ACKNOWLEDGMENTS – RINGRAZIAMENTI

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ABSTRACT

ENGLISH VERSION

This study aims at opening a critical discussion about a topic that needs to be tackled in linguistic research concerning English slang, i.e. the strategic use of slang in the mass media. So far, the literature available on this lexical category has privileged lexicography (e.g. slang etymology, dictionary compilations) and the study of in-group slang (e.g. the slang of the underworld, the slang of college students). Indeed, as consumers of mass culture, we daily witness a pervasive use of slang in the media – so blatant a stylistic choice that it can only be explained as a form of language manipulation. This empirical observation triggers three questions:

a) why is slang considered as an effective lexical choice by text producers?
b) how is it used?
c) what is the outcome of such choice?

Chapter One presents the media's appropriation of slang and explains why the field of analysis has been restricted to American English on the one hand, and to monthly magazines on the other. Chapter Two is devoted to building a theoretical framework that allows for a critical understanding of the social, cultural and economical powers that generate the media's need to devise persuasive and manipulative language strategies. Chapter Three attempts an overview of the reasons why slang has a privileged grip on the audience, due both to its

'unsanitized' socio-psychological potential and to its age-long stigmatization by cultural institutions (dictionaries, the Academy) – a status that has conveyed a defiant and daring attitude to its users.

After discussing the appropriation of slang from a theoretical and socio-cultural point of view, a textual and discoursal study is offered on a corpus consisting of the 2007 issues of six monthly magazines published in the United States of America, namely *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, *GQ*, *Esquire*, *Popular Mechanics* and *Wired*. Chapter Four provides the methodological criteria for corpus selection and analysis. Following the guidelines of Critical Discourse Analysis, an adaptation is made of Fairclough's (2001) stages of analysis, namely description, interpretation, and explanation, in order to suit the needs of a study of written material devised and distributed for a large audience.

Chapters Five and Six offer a qualitative analysis of the use of slang in monthly magazines. The first step is the analysis of covers because it opens a door on editorial strategies at their most overt. Covers play a chief role in the purchase event, whereas the interior is devised to be read when the magazine already belongs to the reader who has bought, borrowed or found it. Therefore, the visual and textual packaging of a magazine issue condenses all the main assumptions made by the editors about the target readers' features, needs and expectations; it also essentializes the magazine's self-representation as an advisor/entertainer/informer to the advantage of the reader (Swann, 1991; Click & Baird, 1990; Morrish, 1996). Then, the analysis shifts to the stories previewed on the covers, in order to verify whether the effectiveness of slang is limited to its role as a purchasers' catcher on cover headlines or it stretches out to the related stories. It has been observed that slang is an effective tool in the hands of the media

because of its emotional content: by triggering in-group memories and a sense of collective identity, slang manages to modify the readers' emotional state and make them more open and receptive to the overt and covert messages offered by the magazine.

Chapter Seven provides concluding remarks. Slang is *exploited* by magazines, not simply used or borrowed: the vocabulary created by powerless groups, i.e. youngsters and minorities, is appropriated by the media, overused to the point that it loses most of its creative and communicative punch, and finally redirected towards its creators in order to gain their trust and turn them into more controllable and more predictable consumers.

ITALIAN VERSION

Questo studio si propone di aprire una discussione critica su un tema che merita di essere esplorato nell'ambito della ricerca che concerne lo slang inglese: l'utilizzo strategico dello slang nei mass media. Fino a oggi, la produzione scientifica su questa categoria lessicale si è quasi interamente limitata alla lessicografia (per esempio, all'etimologia dei termini slang e alla compilazione di dizionari) e allo studio degli slang settoriali (per esempio, lo slang dei bassifondi o quello dei college universitari). Eppure, in qualità di consumatori di cultura di massa siamo quotidianamente testimoni dell'uso pervasivo dello slang nei media – una scelta stilistica alle volte così eclatante da poter essere spiegata soltanto come forma di manipolazione del linguaggio. Questa osservazione empirica solleva tre domande:

a) perché lo slang è considerato una scelta lessicale efficace dai produttori di testi?

b) in che modo è utilizzato?

c) quali sono gli effetti di tale scelta?

