

# HOW PROMOTIONAL LANGUAGE IN PRESS RELEASES IS DEALT WITH BY JOURNALISTS

Genre Mixing or Genre Conflict?

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*This study investigates how promotional language in corporate press releases is dealt with when the release is reused in different journalistic genres. Using a new coding system, it analyzes 89 press releases and their journalistic transformations. Promotional language is shown to be a regular feature of corporate press releases, especially those presenting new products or services. The first press release corpus consisted of releases issued by companies in the airline industry, and the second corpus contained press releases of various large companies operating in the Netherlands. The press releases in the first corpus were generally used in special interest media such as magazines on air travel; these media largely preserved the promotional tone of the press releases, thus exemplifying the tendency of “promotionalization.” The press releases in the second corpus were used in economics sections of daily papers; these news reports conformed to a more “hard news” register because they did not include most of the promotional elements from press release material.*

**Keywords:** news reports; press releases; genre analysis; genre conflict; news editing; communicative purposes; promotion; style; intensifiers; corpus analysis

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Written language is clearly constrained by genre: News reports in the “hard news” tradition employ different lexico-grammatical resources than, say, patient package inserts or magazine advertisements. Research in

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the systemic-functional tradition, such as White's (1998) discussion of the journalistic voice system, has proposed quite detailed accounts of genre-related "registers." Current genre theory also places considerable emphasis on the relationships between different discourse genres. For instance, Bhatia (2002) uses notions such as genre mixing, genre embedding, and genre colonies to account for the ways in which writers of certain genres exploit or borrow discourse strategies originating from other genres. Similarly, Swales (2004, pp. 18-25) discusses notions such as genre chains (regular sequences of texts from different genres sharing their subject matter) and genre networks (collections of genres related by intertextual links).

The research reported later is located at the crossroads of these two orientations in the linguistics of genre: It focuses on genre-related linguistic choices by stylistically comparing two related genres. More specifically, I will present an analysis of promotional language in corporate press releases and the way different journalistic genres work with this kind of language when reusing these press releases.

Later, I will first present a genre-analytical discussion of the relation between press releases and news reports, focusing on the promotional aspects of press releases and how they are to be treated by journalists. Then, I will explain my research questions and methods and introduce my text materials. Subsequently, three studies will be reported. The first is a corpus study of promotional style elements in two corpora of press releases. The second study examines the ways travel journalists respond to promotional elements (PEs) in the press releases on airline travel that constitute the first corpus. The third study analyzes the journalistic reworking of press releases from the second corpus, consisting of press releases of various large companies covered in the economics section of Dutch newspapers.

### **PRESS RELEASES, NEWS REPORTS, AND GENRE STUDIES**

The genre of press releases is characterized by a peculiar participant framework in which writers provide information to journalists in the hope that it will be passed on to the general public. Indeed, public relations (PR) researchers have found that press releases do influence what reporters write. For instance, Turk (1986) found that daily newspapers use more press releases than they reject. Because they cannot cover all newsworthy events in person, journalists need for their news reports to be the "information subsidies" provided by press releases (Gandy, 1982, p. 61). Press releases and

the news reports based on them constitute what Swales (2004) has called a genre chain, a regular succession of genres that conventionally respond to each other, for instance a call for abstracts can be responded to by sending an abstract or an invitation to speak at a colloquium may be responded to by a written acceptance. In such chains, the first genre is a necessary antecedent of the second.

It is important to note that genres in a chain do not always explicitly acknowledge the antecedent genre. For instance, the call for abstracts or the instructions concerning papers in a volume may be followed in the subsequent contribution to the chain without being explicitly mentioned. Likewise, news reports based on press releases avoid mentioning their primary source; using Fairclough's (1992) terms, the relation between the two genres is one of "constitutive" intertextuality, not manifest intertextuality. As Clough, Gaizauskas, and Piao (2002, p. 1678) have noted, although reusing another's writings is considered a cardinal sin in academic genres, it seems to be the rule in journalistic discourse. Once the press release material is accepted, it can be fully appropriated by the journalist.

To maximize the chance of a press release being journalistically appropriated and to exert the utmost control on how they are used, press release writers try to meet the formal requirements of news reporting (see Jacobs, 1999). For instance, the writers adopt a third-person perspective on the events they are involved in themselves and use past tense when writing about events that have not yet taken place at the moment of writing. Jacobs (1999) has introduced the notion of preformulation as an umbrella term for these point-of-view operations. Apart from making it easier for journalists to copy press release material, preformulation serves to "objectify" the content of the release and by doing so to make it more authoritative. At the same time, organizations can be seen to smuggle in positive characterizations of their activities in seemingly innocuous third-person references (e.g., by referencing the biggest cash dispenser net in Turkey instead of the company name).

This last observation points at the "propagandistic" purposes of press releases. Many press releases tell good news (especially those about new products and services), and if they do not, the information is presented as favorable as possible from the corporate viewpoint. This slant, of course, is a common characteristic of corporate discourse genres: It even holds true for the financial information provided in annual reports and letters to shareholders. For instance, Rutherford (2005) found that in annual reports, profits are more often mentioned than losses, regardless of the corporation's financial position. A more subtle device was uncovered by

Thomas's (1997) study of presidents' letters to shareholders that found a tendency to resort to a more factual, objectifying style when discussing negative news, apparently to divert blame from persons that could otherwise be held responsible.

Neither is this tendency to sketch a positive self-image confined to corporate genres. Bhatia (1997, 2002, 2004, pp. 57-111) has observed increasing promotional tendencies in genres such as academic introductions, job advertisements, job applications, advertorials in magazines, and philanthropic fundraising letters. These genres share much of their communicative purposes, lexico-grammatical structure, and move structure with "classic" promotional genres such as advertisements and sales promotion letters. Bhatia speaks of a genre colony of promotional genres, containing core and more peripheral members.

One might ask whether the promotional purpose of press releases might conflict with the more distanced journalistic style that seems to be required by the preformulation directive. Bhatia (2002, 2004, p. 89) has argued that in many cases, informative genres may incorporate PEs without giving rise to functional tension. However, many of the genres Bhatia considered as being "appropriated" by promotional features were not strictly informative to begin with. Consider job application letters. Even before the promotionalization of this genre, it was unusual to include any negative information in such letters, as Bhatia himself notes. When the promotional overtones in such a genre become more explicit, this seems a gradual difference, not a difference in kind. Similarly, Swales (2004, p. 8) has disputed Bhatia's idea that academic introductions are never nonpromotional. When the focus is on more strictly informational genres, in which positive and negative aspects are equally likely to be mentioned, the question of possible conflict between promotion and information gets a new edge: Although press releases are clearly not strictly informational in this sense, it may be argued that news reports (taken in a wide sense for the moment) are or should be.

When examining the stylistic advice for press release writers, one major concern is that PEs may conflict with the informational purposes of news reports. Hence, writers of press releases are commonly advised to avoid promotional language:

Avoid excessive use of adjectives. (*Press Release Writing: 10 Essential Tips to Ensure Your Release Makes the News*, 1998)

Provide the facts . . . no fluff, no puff, no superlatives. (Marken, 1994, p. 11)

Keep the lead devoid of superlatives, and eschew self-promotion. (Williams, 1994, p. 5)

Journalists avoid releases that look like advertising or self-promotion such as “XYZ Corp. gave all its working employees significant raises because the company grew over 50% in profitability.” (Citroen Saltz, 1996, p. 90)

Likewise, the linguist and ex-journalist Bell (1991) has argued that press releases that fit the structure and the style of newspaper reports stand a better chance of being used than other press releases. In some respects, the writers of press releases certainly aim for a newspaper style, as is evidenced by the third-person point of view observed by Jacobs (1999). But these features do not pose promotion-information dilemmas for release writers: The chance that first-person references are retained in newspaper reports is zero, and nothing much seems to be lost in terms of persuasive impact when changing first-person into third-person forms.

