politicians—which is why there is so little support for Mr. Tsipras in the rest of Western Europe. |

| Participant: Carrier | Process: Relational | Participant: Attribute |
| Truth | is, | there is no pain-free path left for Greece. |
| Participant: Value | Process: Relational | Participant: Token |

| Participant: Token | Process: Relational | Participant: Value |
| A “no” | could mean | financial collapse and exit from the common currency—with a short-term decline in living standards, including unpaid pensions, even worse than that which Greece has already seen. |

| Participant: Token | Process: Relational | Participant: Value |
| The extreme elements of Mr. Tsipras’s political coalition | relish | that, |
| Participant: Senser | Process: Mental | Participant: Phenomenon |

| Process: Mental | Participant: Phenomenon |
| sensing | an opportunity for Greece to reorient itself economically, toward a state-run economy, and geopolitically, toward Moscow—which they imagine would finance such an enterprise. |

<p>| Participant: Phenomenon |
| If there is | a fate worse than the country’s current predicament, |</p>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process: Existential</th>
<th>Participant: Existential</th>
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<td>24.</td>
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<td>that would surely be</td>
<td>it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant: Token</td>
<td>Process: Relational</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant: Value</td>
<td></td>
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<td>25.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A “yes” vote</td>
<td>would shore up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant: Actor</td>
<td>European unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process: Material</td>
<td>Participant: Goal</td>
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<td>26.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>and salvage</td>
<td>Greek membership in the euro zone, which most Greeks still want.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process: Material</td>
<td>Participant: Goal</td>
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<tr>
<td>27.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It would preserve</td>
<td>at least the prospect of new financing, on relatively reasonable terms, from Europe and the IMF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant: Actor</td>
<td>Process: Material</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant: Goal</td>
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<td>28.</td>
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<td>To be sure, defeat for Mr. Tsipras’s referendum could bring down his government.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Circumstance: Manner</td>
<td>Participant: Actor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Process: Material</td>
<td>Participant: Goal</td>
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<td>29.</td>
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<td>Given his performance so far,</td>
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<td>Process: Existential</td>
<td>Participant: Existent</td>
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<td>30.</td>
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<td>that seems like one more argument to vote yes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant: Value</td>
<td>Process: Relational</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant: Token</td>
<td></td>
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<td>31.</td>
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