Unwinding the verbose skein: Editorial influence on the Hansard record

"There must be eliminated for all time the authority and influence of those who have deceived and misled the people of Japan into embarking on world conquest, for we insist that a new order of peace, security and justice will be impossible until irresponsible militarism is driven from the world."

Paragraph 7 reads:

"...such a new order is established and until convincing proof that Japan's war-making destroyed, points in Japanese territory occupied by the Allies shall be occupied to the achievement of the basic objectives we setting forth."

Adam Smith
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Overview

• Hansard as a linguistic resource
• Some findings using Macquarie diachronic Hansard corpora
• History of the development of Hansard
• Editorial influence: changing policy and previous research
• Comparisons between Hansard record and transcribed corpus
• Conclusions and future research
Hansard as a linguistic resource

• Provides speech-like data:
  o Over an extended period of time
  o Over a variety of regions (including Australia, Barbados, Canada, Ghana, Malaysia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, UK)

• Already digitised and searchable:
  o Hansard corpus, British Parliament (1803-2005)
  o Parliament of Australia, Parlinfo (1901-present)
  o NZ Historical Hansard (1854-present)
## Macquarie Hansard Diachronic corpora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Britain</th>
<th>New Zealand</th>
<th>South Africa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>321,824</td>
<td>407,852</td>
<td>261,577</td>
<td>414,375*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>400,813</td>
<td>556,791</td>
<td>152,504</td>
<td>179,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>374,721</td>
<td>594,082</td>
<td>234,786</td>
<td>184,940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>879,385</td>
<td>657,534</td>
<td>635,225</td>
<td>148,140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>897,550</td>
<td>896,289</td>
<td>470,609</td>
<td>261,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,874,303</td>
<td>3,112,548</td>
<td>1,754,701</td>
<td>1,188,737</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*composed of parliamentary records from Cape Colony, Natal, Transvaal (1900-03)*
• **Colloquialisation** (Hundt & Mair 1999; Leech et al. 2009) = lexicogrammatical features associated with informal spoken interaction increasingly occur in more formal written or spoken genres (Collins & Yao 2013: 480).
  o In written registers also avoidance of features associated with formal writing.
  o Australian English identified as leading the trend towards increased colloquial usage (Collins & Yao 2013).

• **Anti-colloquialisation** = a movement away from spoken features, and an exaggeration of the features of formal writing.

• **Densification** or **increased economy** (Leech et al. 2009) = the packaging of more information into more compact linguistic structures.
Multidimensional analysis

- Dimension 5 – distinction between “abstract, technical and formal versus other types of discourse” (Biber 1988: 113)

- Colloquialisation indicated by decrease in features such as passives, conjuncts (used to explicitly mark logical relations)

- Other dimensions show signs of densification (e.g. through increased phrasal coordination, nominalisation)

- Hansard is a hybrid register of written speech
Colloquialisation or editorial influence?
Influences on change

- Editorial policy
- Communicative aims of the register
- Intended audience (broadcast of parliament extends audience)
- Production mechanisms (e.g. live shorthand vs transcription of audio)
- Broader social context
History of Hansard in British Parliament

- 18th century: resistance to reporting of proceedings of British Parliament. Publishers provided reports under fictitious titles e.g. *Debates in the Senate of Lilliput*
- Official reporting from 1803 by newspaper reporters – Thomas Hansard one of earliest publishers
- 1878 – shorthand writers started to be employed by Hansard to record debates
- 1908 – establishment of official parliamentary reporting staff

(Weatherston, 1975)
SIR H. DRUMMOND WOLFF expressed a wish that the telegram should be presented to the House in facsimile. [Laughter.]

Afghanistan—Negotiations between Russia And The Ameer

MR. ASHBURY asked the Under Secretary of State for India, Whether Her Majesty's Government has received any communication from the Indian Government to the effect that official or other documents were found in Cabul, or elsewhere, indicating that the Russian Government, or its agents, had opened negotiations with the late Ameer Shere Ali, or Yakoob Khan, prejudicial to the interests of British India, and in contravention of the documentary understandings between the two Governments that Afghanistan was beyond the sphere of Russian interests or designs?

MR. E. STANHOPE Sir, in answer to the Question of my hon. Friend, and also in answer to a similar Question of which Notice has been given on this subject by my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Onslow), I have to say that it is true that certain Russian Correspondence has been discovered at Cabul, and is now in the possession of Her Majesty's Government.

(House of Commons, 6 February 1880)
Mr. SEDDON (Premier) said a reference to the Order Paper would show that there was a fair amount of work for members to get through. He had answered this question in the negative on more than one occasion, and the honourable member would recollect that when they passed the last measure dealing with old soldiers' claims the House and the country were told it was to be final.

Mr. HERRIES. - Some of them were not investigated.

Mr. SEDDON said the Commissioner appointed travelled from one end of the colony to the other, and his salary and expenses amounted to something like £2,000, and, as far as he (Mr. Seddon) knew, the work was complete.

(House of Representatives, 31 July 1901)
Mr. SPEAKER.— I must ask the honorable gentleman to resume his seat.