When it comes to promotional language, however, writers of press releases seem to be faced with a more difficult decision. On one hand, promotional press releases may indeed be rejected by journalists because of what they consider to be self-promotion. But there are other considerations as well. Some authors (Shoemaker, 1991) argue that objectively phrased press releases may also raise suspicion in journalists, precisely because they could be printed verbatim, making the press release look just “too good to be true.” Journalists might even prefer to decide for themselves how a news report needs to be written so that perfect journalistic copy allows them insufficient room to exercise their profession. Hence, promotion may not be that harmful. In fact, strong positive statements can make the release look more newsworthy, and some journalists may think that a positive tone attracts readers. Finally, some media may not bother to carefully edit press release material, and thus, promotional press releases may well succeed in generating free publicity.

Hence, the question to what degree releases are and should be promotional is still open. Turning now to the journalistic response to such language, the most directly relevant kind of work would be field studies of press release coverage. But most of these studies focus on issues other than language. For instance, Morton and Ramsey (1994) investigated whether the treatment of releases was affected by their source and their subject matter. To my knowledge, the only corpus studies dealing with the language of press releases and their coverage are those of T. N. Walters, Walters, and Starr (1994) and L. M. Walters and Walters (1996). They have focused on how press releases are shortened and simplified by journalists, using readability statistics as

indications. One of their findings was that smaller newspapers were more likely to use press releases in their entirety whereas larger newspapers, presumably because of their more extensive resources, edit with more care.

An experimental study by Hoeken and Westbeek (1997) specifically dealt with the way journalists handle promotional language in press releases. They asked 24 journalists, 10 of whom were taking a postgraduate course on journalism, to rework two press releases into newspaper articles. The press releases were presented in two versions: an evaluative version using promotional adjectives such as *interesting* and *enthusiastic* in contrast to the informative version, which used neutral adjectives. Hoeken and Westbeek found that more sentences and adjectives were used in the news report when the informative press release was used than when the evaluative press release was used. Moreover, the informative press releases led to more favorable judgments of the sender of the press release and the quality of the press release itself. The results of Hoeken and Westbeek are remarkable, considering that they changed just a few words in the release (6 out of 180 words and 9 out of 231 words, respectively). However, the rejection of promotional language in the constructed experimental situation is not necessarily generalized to real situations. This kind of experimental research may have invited socially desirable responses, especially because, as the authors noted, 10 of the participants had recently studied journalistic integrity.

Looking at the practices of journalists on the job, Bell (1991, pp. 33-83) found that newspaper editors rework copy written by colleagues or coming from news agencies for four main purposes: cutting, clarifying, maximizing news value, and standardizing language. But he did not address the question of dealing with the language used in particular types of source texts, such as press releases. White (1998) did not examine the use of press releases either, but he presented a more detailed account of different journalistic registers based on a small-scale corpus analysis, the Appraisal System, as his descriptive framework (see Martin, 2000; Martin & White, 2005). This framework classifies evaluative language into three main components: Engagement, the way a discourse positions itself vis-à-vis other discourses, is indicated by devices such as *perhaps*, he says. Attitude encompasses expression of affect (e.g., *like*, *fear*), judgment concerning human behavior (e.g., *corruptly*), and appreciation of entities (e.g., *beautiful*, *striking*). Finally, graduation includes devices for ranking or scaling the strength of statements (e.g., *he is a true friend*, *he is very happy*). Using this framework, White (1998) identified three kinds of journalistic registers: the reporter voice, the correspondent voice, and the commentator voice. The reporter voice can be found in hard news sections and is most constrained in terms of the appraisal devices

it is allowed to use in nonattributed text. The reporter voice does not present explicit judgment and contains no isolated intensifiers. The characteristics of the reporter register as described by White certainly suggest a potential conflict between explicit promotional language and the hard news journalist register. However, the attitude toward positive evaluations in special interest magazines may be quite different. That is, different journalistic genres may embody different linguistic constraints.

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## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The aim of this study is to examine press releases and corresponding news reports for traces of promotion-information conflicts. The study addresses two main questions:

Do corporate press releases contain promotional language of any sort? This question is answered by a corpus analysis of press releases, focusing on predefined elements of promotional style.

If yes, how is this kind of language dealt with in journalistic reworkings of these particular press releases? This question will be answered by a comparative corpus analysis in which press releases are compared with news reports based on them.

This study focuses on textual products, not processes. But these corpora are special because they consist of text pairs; in every pair, the news report is based on reusing the press release. This pairing allows an analysis in more process-oriented terms. Indeed, this study could be called a reader-response study: It investigates the response of journalists to texts specifically designed for them, just as Bazerman (1985) studied physicists reading scientific articles or Neutelings and Pander Maat (2001) studied members of parliament reading and commenting on policy papers. However, in the present study, the reading process rapidly led to an editing process, the end result of which is analyzed. Because the time span between the reading and editing process is short, the actual editing decisions are expected to reveal much of the professional

evaluation by the reader of the text involved. So the study considers press releases through the eyes of their primary addressees by a close analysis of what these addressees do with the press releases.

To sum up, this study aims to analyze promotional language in press releases and the way journalistic reworkings of press release material deal with these PEs. Such reworking allows us to draw conclusions about the potential genre conflicts between the corporate discourse embodied in press releases and journalistic discourse.

### **THE CORPORA USED FOR THIS STUDY**

The first corpus included press releases from a particular branch of industry, aviation. I collected 39 press releases issued by airlines (e.g., Lufthansa, KLM, Ryanair) and the Dutch airport Schiphol. All the press releases were written in Dutch. The selection, further to be called Corpus 1, was based on two criteria:

- The press releases had actually been used in news reports. In all, 62 news reports were included in the corpus (some press releases were used more than once).
- The press releases had to contain at least one PE. Out of the 41 press releases that were inspected, only 2 had to be discarded because they lacked promotion elements.

The topics of the press releases in Corpus 1 can generally be described as “good news”: More than half of the releases announced new products or services; another recurrent topic was financial results, which were good in this particular period; other positive events were the company being awarded a prize and the buying of new, better airplanes.

The text pairs in Corpus 1 were collected in two ways. The first part of Corpus 1 were press releases and news reports appearing in 2000 and the first quarter of 2001 and were collected in cooperation with the PR agency working for Lufthansa Airlines. This agency provided not only the press releases but also copies of the news reports based on the press releases. Many PR agencies collect these news reports to show the success of their activities. Most of the news reports were from specialized magazines on airline travel, although some appeared in the travel section of newspapers.

Because I wanted to compare how press releases are used in these magazines and in daily newspapers, I extended Corpus 1 with a second set created by collecting news reports on airline topics in daily newspapers and

working back from these news reports to the underlying press releases. The procedure in this second data collection step was as follows: I searched an online collection of Dutch newspapers (Lexis/Nexis) using the names of airlines and the Dutch airport Schiphol as keywords. When an article seemed to derive from information provided by the company in question, the company's Web site was searched for corresponding releases. Only reports and releases with the same central topic were included in the corpus. The publications in the second part of Corpus 1 appeared from September 2002 to March 2003.

For the second corpus, a broader collection of press releases was assembled. The aim of collecting Corpus 2 was twofold. First, I was interested in the generalizability of the results of the stylistic analysis of airline releases from Corpus 1. Second, for the analysis of journalistic reuse, I wanted to focus on newspaper reports of the hard news type because newspaper journalists might be more critical in their treatment of release materials than special interest journalists. White (1998), for example, observed more tight stylistic constraints for hard news reporting. Corpus 2 contained 50 press releases written in Dutch, issued by major industrial companies from December 2003 to February 2005. The press releases were issued by companies in different branches of industry—the telecom, financial, food, retail, and information technology sectors. This selection process created a diverse sample, and as expected, the topics of the press releases were somewhat more diverse than those in Corpus 1. The most frequent topics were as follows:

- new products or services
- financial results
- reorganizations, acquisitions, or mergers
- personnel changes in the board of directors

The press releases in Corpus 2 were not selected in advance for including promotional language because Corpus 2 was also used for another study of journalistic editing. All press releases in Corpus 2 were covered in news articles appearing in six Dutch daily papers in the economics section, a section considered to contain hard news. The total number of news reports for Corpus 2 was 95.

Because the corporations giving out the press releases in Corpus 1 and Corpus 2 were large, it is likely that all of them were written by PR professionals.