Il Capitolo 1 introduce il fenomeno di appropriazione mediatica dello slang e restringe il campo di analisi all'inglese americano da un lato e alle riviste mensili dall'altro. Il Capitolo 2 è dedicato a costruire un apparato teorico che permetta una comprensione critica dei poteri sociali, culturali ed economici che generano nei media la necessità di elaborare strategie linguistiche volte alla persuasione e alla manipolazione. Il Capitolo 3 tenta di dare una visione d'insieme delle motivazioni per cui lo slang ha una presa privilegiata sul pubblico, in virtù sia del suo potenziale socio-psicologico, principalmente dovuto alla sua mancata 'igienizzazione', sia del lungo processo di stigmatizzazione attuato dalle istituzioni culturali (i dizionari, l'Accademia) – uno status che ha sempre conferito a chi lo utilizza un'aria scomoda e di sfida.

Dopo avere discusso l'appropriazione dello slang da un punto di vista teorico e socio-culturale, si propone uno studio testuale e del discorso sulla base di un corpus formato dall'annata 2007 di sei riviste mensili pubblicate negli Stati Uniti d'America: *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, *GQ*, *Esquire*, *Popular Mechanics* e *Wired*. Il Capitolo 4 fornisce i criteri metodologici seguiti nella scelta del corpus e nell'impostazione dell'analisi. Seguendo le linee guida della Critical Discourse Analysis, i tre stadi di analisi formulati da Fairclough (2001) – descrizione, interpretazione e spiegazione – sono stati adattati per soddisfare le esigenze di uno studio incentrato su testi concepiti, scritti e diffusi per un pubblico ampio.

I Capitoli 5 e 6 offrono un'analisi qualitativa dell'utilizzo dello slang nelle riviste mensili. Il primo passo consiste nell'analisi delle copertine, poiché ciò permette di aprire una finestra sulle strategie editoriali più evidenti. Infatti, le copertine rivestono un ruolo predominante nell'atto dell'acquisto, mentre l'interno è progettato per essere letto quando la rivista è già entrata in possesso di chi l'ha comprata, presa in prestito o semplicemente trovata. Per questo motivo, il confezionamento visivo e testuale di un determinato numero condensa in sé tutte le maggiori supposizioni fatte dalla redazione per quanto concerne la natura, i bisogni e le aspettative dei lettori destinatari; inoltre, riassume in sè l'autorappresentazione della rivista come consulente/intrattenitore/informatore del lettore (Swann, 1991; Click & Baird, 1990; Morrish, 1996). In seguito, l'analisi si rivolge agli articoli preannunciati sulle copertine (definiti *cover stories*), al fine di verificare se l'efficacia dello slang si limiti a procacciare acquirenti sulla copertina oppure si estenda alle *cover stories* correlate. Si è osservato che lo slang è uno strumento efficace nelle mani dei media a causa della sua carica emotiva: attivando la memoria di gruppo e il senso di appartenenza a un'esperienza comune, lo slang riesce a modificare lo stato emotivo dei lettori e a renderli più aperti e ricettivi ai messaggi, diretti e indiretti, proposti dalla rivista.

Il Capitolo 7 presenta le conclusioni. Lo slang è *sfruttato* dalle riviste, non semplicemente usato o preso in prestito: infatti, i media si appropriano di un lessico creato da gruppi privi di potere, cioé i giovani e le minoranze, ne inflazionano l'uso al punto da fargli perdere la carica creativa e comunicativa originaria, e infine lo ridirigono verso i suoi creatori per conquistare la loro fiducia e trasformarli in consumatori più controllabili e prevedibili.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

> *Slang and colloquial speech have rarely been so creative. It is as if the common man […] would in his speech assert his humanity against the powers that be, as if the rejection and revolt, subdued in the political sphere, would burst out in the vocabulary that calls things by their names.*
>
> Marcuse (1964: 86)