Mr. McDONALD.— I am going to stand out for my rights, and I do not care what the cost may be. I claim my right to say a few words now.

Mr. BARTON.— May I ask my honorable friend for a moment's hearing? The carrying of the motion which has been moved will not conclude our proceedings to-day; there will be the further motion — “That this House do now adjourn,” — and the honorable member can speak to it.

Mr. McDONALD.— You, sir, have granted the Prime Minister the privilege of saying a word or two, and I could have said what I wished to say in just as short a time.

Mr. SPEAKER.— I cannot allow a debate at this stage.

Mr. McDONALD.— It is not a question of debate at all.

HONORABLE MEMBERS.— Chair!

Mr. McDONALD.— It is no use calling out “Chair.” We have neither rules, nor anything else, at the present time. It is only as a matter of courtesy that one is allowed to speak at all at the present time.

(Australian House of Representatives, 9 May 1901)
What does ‘verbatim’ mean in practice?

- The Official Report is “… one which, though not strictly verbatim, is substantially the verbatim report, with repetitions and redundancies omitted and with obvious mistakes corrected, but which on the other hand leaves out nothing that adds to the meaning of the speech or illustrates the argument”.  
  *Select Committee on Parliamentary Debates (HC 239 1907)*

- Mollin (2007) coined the phrase “the Hansard hazard” in cautioning linguists to depend uncritically on the official records of parliamentary debates (the Hansard) as representations of spoken language, given the fact that the official written record is, in fact, a **written representation** of the speech of parliamentarians, mediated by various other language users: reporters, transcribers, copyeditors, and proofreaders.
Editorial policy and Hansard

The (British) Hansard editors’ task:

1913
“so to unwind the verbose skein as to make clear the hidden governing principle, the salient points, of the speaker; to present the vague thought with definiteness, to give the language in which it is expressed consecutiveness and coherency”
(MacDonagh 1913, 32)

2013
“aim to provide a full, accurate and fluent report... by removing repetition and a good deal of the ‘wordiness’ of everyday speech patterns. We take out a lot of the verbal scaffolding...”
(Sutherland & Farrell 2013)
Changes in Hansard editorial policy

• Editorial practices are moving towards a greater tolerance for colloquial usage, informality, and a closer verbatim style.

• Gravlee (1981, 92): 1970s British Hansard reporters have a particular Hansard style “that we use for certain phrases and we tend to make people speak in that style if we can”.

• Contemporary Australian advice: “give speakers what they say” (Hansard 2008).

• Other factors have bolstered the move towards a more verbatim style over time:
  o the recording and broadcasting of parliamentary business
  o differences in production process (>shorthand reporting >recording and respeaking).
Existing research

• Slembrouck (1992, data from 1987; examples only)
• Mollin (2007, data from one sitting in 2006; 43k/35k words of transcription/Hansard)
• Cribb and Rochford (2018, data from 2012-2014; 5k words (36 minutes) of prime minister’s question time)

1. A shift towards a more formal, “written” style (including some hyperconservative/archaic forms) that strips out the spoken language features of the original discourse
   • Elimination of repetition, incomplete utterances, filled and unfilled pauses, false starts, reformulations, syntactic blends, disfluencies (also leading to the reduction of the text).
   • Replacing contractions with full forms.
   • More formal or standard lexical choices (e.g. ensure instead of make sure, consider or examine instead of look at, must instead of have to).
   • Bare infinitive with help is changed to help to.
   • Changing going to future to will, and will to shall.
Existing research

2. Reduction in the interpersonal and textual meanings of the discourse, in favour of foregrounding ideational meanings.
   • Reduction in frequency of amplifiers (very, really, absolutely, actually, clearly).
   • Generic you changed to impersonal constructions.
   • Reduction in the frequency of hedges (I think, I guess, I mean).
   • Reduction in frequency of first-person pronouns.

3. Transformation of discourse grounded in the “here and now” of the situation of interaction to a more distant, even “decontextualized report that is also understandable to the distant reader” (Mollin 2007, 208).
   • Demonstratives this and these are changed to that and those.
   • Increased referential explicitness.
Cribb and Rochford (2018) investigate the same features as in Mollin (2007): Have editorial practices changed from 2006 to 2012-2014?

“Hansard editors have moved towards a less formal, less conservative representation of spoken language” (Cribb & Rochford, 2018, 5), in being more inclined to retain
  o generic you
  o amplifiers and stance adverbials
  o demonstratives.

While this provides some support for the suggestion of changes in editorial practices, the limitations of their study (and that of Mollin 2007) should be kept in mind.
Comparing Hansard with original

Mr. ALLAN FRASER.—Then I gather from the honorable member that he regards all the present rates of social service payments as being adequate?

Mr. Turnbull.—I have not said so.

Mr. ALLAN FRASER.—The honorable member will have an opportunity of saying so in a little while.

Mr. Browne.—Which vote would you reduce in order to pay for this?

Mr. ALLAN FRASER.—There is no question of reducing a vote. The honorable member needs a little more experience.