This procedure of data collection clearly neglected press releases that failed to attract press attention. Hence, this research does not address which press

releases get journalistic coverage and which ones do not; it focuses instead on the stylistic adaptation of press releases that are used in news reports.

## PROMOTIONAL STYLE IN PRESS RELEASES

### The Analysis of Promotional Language

The coding scheme used for the identification of promotional language started with posing two requirements to be fulfilled for an element to be counted as promotional.

First, a PE needed to intensify a statement in a direction favorable to the sender. Intensification is defined here as argumentative reinforcement in the sense of Ducrot's (1980) use of the word: A reinforced statement is a stronger argument for a particular conclusion than the nonreinforced version. For instance, *very* in "the weather is very nice" strengthens it as an argument for the conclusion that we should take a walk. A substantial number of PEs fall under the graduation component of the appraisal framework (Martin, 2000; White, 1998), concentrating on so-called isolated graders and amplifiers. However, the notion of argumentative reinforcement also applies to evaluative adjectives (fantastic) and adjectives referring to positive properties (efficient) that the appraisal framework would classify under attitude (more specifically, appreciation). An utterance such as (1a) is a stronger argument for the quality of the PC than (1b):

Ex. 1a: The home-PC transforms itself into a *complete and easy-to-use* home entertainment system.

Ex. 1b: The home-PC transforms itself into a home entertainment system.

Moreover, intensification covers time adjuncts (*already*), place adjuncts (*all over the world*), and strengthening modifiers of numerals (*over 2 million visitors*).

A promotional statement does not always refer to the company itself. It only needs to support certain conclusions that are positive for the company. For instance, when a German airline announces an alliance with an Italian airline, the statement that Italy is *one of the largest* travel markets in Europe (the PE is italicized) casts the alliance in a positive light. Most often, PEs reinforce a positive statement; however they may also weaken a negative statement (as is the case for quantity mitigators; see Table 1).

The second requirement for PEs is that either they can be left out without affecting the grammaticality and the interpretation of the sentence or they can easily be replaced by a weaker element (this holds for comparatives, quantity intensifiers, and mitigators; see Table 1).

**Table 1. 13 Kinds of Promotional Elements**

Category	Subcategory	
Premodifiers		Amplifying prefixes indicating extreme degrees of positively evaluated properties, such as <i>ultramodern</i> (Dutch: <i>hypermodern</i> ) and <i>brand new</i> ( <i>gloednieuw</i> ), and nominal premodifiers indicating exceptional quality, such as <i>No. 1 low fares airline</i> and <i>top-class athlete</i> ( <i>topatleet</i> )
Adjectives	Intensifying adjectives	Adjectives intensifying the interpretation of the noun, such as <i>important</i> ( <i>belangrijk</i> ), <i>large</i> ( <i>groot</i> ), <i>strong</i> ( <i>sterk</i> ), and <i>extensive</i> ( <i>uitgebreid</i> )
	Evaluative adjectives	These adjectives refer to positive evaluations without specifying the property giving rise to this evaluation. Examples are <i>terrific</i> ( <i>geweldig</i> ), <i>good</i> ( <i>goed</i> ), <i>special</i> ( <i>speciaal</i> ), <i>leading</i> ( <i>toonaangevend</i> ), <i>unique</i> ( <i>uniek</i> ), and <i>excellent</i> ( <i>uitstekend</i> )
	Property specifying adjectives	Some of these adjectives evoke a positive attitude in general, such as <i>reliable</i> , <i>clear</i> , <i>efficient</i> , and <i>practical</i> . Others refer to properties that are not necessarily positively evaluated but are definitely so in the present context, such as <i>well-known architect</i> (compare <i>well-known criminal</i> )
	Intensifying quantifiers	This category includes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- quantifiers preceding plural noun phrases, such as <i>all</i> (<i>alle</i>), <i>various</i>, <i>several</i> (<i>diverse</i>, <i>verschillende</i>), <i>millions</i> (<i>miljoenen</i>), and <i>many</i> (<i>veel</i>)</li> <li>- elements indicating quantities beyond some expectation, primarily <i>extra</i> (<i>extra</i>)</li> <li>- intensifying elements referring to proportions, such as <i>entire</i> (<i>hele</i>) and <i>complete</i> (<i>volledig</i>)</li> </ul>
	Comparative and superlative degrees	Superlatives were counted as promotional when they could easily be replaced by a weaker alternative expression. For instance, the superlative in “Our profit was the highest in the past 5 years” was not counted as a promotional element, as it constitutes the core information of the sentence. By contrast, the <i>most important</i> in Spain in the following sentence counted as promotional: “Brussels Airlines will offer an extensive shuttle service between Brussels and the two most important business destinations in Spain.” In this sentence, <i>two most important</i> can easily be replaced by <i>two important</i> .
Adverb elements	Intensifying adverbs	This category includes items such as <i>tremendously</i> ( <i>enorm</i> ), <i>considerably</i> ( <i>aanzienlijk</i> ), <i>well</i> ( <i>goed</i> ), <i>strongly</i> ( <i>sterk</i> ), <i>more and more</i> ( <i>steeds</i> ), <i>even</i>

(continued)

**Table 1. (continued)**

Category	Subcategory
	such as in <i>even faster (nog sneller)</i> , and <i>exactly</i> such as in <i>exactly on time (stipt op tijd)</i>
Time adjuncts	This category includes items such as <i>already (al, reeds)</i> , which in this corpus is used to suggest that a positively evaluated situation starts to hold earlier than was expected or has been holding longer than was expected. Other items include <i>once again (eens temeer, wederom, opnieuw)</i> , <i>always (altijd)</i> , and <i>constantly (continu, voortdurend)</i>
Place	This category includes items such as <i>internationally (internationaal)</i> and <i>throughout the world (wereldwijd)</i> such as in "Our network has a high reputation throughout the world."
Intensifiers of numerals	Intensifiers of numerals were counted when indicating positively evaluated quantities. This includes items such as <i>almost (bijna)</i> and <i>(well) over (ruim, meer dan)</i> . Consider the example: "Air One expects almost 2 million passengers this year." <i>Almost 2 million</i> is stronger wording than <i>1.98 million</i> in that it invites the reader to draw inferences from a higher number than the actual number. Similarly, <i>more than 2 million</i> invites the reader to draw inferences from a higher number than <i>about 2 million</i> does; it is also stronger than <i>2.01 million</i> , as it does not limit the degree to which the number of 2 million has been exceeded
Mitigators of numerals	Mitigators of numerals were counted when referring to negatively evaluated quantities. This includes items such as <i>only (slechts)</i> and <i>less than (minder dan)</i> . Example sentence: "We bought this company for less than 5 million Euro."
Modal intensifiers	This includes items such as <i>of course (natuurlijk, uiteraard)</i> and <i>simply (simpelweg)</i> . Example sentence: "Of course the meals can also be reserved when buying the ticket."
Connectives	– This category does not include items such as <i>and (en)</i> but only includes those connectives that emphasize the length of the list in one way or another. Because Dutch <i>ook (also)</i> may but does not have to be emphatic in this sense, it was excluded from the list. Examples are <i>moreover (bovendien, daarbovenop)</i> , <i>besides (tevens)</i> ,

*(continued)*

**Table 1. (continued)**

Category	Subcategory
	<i>besides X also Y (niet alleen X maar ook Y), and both X and Y (zowel X als Y).</i> Example sentence: "This opens quite a few new possibilities of fast and efficient services for both SN Brussels Airlines passengers and Iberia passengers."

Although the second requirement is theoretically motivated, it has an additional advantage in this study. The conceptualization of promotional language as something that often can be deleted or replaced maximizes the chance of neutralizing transformations when promotional release sentences are used in news reports. After all, Bell (1984, p. 84) found that copy editors favor changes that are easy to make, and the possibility of deleting material and still having a good sentence seems especially attractive.

Eventually, the coding scheme distinguished 13 PEs that can be grouped into 4 categories: premodifiers, adjectives, adverbial elements, and connectives. Table 1 illustrates the 13 devices; for reading ease, I use English translations of the Dutch items, which were the actual input for the analysis; the original items are between brackets.