If the contemporary status of slang were as simple as Marcuse depicts it in the 1960s, there would be no need for this study. Indeed, the philosopher captures the most fascinating – and also the most frequently studied – moment in the life of slang vocabulary, i.e. its birth and the social groups igniting its creation. However, little is ever said concerning more powerful social groups which benefit from its exploitation within their discourses, and which often even manage to determine, or at least influence, what is it that slang calls when it "calls things by their names". Whenever a teenager in class or on the bus describes her[1] new cell phone as *hot*, one may wonder when the new

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[1]   Studies on the use of generic pronouns highlight that the use of generic *she*, introduced in the Sixties, may lead to misunderstandings. While generic *he*, due to its diffusion and tradition, does not necessarily create a masculine image in the reader's mind, generic *she* is still perceived as an 'instantiating' pronoun, which projects a feminine-only image, thus complicating the context (see Adami, forth.). Perseveration

generation has started to attribute sexual desirability to technological items. Unless we are witnessing an outburst of collective schizophrenia, in order to answer this question we must acknowledge that a much longer path has to be traced. Indeed, this slang modifier has been taken up and exploited by advertisers, writers, publishers, and celebrities: the recent one-size-fits-all motto "That's so hot!", popularized by Paris Hilton and used to commercialize a wide range of products, is only one instance of a quite blatant tendency in advertisement to sexualize or oversexualize objects in order to increase their desirability, with the implicit but constant promise that such attractiveness will be transferred onto buyers at the act of purchase. The media, such as television, the press, the Internet, cinema, and music, have then amplified, spread, and replicated new uses of *hot*, which eventually have become available to teenagers, as well as to all kinds of consumers. The number of referents to which this modifier applies nowadays (people, clothes, cars, accessories, locations, and technological tools) is obviously wider than it used to be decades ago.

However, none of these passages from one community of speakers to another is innocent: regardless of the degree of awareness of each single language user, when vocabulary is appropriated by a more influential and decision-making group in order to attract audiences by mirroring them and then profit from such attraction, the transaction is no longer a *borrowing*, as it is commonly described, but rather an act of linguistic *shoplifting*. The former term draws on the idea that speakers exchange codes under mutual agreement and at nobody's expense: in fact, as it is often the case, speakers whose language is constantly borrowed for its exoticism or attitude (let us think of linguistic

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in the use of generic *she* may gradually weaken that unconscious misperception, both in the reader's and in the writer's mind.

minorities) are damaged by this transaction, since their culture and values – so deeply rooted in language – embellish the borrower without projecting outward a fairer and less stereotyped image of the lender.

Slang is a lexical category that enjoys a greater freedom from political correctness and politeness, as Marcuse posed in *One-dimensional man*: when a young woman is called a *chick*, or an Arab is called a *towel head*, the background and ideology of the speaker are immediately unmasked. By ideology I mean the horizon of values, beliefs, and prejudices that shape every individual's representation of the world and affect her practice.[2] Only when this horizon is distilled, essentialized, and imposed on the social sphere in an overt way, it is commonly perceived and named as 'ideology', and therefore supported or opposed – let us think of Fascist ideology, or Communist ideology. In all other cases, there is a need to foreground that horizon and expose it by drawing on its formal, mostly unintentional, manifestations in the social practice of the individual or the group that carry it. I am referring in particular to the study of discourse: certain preferences with regard to vocabulary choices (e.g. politically correct names for job positions), syntactic structures (e.g. inclusive 'we', or active versus passive voice), and turn-taking patterns are only a few examples of formal features that could signal the emergence of the speaker's beliefs or political agenda.

The surfacing of ideology – that can be observed in all semiotic modes, not only in language – has been analyzed by several branches of linguistics and semiotics.[3] This study mainly adopts the analytical framework developed by Critical Discourse Analysis, in particular by

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[2]   I derive my idea of horizon from the notion of *horizon of expectations* formulated by Jauss (1989).