Australian House of Representatives Hansard
17 September 1959
### Australian Hansard recordings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Transcription</th>
<th>Hansard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946 [2]</td>
<td>8409</td>
<td>5885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959 [3]</td>
<td>13960</td>
<td>11212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>128485</strong></td>
<td><strong>107868</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription</td>
<td>Hansard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. SPEAKER. – The member for Grey.</td>
<td>Mr. RUSSELL. - I ask the Minister for Air</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. RUSSELL. – Mr. Speaker, I desire to ask the Minister for Air a question without notice</td>
<td>whether, in the event of the Department of Air deciding to close the air training school at Port Pirie, the conversion of some of the huts into suitable homes will be considered, so as to ease the acute housing shortage in Port Pirie?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A commentator. – &lt;overlap&gt; This is Mr. Russell.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. RUSSELL. – [unclear] &lt;overlap&gt; deciding to close the air training school at Port Pirie would the authorities then consider the converting of some of the huts for suitable homes so as to ease the acute housing shortage of Port Pirie?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In support of the suggestion I point I wish to point out that electric light and power is laid on together with excellent roads, well-prepared garden space, lawns, water service, deep drainage, swimming pool, recreation grounds, et cetera.</td>
<td>I point out that electric light and power are laid on, and there are excellent roads, a well-prepared garden space, lawns, a water service, deep drainage, a swimming pool, recreation grounds, &amp;c.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Split infinitives and contractions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription</th>
<th>Hansard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Merely because they were able to find the money, <strong>to almost balance</strong> their budget this year doesn’t mean as the Treasurer said that we’d had a good year.</td>
<td>1. But the mere fact that the <strong>Government</strong> was able to find the money <strong>to enable it almost to balance</strong> its budget this year does not mean, as the Treasurer said, that <strong>Australia</strong> has had a good year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. But our actual trade balance, <strong>that’s the physical things that</strong> we export from this country, only exceeded our imports by an amount of sixteen million pounds without taking into consideration what are known as the invisible items.</td>
<td>2. But our export trade balance, <strong>representing the physical goods which</strong> we export from this country, exceeded imports by an amount of only £16,000,000, without taking into consideration what are known as the invisible items.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>That’s</strong> where the money came from and <strong>that’s how</strong> the <strong>Government</strong> were able to almost balance their budget.</td>
<td>3. <strong>That is</strong> where the money came from and <strong>that is how</strong> the <strong>Government</strong> was almost able to balance its Budget.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pronouns

Normalized frequencies (/1000 w.) of 1st/2nd person pronouns

Normalized frequencies (/1000 w.) of 3rd person pronouns
## Pronouns

### Change from direct address

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription</th>
<th>Hansard</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Many claimants as you know...</td>
<td>As the Minister knows, many claimants...</td>
<td>1959</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Change from generic you

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription</th>
<th>Hansard</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you do?</td>
<td>What does one do?</td>
<td>1988-9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Loss of direct appeal to audience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription</th>
<th>Hansard</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Let me give you some examples.</td>
<td>I will provide some examples.</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual features

- Only 7 of Biber’s (1988) 67 features investigated demonstrated a statistically significant difference in frequency between the oral parliamentary discourse and the Hansard records.
- This method identifies features that have not been identified in previous studies (in blue).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informality and spoken-language features</th>
<th>Interpersonal and textual meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>That</strong>-deletion</td>
<td>Discourse particles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractions</td>
<td>Demonstratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clausal coordination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type-Token Ratio (TTR)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Split auxiliaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hansard reduction of spoken-language features - with changes over time

Clausal *and*  

*That* deletion  

Demonstratives
Increased complexity in Hansard

TTR

Split auxiliaries
Categorical editorial effects: Removing informality

Discourse particles

Contractions
Discourse markers

Normalized frequencies (/1000 w.) of
well, now, you know, I mean

Normalized frequencies (/1000w.) of
of course, in fact, so
Discourse markers: Australia vs. New Zealand

Interpersonal DMs - Aus. vs. NZ

Discourse-organization DMs - Aus. vs. NZ
Summary

Main differences between oral parliamentary discourse and official records:

• Reduction or deletion of certain spoken language features
  • False starts and repetitions (observed through inspection of texts/concordance lines, not quantified)
  • Informality features: contractions, complementiser omission
  • Overt marks of interpersonal interaction: discourse markers, non-third person pronouns
  • Reduction of immediacy: fewer demonstratives
• Selection – imposition – of conservative choices: adjustment in second person pronouns
• Increase in grammatical density: clausal coordination reduced, TTR and split auxiliaries increased

Changes over time in editorial practices:

• Acceptance of incoming changes (use of 1st person plural and 2nd person pronouns) lags behind in Hansard compared to transcripts
• Gradual convergence of spoken and written records for many features, without complete identity – remaining differences extend beyond deletion of false starts and repetitions
Conclusions and future research

Conclusions

• Not as much change in editorial practices as expected?
• Some convergence, the match between transcript and Hansard is perhaps closer than suggested by previous research focused on “finding the differences”.

Future research

• Different types of discourse: question time, debates, speeches may see different degrees and kinds of changes
• Collection of corpora from different regions, especially where first language is not English, will allow research into the rate of acceptance of non-standard items
References