### Intercoder Agreement

Both press release corpora were coded by two coders. For the analysis of Corpus 1, intercoder agreement was determined in two steps. The first decision was whether a certain element was considered promotional. This proved to be the hardest decision to make. After training, the two coders independently agreed on 71% of all items that were considered; 29% of the items were initially selected by only one of the coders. Disagreements often focused on the question of whether a particular element could be eliminated without damaging the interpretation. For instance, whether elements such as *various* and *several* may be left out depends on the context. In Example 2, *diverse* (*various*) cannot be deleted because, by specifying that Europe can be divided into different regions, it does more than enhance a positive impression. By contrast, *verschillende* (*several*) in Example 3 may be deleted. After discussion, only the last element (3) was counted as promotional.

Ex. 2 (D): Vijf meesterkoks uit *diverse* Europese regio's hebben speciaal voor Lufthansa verfijnde streekmenu's samengesteld met als doel Business-passagiers net dat beetje meer te geven.

- (E): Five top-ranking chefs from *various* European regions have created sophisticated regional dinners especially for Lufthansa in order to give Business-passengers just that little bit more.
- Ex. 3 (D): Dankzij deze samenwerkingsovereenkomst zullen we meer rechtstreekse vluchten naar *verschillende* Europese zakencentra kunnen aanbieden.
- (E): Because of this agreement we will be able to offer more direct flights to *several* European business centers.

The second decision was to identify which of the 13 promotional devices was involved. Intercoder agreement for this decision was satisfactory: Cohen's kappa was .79. All disagreements were resolved by discussion; in general, dubious cases were discarded from the promotional category.

### Results of the Stylistic Analysis

Corpus 1 contained 39 press releases, containing 715 sentences. The total number of PEs for Corpus 1 was 475 (a mean of .66 per sentence). From this, it can be concluded that promotional language is a pervasive feature of the press releases in this aviation corpus.

In Corpus 2, the number of PEs was substantially lower, but direct comparisons between the corpora are difficult to make. For one thing, Corpus 1 contained only press releases with at least one PE, whereas Corpus 2 contained a number of press releases without any promotion. Second, the analysis of Corpus 1 included all sentences from all press releases, but the analysis of Corpus 2 confined itself to the 310 sentences that were actually used in news reports; these sentences yielded 132 PEs (a mean of .43 per sentence).

The most interesting observation in Corpus 2 was that the promotional style varied with the release topic. The press releases about new products had a more promotional style than the other topics, except reorganizations. On the other hand, press releases on personnel changes tended to be written in a rather neutral style (see Table 2).

Table 3 presents the frequencies of the different PEs in the two corpora. Given the differences in data collection methods and the paucity of observations for many categories in Corpus 2, I will refrain from direct comparisons between the corpora. The only clear pattern emerging from Table 3 seems to be that intensifying and evaluative adjectives and intensifying adverbs were the most frequently occurring PEs.

Some PEs in the press releases were embedded in quotes from company representatives, such as CEOs. Sleurs, Jacobs, and van Waes (2003) have observed that PR writers in fact skillfully construct quotations rather

**Table 2. PE Frequencies for Different Press Release Topics in Corpus 2**

<i>Press Release Topic</i>	<i>Number of Releases</i>	<i>Sentences Analyzed</i>	<i>Number of PEs</i>	<i>Mean Number of PEs per Sentence</i>
New products or services	16	108	61	.56
Reorganizations, acquisitions, or mergers	14	85	32	.38
Financial results	8	65	17	.26
Personnel changes in the board of directors	6	25	2	.04
Other	6	27	7	.26
Total	50	310	119	.38

Note: PE = promotional element.

than stick to the actual wording used by representatives of a company. PR writers also know that quotes may enliven the release text in a way that is attractive to journalists. They also know that journalists have less freedom in editing quotes than in editing other sentences. In other words, quotes may be a device to smuggle some promotion into the news report. To check whether these considerations result in a higher concentration of PEs in quotes, I compared the number of PEs in quotes and nonquotes (see Tables 4 and 5).

Quotes contain more PEs per sentence than nonquote sentences do, both in Corpus 1 ( $\chi^2 = 8.16$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .004$ ) and even more extremely so in Corpus 2 ( $\chi^2 = 27.11$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Example 4 illustrates a heavily promotional quote, taken from Corpus 2:

Ex. 4 (D): “Daarom past Gemini *perfect* bij Philips: deze overname versterkt ons distributiekanaal in de Verenigde Staten én vergroot ons *zeer succesvolle* assortiment *innovatieve*, *gebruiksvriendelijke* en *bekroonde* audio-videoaccessoires en pc-randapparaten.” (Frans van Houten, vice president of Royal Philips Electronics, Inc.)

(E): “That’s why Gemini is the *perfect* partner for Philips: this take-over strengthens our distribution channel in the US and at the same time increases our *very successful* assortment of *innovative*, *user-friendly* and *award-winning* audio and video accessories and peripheral equipment for PCs.”

**Table 3. Frequencies of the 13 Promotional Elements in the Corpora**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Subcategory</i>	<i>Frequency in Corpus 1</i>	<i>Frequency in Corpus 2</i>	<i>Example</i>
Premodifiers	—	20 (4%)	2 (2%)	<i>Brand new</i>
Adjectives	Intensifying	80	22	<i>Important</i>
	Evaluative	61	19	<i>Dynamic</i>
	Specifying adjectives	54	5	<i>Efficient</i>
	Quantifiers	51	14	<i>Various, extra</i>
	Comparatives	11	2	<i>One of the X-est in Y</i>
	Total adjectives	257 (56%)	62 (52%)	
Adverb elements	Intensifying adverbs	58	18	<i>Considerably</i>
	Time	40	9	<i>Once again</i>
	Place	14	2	<i>Throughout the world</i>
	Quantity intensifiers	29	13	<i>Over</i>
	Quantity mitigators	6	9	<i>Only</i>
	Modal intensifiers	18	0	<i>Of course</i>
	Total adverbials	165 (36%)	51 (43%)	
	Connectives	—	33 (7%)	4 (3%)
Total		455 (100%)	119 (100%)	

**Table 4. PEs in Quotes and Other Sentences in Corpus 1**

	<i>Sentences</i>	<i>PEs</i>	<i>PEs per Sentence (M)</i>
Quotes	73	75	1.03
Nonquotes	642	400	0.62
Total	715	475	0.66

*Note:* PE = promotional element.

Therefore, quotes were indeed used promotionally. For this study, quotes should be treated separately from ordinary sentences. However, because the number of quote sentences was rather small (about 10% in Corpus 1 and 5% in Corpus 2), they are omitted from the analysis in the rest of this article.

**Table 5. PEs in Quotes and Other Sentences in Corpus 2**

	<i>Sentences</i>	<i>PEs</i>	<i>PEs per Sentence (M)</i>
Quotes	16	26	1.62
Nonquotes	294	93	0.32
Total	310	119	0.38

*Note:* PE = promotional element.

I also examined the location of promotional language not in quotes because it is possible that writers would keep the lead factual and place the PEs near the end. If this were the case, the proportion of sentences containing PEs would gradually increase within a particular release. For Corpus 1, I divided the first 14 sentences into 4 sections: Sentences 1 and 2 (heading and subheading), 3 to 6 (most often, the lead), 7 to 10, and 11 to 14. There were at least 10 sentences in 85% of the press releases; 64% of them had at least 14 sentences. No reliable upward trend was found in the proportions of promotional sentences for these sections, when present in the release. The one sentence standing out was the headline: Whereas the mean overall proportion of promotional sentences was 44%, only 19% of the headlines were promotional.

Finally, I examined the releases to see if different categories of promotional language provide an internally consistent measure. In other words, do writers of press releases who use a lot of PEs of one kind also use a higher number of other kinds of PEs? Should this be the case, then it may be concluded that the categories reflect a common stylistic trait. To investigate the internal consistency of this concept of promotional language, a reliability analysis was carried out for Corpus 1 (such an analysis was impossible for Corpus 2 because of data sparseness: I did not analyze entire press releases in this corpus).