[3]   For a general overview, see Barthes (1973); Bernstein (1981); Fairclough (2001); Kress and van Leeuwen (2006).

the work of Fairclough, van Dijk, Wodak, and Caldas-Coulthard, since their approach allows to investigate the use of slang in the mainstream media in order to unmask and expose the ideologies of the 'shoplifters', so to speak. The ethical goal underlying Critical Discourse Analysis (and critical approaches in general) is the achievement of a higher degree of awareness with regard to the private and public discourses that reproduce social inequalities and oppression, in order to resist them and promote social change through the problematization and eradication of any discoursal practices that dehumanize the Other. The above example of the slang term *chick* is a case in point: while its use in public discourses may be playful, the term nonetheless embodies a sexist view of women that not only objectifies but also animalizes them. The double-sided essence of this noun, endearing and degrading at the same time, has brought a female rock band as the Dixie Chicks to wear it on their sleeve as a living contrast to their culturally and socially engaged agenda – an act that could be rightfully interpreted as an attempt to trigger social change through conscious language reinvention.

Using degrading expressions *consciously* can help weaken their power and set them free from the hypocritical disposal bin of political correctness, according to which censoring and dismissing the offence is tantamount to erasing the ideology that generates it. In July 2007, the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a civil right association which supports minorities in the United States) organized a symbolic burial of the word *nigger*,[4] an act especially

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[4] This noun is considered as slang only in contexts where it is not a racial slur: for example, it is slang when it is used by an African American as a term of endearment or a synonym for *friend*, such as in the phrase 'You are my *nigger*'. Note the semantic shift, akin to the process of reinvention promoted by the gay community with regard to the sexist slur *queer*.

triggered by the release of a hip-hop album with that title. As Salim Muwallil suggests, however, even the most racially tainted words can be transformed through use: since they do not have an intrinsic value, as any other lexical item, conscious hip-hop artists could perform "an act of etymological alchemy by transforming a verbal weapon into a term of endearment. They who use the word with malicious intent may still be able to inflict pain, but they are brandishing a weakening weapon" (Muwallil, 2008: 17).

Because of its bluntness and (attributed) social awkwardness, slang has been traditionally left out of Standard varieties, which throughout history have preferred not to perpetuate it in formal written texts, stigmatizing whoever could not refrain from its use in formal interactions, since the sanitization of vocabulary has erroneously been considered as an effective way to prevent the speaker's ideology and social identity from leaking out and contaminate an allegedly 'unbiased' ground. Whenever parents warn their children not to use slang, or teachers reformulate their pupils' utterances (cf. Sledd, 1965), they are precisely struggling to make sure that their younger interlocutors will not step out of social acceptability, which may deny them access later in their life.

Most of the terminology used to describe this lexical category has contributed, more or less consciously, to build an exoticized and misleading image of slang as a fascinating though quantitatively disregardable aspect of language production. Slang dictionaries and lexicons, flourishing from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, have stressed that slang is a "language apart" (Weseen, 1934: v), it is "unconventional" (Partridge, 1937), and "uncensored" (Lewin & Lewin, 1988); linguists have defined it as an "anti-language" (Halliday,

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1976), or a living "paradox", since speakers look down on it but, simultaneously, love using it (Crystal, 2003: 182). Although these descriptions correctly point at crucial features of slang, such as secrecy (i.e. unintelligibility from the outside), obliqueness and resistance to the status quo, they tend to resort to a terminology that unfailingly pertains to the field of segregation: slang is *anti-*, is *un-*, is *para-*, and is *apart*. For this reason, a study such as Eble (1996) is refreshing, in that she avoids defining slang negatively, i.e. by means of privative prefixes, and stresses that it is a lexical category which lies within the *ordinary* competence of language users.

All of the above listed works have built a literature that has provided a theoretical account of slang or collected lists of words which belong to specific social or professional groups. It is time for the study of slang to move beyond definitions, since labels tend to prove ideological and even discriminatory through time (let us think of *cant*, which up to a few decades ago was an independent category separated from slang, the former being the vocabulary of criminals and the homeless alone!). The study of slang needs to move beyond lexicography, as well, which is a necessary but nonetheless partial and delayed process of cherry-picking uses out of their context without accounting for the social effects of their actual use. The constraining nature of this field of research is part of a tendency observed by Gleason (1973), according to whom linguistics has traditionally considered as normative and ordinary what in fact is extraordinary and unfamiliar to most verbal exchanges. By enhancing research interest in genres characterized by highly formal registers, such as scripted speeches, or in specialized discourses, such as legal English, linguistics has disregarded colloquial language, regional speech, and slang for a

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long time, or at least it has denied them quantitative analysis, by reducing studies to lexicographical collections and entertaining notes on usage, whose contribution is precious but not sufficient.