For each press release, I calculated the mean frequency of the four main categories (premodifier, adjective, adverb, and connective) by dividing the number of occurrences of a certain category by the number of sentences in the press release. I then calculated the standardized alpha for these four mean category frequencies for the 39 press releases and found a value of .62. When excluding the connective category, the alpha increased to .79. This result suggests that with the possible exception of connectives, these categories reflected a common underlying stylistic dimension.

To sum up, the stylistic analysis suggests that promotional language can be defined and identified reliably, although this may require a detailed and

contextually sensitive analysis. The corpus analysis shows that although quote sentences were more promotional than others, press release writers used promotional language on a routine basis throughout the text.

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Promotional language from press releases survives remarkably well in the corresponding press publications, especially in magazines dedicated to air travel and newspapers with travel sections.

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### **HOW PEs ARE HANDLED BY TRAVEL JOURNALISTS: CORPUS 1**

The second research question concerns the way PEs are actually treated in news publications based on the releases in the Corpus. I will report the results for the two studies separately, starting with the coverage of the press releases in Corpus 1. The press releases in this corpus led to 62 publications. I used only publications that could be traced back exclusively to a particular press release. In other words, I avoided publications containing information that stemmed from other sources. For instance, when the news report contained quotes of company representatives not to be found in the press release, it was discarded because the press release information had been evidently supplemented by information gathered other ways (e.g., phone calls or interviews). Three types of media are represented in the news report collection for Corpus 1:

1. Daily papers (both regional and national).
2. Subscription magazines on (airline) travel; these magazines were aimed at employees in the travel industry or at business travelers who are regular users of airline services.
3. Free Internet magazines dedicated to travel or aviation.

Comparing different types of media is important, because research on the penetration of press releases so far has concentrated on newspaper coverage (Minnis & Pratt, 1995; Morton, 1986; Morton & Ramsey, 1994; Morton & Warren, 1992; T. N. Walters et al., 1994). Although I wanted to assemble a corpus in which the three types of media were more or less

equally presented, I was not fully successful. For instance, in the category of free Internet magazines, I could identify only two magazines. By contrast, the category of newspapers included eight newspapers, both regional and national and both popular and quality newspapers. However, half of this corpus was taken from the travel section of a single popular national newspaper, *De Telegraaf*. Of course, this bias in the sample can be argued to reflect the actual situation regarding the press coverage of information on airlines. The national quality newspapers apparently do not typically cover this kind of information.

I analyzed the coverage of the press releases as follows. For every sentence in the press releases and for every publication based on this particular release, I determined whether this sentence was used. This was an easy task when verbatim reproductions were concerned, but I also found paraphrases of sentences. The paraphrase in Example 5 was considered a use of a press release sentence because it provided the core proposition of the press release sentence although it dispensed with the goal adjunct (*met als doel . . . / in order to . . .*).

In Example 6, however, the two underlined sentences globally corresponded in terms of content but differed in two ways. First, the newspaper sentence was much less detailed on the makers of the new system; at the same time, the structure of the article was entirely different because the newspaper sentence was the opening sentence, introducing the topic in general terms. In this case, I did not consider the newspaper sentence a reuse of the press release sentence.

Because some press releases led to several publications, the same sentence could constitute more than one case in the data set. This duplication seemed acceptable because journalistic decisions on what to do with a sentence in different news reports were independent from each other. Likewise, a press release sentence that contained two PEs appeared twice in the data set because it represented two decisions made by the news article writer. The entire data set, apart from the quote sentences that were omitted, comprised 687 PE cases. Two hundred and seventy of these PEs appeared in a sentence that was actually used in a news report. Because some sentences contained more than one PE, the number of different promotional sentences used was somewhat lower: 202.

In the sections below, I report the results of a specific analysis of how PEs from press releases were treated in the news reports from Corpus 1. First, I determined if the presence of PEs in a press release appeared to affect the decision to use press release sentences in a news report. Second, I determined if PEs in press releases were retained, replaced by another

**Example 5**

	<i>Press Release</i>	<i>News Report</i>
Dutch	Vijf meesterkoks uit diverse Europese regio's hebben speciaal voor Lufthansa verfijnde streekmenu's samengesteld met als doel Business-passagiers meer service te geven.	De Duitse luchtvaartmaatschappij schakelde vijf meesterkoks uit eveneel hoeken van Europa in en vroeg hen hun regionale specialiteiten samen te stellen.
English	Five top-ranking chefs from various European regions have created sophisticated regional dinners especially for Lufthansa in order to provide more service to the Business-passengers.	The German airline company engaged five top-ranking chefs from five European regions and asked them to prepare their local specialties.

PE, or deleted in news reports. Third, I compared how different media treated PEs from press releases.

### How Press Release Sentences Were Used in Corpus 1

The first step in my analysis of Corpus 1 was to determine if press release sentences were copied verbatim or edited. Table 6 shows that it was a fairly common practice for some medium types to copy entire news press release sentences into news reports.

Free Internet magazines were more likely to use copied material, whereas the other two medium types tended to edit the material used ( $\chi^2$  for this  $2 \times 2$  contrast = 28.66,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The difference between newspapers and subscription magazines did not reach significance ( $\chi^2 = 3.66$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .056$ ). Later, some examples of edited sentences will be cited.

I then analyzed the data to determine if news reports used PEs from the press releases. If journalists are wary of promotional language, it is possible that promotional sentences will be edited more often and copied less often than nonpromotional sentences and even more so when the number of PEs per sentence rises. To determine how PEs were dealt with in news reports, sentences from these news reports were divided into three categories: sentences without PEs, sentences with one PE, and sentences containing two or more of those elements. Table 7 shows that the expectation to edit PEs or not use them at all was not confirmed. In fact, promotional sentences were copied more than nonpromotional sentences (taking together all promotional sentences;  $\chi^2$  for this  $2 \times 2$  contrast = 6.69,

**Example 6**

	<i>Press Release</i>	<i>News Report</i>
Dutch	<p>(A paragraph explaining why the lighting system for the aisle in airliners often breaks down, with delayed departures as a consequence.)</p> <p>Dankzij de inspanningen van Lufthansa Technik—een Lufthansa dochtermaatschappij en de grootste leverancier ter wereld op het vlak van engineering—diensten voor de burgerluchtvaart behoren vertragingen als gevolg van een niet-werkende gangpadverlichting nu voorgoed tot het verleden.</p> <p>(Follows: an explanation of the new lighting system.)</p>	<p>(First sentence:)</p> <p>Een nieuw systeem voor vloerverlichting in passagiersvliegtuigen levert grote winst op wat vliegtijden betreft.</p> <p>(Follows: a verbatim reproduction of the problem explanation from the release, followed by the new system.)</p>
English	<p>Thanks to the work of Lufthansa Technik—a Lufthansa daughter company and the world’s largest supplier of engineering services for civil aviation—delays resulting from non-functioning lighting of aisles are gone forever.</p>	<p>A new lighting system for aisles in airliners yields large profits in terms of flying times.</p>

$df = 1, p = .010$ ). There was no significant effect of the number of PEs per sentence on whether a sentence was used in the news report ( $\chi^2 = 5.30, df = 2, p = .071$ ).

Hence, it seems unlikely that promotional language is avoided by the journalists in this sample.

### How PEs Were Dealt With in Sentences Used

The next part of my data analysis concerned how PEs from press releases were actually used in news reports. The data set for this analysis had to be further restricted because in some cases, the promotional constituent or clause was not used in the news report, whereas the rest of the

**Table 6. How Press Release Sentences Were Used in Different Medium Types: Frequencies and Row Percentages**

<i>Medium type</i>	<i>Use of Press Release Sentences</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Copied</i>	<i>Edited</i>	
Daily papers	31 (17%)	90 (41%)	121
Subscription magazines on (airline) travel	40 (22%)	67 (31%)	107
Free Internet magazines on (airline) travel	114 (61%)	61 (28%)	175
Total	185 (46%)	218 (54%)	403

**Table 7. The Use of Sentences With Different Numbers of PEs: Frequencies and Row Percentages**

<i>Number of PEs</i>	<i>How PEs Are Treated in News Reports</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Copied</i>	<i>Edited</i>	
0	97 (52%)	142 (65%)	239
1	66 (36%)	59 (27%)	125
2 or more	22 (12%)	17 (8%)	39
Total	185 (46%)	218 (54%)	403

*Note:* PE = promotional element.

sentence was (see Example 7 for an example of a PE from a press release that was not used in a news report).

The first part of the press release sentence on Italy being a large travel market (Example 7) was not used in the news report. This part contained a PE, namely *one of Europe's largest*. Because the sentence part hosting the PE was not used in the news report at all, this case provides no information on how PEs are edited and was excluded from the analysis.

I ended up with 195 relevant cases of PEs from press release sentences that were used in some form in a news report. For every case, two questions were asked:

- How was the host sentence of the PE used in the news report? The sentence might be simply copied into the news report, or it might be edited in some way.
- How was the PE itself dealt with in the news report? Was it retained, replaced by another PE, or deleted? PE deletions were further coded to

**Example 7**

	<i>Press Release</i>	<i>News Report</i>
Dutch	Italië [is één van Europa's grootste reismarkten en] Lufthansa's tweede grootste markt wereldwijd.	Italië is de tweede grootste internationale markt voor Lufthansa.
English	Italy [is one of Europe's largest travel markets and it] is Lufthansa's second largest market worldwide.	Italy is the second largest international market for Lufthansa.

**Table 8. Treatments of PEs in Different Kinds of Sentence Use: Frequencies and Row Percentages**

<i>How the Press Release Sentence With the PE Is Used</i>	<i>Treatment of PEs in News Reports Sentences</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>Retained</i>	<i>Replaced by Another PE</i>	<i>Deleted as Part of a Larger Operation</i>	<i>Selectively Deleted</i>	
Copied	115 (100%)				115 (100%)
Edited	34 (43%)	7 (9%)	38 (48%)	1 (1%)	80 (100%)
Total	149 (76%)	7 (4%)	38 (20%)	1 (1%)	195

*Note:* PE = promotional element.

determine whether an editing operation was exclusively focused on deleting the PE as such or whether the PE disappeared as part of a larger editing operation.

Table 8 presents the answers to these questions.

Because press release sentences that were used were copied more often than edited, a large number of PEs was retained. A more surprising finding was that editing a sentence did not mean eliminating PEs. More than half of the PEs in edited sentences were retained or replaced by other PEs. Furthermore, when PEs disappeared, it usually happened as part of a larger editing operation. Only one PE deletion showed particular attention for the PE: The host sentence was left intact except for the PE. There was, therefore, no evidence that the travel journalists targeted PEs for editing. The following examples illustrate the different editing operations reported in Table 8.

Example 8 illustrates a slight syntactic reworking that retained several PEs.

Example 9 shows that the entire sentence could be rephrased while retaining the PE.

**Example 8**

	<i>Press Release</i>	<i>News Report</i>
Dutch	Vijf meesterkoks uit diverse Europese regio's hebben speciaal voor Lufthansa verfijnde streekmenu's samengesteld met als doel Business-passagiers net dat beetje meer te geven.	(Vorige maand werd het nieuwe concept geïntroduceerd door 5 meesterkoks uit diverse Europese regio's, die speciaal voor Lufthansa verfijnde streekmenu's samenstellen met als idee de business-passagiers net dat beetje meer te geven.
English	Five top-ranking chefs from various European regions have created sophisticated regional dinners especially for Lufthansa in order to give the Business-passengers just a little bit more.	(Last month a new concept was introduced) by 5 top-ranking chefs from various European regions, who created sophisticated regional dinners especially for Lufthansa in order to give the Business-passengers just a little bit more.

Example 10 illustrates the cases in which PEs (*verder / further; verschillende / various*) disappeared in the reworking, but other PEs were introduced (*volop / fully*).

Examples 11 and 12 illustrate how PEs were deleted as part of one change involved in a global reworking of the sentence.

### Differences Between Media

Next, I determined if different kinds of media varied in the number of PEs retained or replaced or deleted (see Table 9, which compares the treatment of PEs in three different media).

Although the newspapers retained two thirds of the PEs, they eliminated PEs more often than the two other media types ( $\chi^2 = 19.93$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .000$  for this  $2 \times 2$  contrast). Two possibilities might account for this difference. One possibility is that newspapers copied less often and edited more often. But in this respect, the difference between papers and magazines was not significant ( $\chi^2 = 2.32$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .128$ ).

It might also be that when paraphrasing material, newspapers more often eliminated PEs than did the other media.

Table 10, which examines paraphrases, shows that newspapers more often edited out PEs than magazines did ( $\chi^2 = 13.70$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This

**Example 9**

	<i>Press Release</i>	<i>News Report</i>
Dutch	Met deze cijfers steekt de luchthaven opnieuw gunstig af ten opzichte van zijn belangrijkste concurrenten.	Deze cijfers vertonen opnieuw een gunstig beeld ten opzichte van wat de belangrijkste concurrenten laten zien.
English	With these figures, the airport again compares favorably in regard to its most important competitors.	These figures again present a favorable picture when compared to the most important competitors.

**Example 10**

	<i>Press Release</i>	<i>News Report</i>
Dutch	Lufthansa bouwt haar reputatie van "Connoisseurs on Bord" verder uit door met kindermaaltijden in te springen op de verschillende smaken en wensen van haar passagiers.	Lufthansa heeft een reputatie van "Connoisseurs on board" en daar kunnen kinderen nu volop van mee genieten.
English	Lufthansa further extended its reputation of "Connoisseurs on Board" by accommodating to the various tastes and preferences of its passengers with the introduction of children's meals.	Lufthansa enjoys the reputation of "Connoisseurs on board" and children can now fully take advantage of this.

difference might indicate that journalistic integrity was a more pressing concern in the newspapers than in magazines. However, this difference held only for the process of rewording a sentence; there was no significant difference between media in the decision to reword a sentence or to leave it unchanged.

Finally, I examined whether newspapers differed in their approach to PEs. In Table 11, the two newspapers that appeared most frequently in the corpus are compared.

The *Algemeen Dagblad* significantly deleted more PEs than the *Telegraaf* ( $\chi^2 = 14.61$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The different focus of the two newspapers might explain the difference. The economics section of *Algemeen Dagblad*, like other national Dutch newspapers, prints short news reports on financial results. Many of these news reports did not

**Example 11**

	<i>Press Release</i>	<i>News Report</i>
Dutch	(Het aantal vluchten en de capaciteit naar Azië wordt flink verhoogd.) Lufthansa wordt daardoor zelfs de belangrijkste luchtvaartmaatschappij voor vluchten tussen Europa en Azië.	(De capaciteit op Azië wordt opnieuw verhoogd) en zo wordt Lufthansa de belangrijkste carrier voor vluchten tussen beide werelddelen.
English	(The number of flights and their capacity to Asia is being increased considerably.) As a result of this, Lufthansa will indeed become the largest airline for flights between Europe and Asia.	(The capacity for Asian flights is being increased again) and this will make Lufthansa the most important flight carrier between both continents.

**Example 12**

	<i>Press Release</i>	<i>News Report</i>
Dutch	Dankzij deze samenwerkingsovereenkomst zullen we meer rechtstreekse vluchten naar verschillende Europese zakencentra kunnen aanbieden.	Eurowings zal vanaf volgend jaar meer vluchten naar Europese zakencentra gaan uitvoeren voor Lufthansa . . .
English	As a result of this agreement, we will be able to offer more direct flights to various European business centers.	As of next year, Eurowings will carry out more flights to European business centers on behalf of Lufthansa . . .

directly use press release sentences at all but rather summarized the crucial information in four or five sentences written anew by the journalist. By contrast, most airline news in the *Telegraaf* were presented in longer feature-like articles in a special travel section.

### Conclusion for Corpus 1

The results of the first study are fairly clear cut:

- Promotional language is a pervasive feature of press releases of airline companies, despite the injunctions not to use it.

**Table 9. Treatment of PEs in Different Kinds of Media: Frequencies and Row Percentages**

<i>Medium Type</i>	<i>Treatment of PEs From Press Releases</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Retained or Replaced</i>	<i>Deleted</i>	
Daily papers	41 (26%)	25 (64%)	66
Subscription magazines on (airline) travel	45 (29%)	8 (21%)	53
Free Internet magazines on (airline) travel	70 (45%)	6 (15%)	76
Total	156 (80%)	39 (20%)	195

*Note:* PE = promotional element.

**Table 10. Treatment of PEs in Paraphrases in Different Media Forms: Frequencies and Row Percentages**

<i>Medium Type</i>	<i>Treatment of PEs From Press Releases</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Retained or Replaced</i>	<i>Deleted</i>	
Daily papers	10 (24%)	25 (66%)	35
Magazines	31 (76%)	13 (34%)	44
Total	41 (52%)	38 (48%)	79

*Note:* PE = promotional element.

- Promotional language from press releases survives remarkably well in the corresponding press publications, especially in magazines dedicated to air travel and newspapers with travel sections. Most often, PEs end up in news reports because their host sentence has been copied verbatim; however, even when this sentence is edited, the PE stands an almost 50% chance of turning up in the publication.

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Promotional language from press releases survives remarkably well in the corresponding press publications, especially in magazines dedicated to air travel and newspapers with travel sections.

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**Table 11. Treatment of PEs in Two Daily Papers: Frequencies and Row Percentages**

<i>Daily Paper</i>	<i>Treatment of PEs in Two Daily Papers</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Retained or Replaced</i>	<i>Deleted</i>	
<i>De Telegraaf</i>	34 (94%)	9 (50%)	43
<i>Algemeen Dagblad</i>	2 (6%)	9 (50%)	11
Total	36 (67%)	18 (33%)	54

*Note:* PE = promotional element.

Apparently, the press release writers ignored the common advice to avoid self-promotion and rightly so. Travel journalists reused PEs, sometimes even introducing new ones. This study only dealt with press releases that were used to some extent; hence, it cannot be ruled out that some press releases were discarded altogether because of their promotional style. Discarding a press release because of its promotional elements does not seem likely, however. Decisions whether to use a release are probably based on its topic, not on its style. This study gives no indications that journalists for travel magazines reject promotional language.

It is conceivable that a lack of staff or resources means journalists for travel magazines are less critical when filling their pages. However, it is also possible that the makers of special interest magazines differ from the skeptical, detached editors of top-ranking newspapers who appear to be the model for the writers quoted in the introduction to this article. Special interest journalists may see no harm in enthusiastic reports on developments in the professional field in which they earn a living. In his discussion of the “promotionalization” tendency in genres that were nonpromotional at the outset, Bhatia (2004, pp. 133-136) discussed the example of a holiday magazine article, purportedly written by the magazine staff, which portrayed a certain golf resort in euphoric terms. This study showed that the actual text of such articles might very well come from corporate press releases, not from the editor’s desk.

In fact, special interest media are probably the primary audience for “good news” press releases about new products and services. From a marketing point of view, they are an important publicity outlet, because the readers of special interest magazines are more likely than newspaper readers to be a potential audience.

In the introduction, I discussed the dilemma concerning promotional language for press release writers. They have to weigh the possible publicity gains of promotional releases against the risk that their releases will not be

used. For the press releases in this study, the gains are considerable, whereas the costs are negligible.

Special interest journalists do not avoid promotion, and it is plausible that quality newspapers primarily interested in hard economic news (e.g., financial results) use the press releases to get the relevant facts and figures, even when these are surrounded by promotional phrases.

This is not to say that press releases are not “preformulated”: Press release writers try to produce text that can be reused immediately by journalists. The issue is not whether preformulation takes place but at what kind of media the press release is primarily targeted. For good news press releases in the aviation industry, promotional language may well be part of a successful preformulation strategy.

### **HOW PEs ARE HANDLED BY ECONOMICS NEWSPAPER JOURNALISTS: CORPUS 2**

Although press releases are an important source for news reports, the first study seems to indicate that not all journalistic genres incorporate PEs from press releases to the same extent. In particular, the economics section of daily papers seems more likely to resist PEs in press releases, especially if journalists practice the conventions of the hard news genre described by White (1998). Hence, the second study focused on this journalistic genre. All press releases in Corpus 2 were covered in the economics section of Dutch daily papers.

Whereas the news reports sample was more restricted in Corpus 2, the press release sample was more diverse because they were issued by large companies from different branches of industry. The most frequent topics were new products or services, financial results, reorganizations, acquisitions or mergers, and personnel changes in the board of directors.

The transformation analysis for Corpus 2 was more limited than that of Corpus 1 because for Corpus 2, I analyzed only sentences actually used in news reports. When a press release sentence was used in several news reports, it was counted more than once when the news report versions of it differed. In all, 91 cases were examined.

#### How Press Release Sentences and PEs Within Sentences Are Used in Corpus 2

In Table 6, free Internet magazines had a strong tendency to copy press release sentences, whereas subscription magazines and newspapers

tended to edit them (in 63% and 74% of the cases, respectively). Hence, the most interesting comparison would be the one between the newspapers from Corpus 2 on one hand and the magazines and newspapers from Corpus 1 on the other. The economics journalists from Corpus 2 edited the majority of their input release sentences (97%;  $n = 401$ ), more so than travel magazine writers ( $\chi^2 = 102.13$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .000$ ) and the newspaper journalists contributing to Corpus 1 ( $\chi^2 = 57.78$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Because virtually all used sentences were edited in Corpus 2, it cannot be determined whether the number of PEs affected the choice of editing or copying a sentence.

To see what happened to the PEs in news reports, Table 12 compares the findings for Corpus 1, taken from the bottom row of Table 8, with those for Corpus 2.

The overall picture (see the two columns on the right) is clear: Whereas 80% of the PEs were retained in Corpus 1, the figure is only 22% in Corpus 2 ( $\chi^2$  for the  $2 \times 2$  comparison = 76.05,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The frequencies in the first two columns indicate that in Corpus 1, PEs were retained when entire sentences were copied. In Corpus 2, virtually no sentences were copied as a whole. PEs that were retained in Corpus 2 occurred mainly in host sentences that were edited for other aspects. The retention might indicate that these PEs were left unchanged quite deliberately. Furthermore, PE eliminations in Corpus 1 took place in the context of global reworking operations, whereas in Corpus 2 the majority of PE eliminations seemed the result of strategies specifically aimed at maintaining neutrality.

A closer look at the treatment of promotional language in Corpus 2 found that retained elements in Corpus 2 were relatively often modifiers of numerals (*almost*, *over*); furthermore, more than half of the numerals (63%;  $n = 11$ ) were copied or replaced by another element with the same argumentative orientation. Compare the replacement of *over* by *already* in Example 13.

All other PEs were eliminated in at least 73% of the cases in Corpus 2. Hence, it seems that modifiers of numerals were considered as less harmful than other intensifying devices by journalists producing news reports for economics sections. By contrast, for Corpus 1, no such differences between types of PE were found.

Eliminating PEs in Corpus 2 was done in several ways. First of all, consider the global reworking in Example 14, which retained the numerical intensifier *over* but removed four other PEs: the intensifiers *several*, *strongly*, and *large*, and the evaluative *high-quality*.

**Table 12. Treatment of PEs: A Comparison Between Corpus 1 and Corpus 2: Frequencies and Column Percentages**

	<i>Treatment</i>	<i>Corpus 1</i>	<i>Corpus 2</i>	<i>Corpus 1</i>	<i>Corpus 2</i>
Retained	Sentence copied verbatim	115 (59%)	2 (2%)	156 (80%)	20 (22%)
	Sentence edited, PE unchanged	34 (17%)	12 (13%)		
	Replaced by another PE	7 (4%)	6 (7%)		
Eliminated	Eliminated in a global reworking	38 (19%)	23 (25%)	39 (20%)	71 (78%)
	Selectively eliminated	1 (1%)	23 (25%)		
	Replaced by more neutral or a negative element		14 (15%)		
	Transformed into a quote		11 (12%)		
	Total	195	91	195	91

Note: PE = promotional element.

### Example 13

Dutch	Apple kondigt vandaag aan dat muziek liefhebbers in het Verenigd Koninkrijk, Frankrijk en Duitsland meer dan 800.000 muzieknummers hebben gekocht en gedownload via de iTunes Music Store sinds de introductie vorige week dinsdag.	Een week na de lancering van de Europese versie van iTunes zijn er al 800.000 nummers gedownload, zo meldt Apple woensdag.
English	Apple has announced today that music lovers in the UK, France and Germany have bought and downloaded over 800,000 songs at the iTunes Music Store.	A week after its launching, already 800,000 songs have been downloaded of the European version of iTunes.

Although this kind of reworking could be argued to be primarily motivated by brevity considerations, a substantial number of cases suggests selective editorial attention for the PE as such. In Example 15, the intensifier *considerable* was left out. In Example 16, *better* was replaced by the more neutral *lower*; in Example 17, *immediately already 30%* was replaced by the negative *only 30% yet*. In Example 18, *clearly cheaper* was put between quotation marks.

**Example 14**


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Dutch	Ultra High Sites (UHS) zijn locaties met een hoogte van meer dan 100 meter, zoals zendmasten en industriële schoorstenen, van waaruit diverse sterk gebundelde antennes een uitgebreid gebied voorzien van een kwalitatief hoogwaardig UMTS-sigitaal.	Het telecomconcern gaat daar op een hoogte van meer dan 100 meter een aantal antennes plaatsen. Het bereik is daardoor groter dan bij de oude techniek.
English	Ultra High Sites (UHS) are locations with a height of over 100 meters, such as masts and factory chimneys, from which several strongly focused antenna's provide a large area with a high-quality UMTS-signal.	The telecom company will place a number of antenna's there on a height of over 100 meters. As a result, the reach is larger than with the conventional technology.

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**Example 15 (From a Release on a Digital System for Paying Bills)**


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Dutch	Bedrijven en instellingen levert dit een forse besparing ten opzichte van het versturen van papieren facturen en acceptgiro's.	Hun voordeel (dat van de bedrijven, hpm) ligt in de (Ø) kostenbesparingen. De zegelkosten worden uitgespaard en de aanmaak en het printen van de papieren formulieren.
English	For companies and organizations, this means a considerable money-saver compared to sending paper invoices and giro slips.	Their advantages lies in (Ø) savings. The costs for stamps and the production and printing of paper forms are saved.

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## Conclusion for Corpus 2

In sum, economic journalists working for daily papers generally eliminated the promotional language they encountered in releases (with the possible exception of intensifiers preceding numerals). This second study found clear evidence for a genre conflict between corporate press releases and newspaper reports. The genre conflict primarily concerned the wording of

**Example 16 (From a Release on Internet Services for Laptop Users)**


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Dutch	Hoe groter de databundel, des te voordeliger het tarief per MB.	Hoe groter de databundel, des te lager het tarief.
English	The larger the data bundle, the better the price per MB.	The larger the data bundle, the lower the price per MB.

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**Example 17 (From the UHS Release Cited in Example 11 Above)**


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Dutch	Met de nieuwe masten bereikt KPN onmiddellijk maar liefst 30% van de bevolking.	De nieuwe masten bereiken nog slechts 30% van Nederland.
English	With the new masts, KPN will immediately reach as much as 30% of the population.	The new masts will only reach 30% of the Netherlands yet.

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the information. Economic journalists used corporate press releases with apparent professional distrust. But they did not necessarily discard the entire press release. Instead, they seemed to consider a certain degree of promotion as a self-evident characteristic of corporate press releases. They routinely rectified or toned down certain statements. This response was similar to the one of parliamentarians reading policy papers, as studied by Neutelings and Pander Maat (2001). In their think-aloud study, parliamentarians often regarded some information in a policy paper with explicit distrust, but they usually adjusted the information to their needs by rectifying it or adding relevant information and continued reading. Likewise, the stylistic genre conflict between press releases and news reports seems a fact of life for economic journalists and did not prevent them from extensively using the information provided by the press releases.

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In sum, economic journalists working for daily papers generally eliminated the promotional language they encountered in releases (with the possible exception of intensifiers preceding numerals).

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**Example 18**


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Dutch	Het Super De Boer-huismerk is duidelijk voordeliger dan het huismerk van Albert Heijn. Dat voordeel zal gehandhaafd blijven.	Het huismerk van de dochteronderneming van Laurus moet “duidelijk voordeliger” blijven dan dat van Albert Heijn.
English	Super De Boer’s own brand is clearly cheaper than Albert Heijn’s brand. That advantage needs to be maintained.	Its own brand should remain “clearly cheaper” than that of Albert Heijn.

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*Note:* Super De Boer and Albert Heijn are Dutch supermarkets.

**CONCLUSION**

This study makes several contributions to the study of language in professional genres. First, the study proposes an operational definition of promotional language based on the notion of argumentative strengthening of Ducrot (1980), which enables a reliable analysis of a large array of diverse stylistic devices. This methodological contribution is important given the current attention to evaluative language in general and to the concept of promotional language in particular, inspired by Bhatia’s (e.g., 2004) claims concerning “promotionalization.” Second, this study analyzed the relation between different genres of text by analyzing the reworking of instances of the first genre into instances of the second. This kind of data sheds light on actual processes of text processing while at the same time offering numbers of observations large enough for statistical reasoning.

The study further shows that promotion is a regular component of many corporate press releases. Press releases clearly adopt certain genre conventions from news reports, especially in their move structure (heading, lead, and body) and perspective (third- as opposed to first-person style), thus exhibiting what Jacobs (1999) has termed *preformulation*. But this adoption does not make them an informational genre. Not only has the stylistic analysis shown a rather explicit tendency to include positive evaluations and to intensify them, it also shows that hard news reporters apparently recognize these elements as promotional. In fact, the mix of information and promotion seems to characterize press releases as a genre. Although it is a rather peculiar claim that certain genres by definition display genre mixing, perhaps one should make a conceptual distinction between communicative purposes such as informing and persuading

on one hand (Lentz & Pander Maat, 2004) and genres as culturally complex combinations of purposes and participants on the other hand. In that case, press releases simply combine different kinds of communicative purposes.

Notions such as genre mixing and genre conflict become relevant when examining journalistic responses to press releases. New reports in special interest media may be said to exhibit genre mixing in the very real sense of combining move structures and stylistic choices from corporate discourse (e.g., press releases) with those of news reporting. The finding, thus, calls into question the advice literature on press releases, which invariably states that news journalists resent promotion. Rather than concluding that promotional language in press releases is a sign of defective preformulation (i.e., promotional release texts are badly adjusted to the needs of the press), this study shows that promotional language is dealt with differently in different sectors of the press. Special interest media are apparently quite willing to recycle PEs. In this domain, then, promotional press releases seem stylistically adequate because they generate free publicity that is maximally positive. Hence, the optimal preformulation strategy from the perspective of press release writers seems to consist of maximizing the chances of positive publicity.

However, the economics sections of national newspapers tend to avoid promotional language. There seems to be a genre conflict between press releases and journalistic subgenre of hard news writing, which confirms White's (1998) findings concerning the linguistic register characterizing the reporter voice. At the same time, however, newspaper journalists extensively draw on corporate releases, especially when producing shorter news reports. Although I did not study the decision to use press releases, the news value of a press release as judged by journalists does not appear to be negatively affected by the presence of promotional language. Newsworthy information is generally extracted from newsworthy press releases, even if dressed up promotionally. There might be some friction inherent in the information marriage between press releases and news reports in hard news sections of newspapers, but they are nowhere near divorce.

Future research in this area could focus on several issues. First, the construct validity of the coding schema for PEs could be examined by a more detailed inspection of the appraisal framework for the description of evaluative language. For example, lay readers could be asked to assess the degree of subjectivity/evaluative import associated with the various types of elements. Second, several genre analytic issues merit further empirical

investigation, one of them being the stylistic analysis of other journalistic and corporate discourse genres. For instance, press releases might not only be compared with the news reports to which they may give rise but also with other genres of corporate discourse so that the language culture engendering press releases may be explored. More generally, corpus linguistic comparisons between closely related genres provide interesting evidence for genre analytic claims. Another empirical avenue for genre analysis could be to investigate to what extent conventional stylistic features of genres are represented in the genre knowledge of ordinary readers. Third, further work could focus on the difference between various journalistic subfields in their treatment of press releases and other kinds of external texts reused by journalists. After all, much journalistic writing consists of recontextualizing other texts.

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