Slang originates in hierarchical social environments. I use the term environment to point at the difference between social systems, which are always hierarchical in terms of the distribution of power, cultural capital, and wealth, and social environments, where higher and lower layers of that hierarchy, such as employers and employees, teachers and pupils, or parents and children, are in physical proximity on a daily basis. This distinction is crucial because forced closeness has been a central driving force for the creation of slang. The undesired Other may not necessarily be the authority, since doctors and nurses develop slang to make themselves unintelligible in the presence of patients and their families, nor it necessarily has to cover an institutionally higher position, since individuals of a specific ethnic group may invent a vocabulary in order to mock 'structural' peers, such as co-workers, schoolmates, or fellow soldiers, who share their same position in a particular institution but whose ethnicity allows them to enjoy greater power in other environments.

In the United States, the black community has created a conspicuous slang vocabulary through the centuries as a form of both linguistic and cultural resistance – and, in turn, their lexicon has been the most shoplifted by mainstream white America.[5] The appropriation of the language of jazz and sports, albeit real, is an overused example that indirectly feeds the stereotype of African Americans as musicians and athletes. More telling is the less overt appropriation of auto-

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[5] Here and further on, the word 'America' refers to the United States of America. The shortening is done only for the sake of conciseness, with no intention of endorsing the unfair appropriation of the U.S.A. of the name of a whole continent – an ideological act which has been rightfully criticized by other American countries.

antonyms, i.e. words that can mean their contrary depending on the context, like *bad*, *sick*, or *shit*, which can be all synonyms of *excellent* or *the best*, such as in the phrase 'Your new car is the *shit*'. Auto-antonyms are created by reversing Standard vocabulary in such a way that intended positive meanings are conveyed under a disguise of semantic transparency (to the extent that outsiders are made to believe that "He's bad" or "You're sick" have a negative meaning). For this reason, they have been central to black slang and crucial for the daily struggle for survival, since slavery times; moreover, they have contributed enormously to the evolution of American English by pushing semantic change. However, not all forms of lexical appropriation are blameworthy. In the Seventies, Major suggested that the use of black slang by other powerless members of society was a victory:

> when bright white kids become disillusioned – suddenly
> discovering that they have been nourished on lies, [their use
> of black slang] proves that the spirit of revolution continues
> (as always) to be an intensely real force in the North
> American experience (Major, 1971: 13).

Those disillusioned kids, however, were the initiators of the Sixties counterculture, people for whom social commitment and human rights were central to their life and action.

The white adolescents of our decade, who appropriate black slang through rap and hip-hop, are living another kind of disillusionment: by replicating the language and the physical appearance of rappers, white suburban kids seem to look for a stronger 'ethnicity' in which to identify. The lie, in this case, is probably the belief that Caucasians living

in the United States are the real Americans, and are the only ones who do not need to provide extra details with regard to their ethnicity. The de-ethnicization of white Americans has brought to the loss of the sense of community, which is perceived – although it might not be rationally processed – by youngsters, who are more sensitive to it in their daily struggle to shape their own identity. The difference between the Sixties and today is that the market has found new ways to exploit their genuine disillusionment, and to numb their potential rebelliousness by offering them an 'ethnic' language (commercial rap and hip-hop music) and 'ethnic' paraphernalia (hip-hop clothes and accessories). However, Major's claim is still valid because it implies that the use of black slang by whoever is complicit with or uncritical about those 'lies' (the media, the élites, the entertainment industry) deserves a suspicious and critical look. This is precisely the kind of gaze adopted here.

Among periodicals, magazines make larger use of colloquial and informal language than newspapers and journals do. This practice is superficially seen as a way for columnists to reproduce the audience's speech and tastes in order to draw their attention and bridge the social distance between writers and readers. This distance is at the same time physical, cultural, and political in a broad sense. The physical farness is not only due to the space and time gap occurring between the creation of an article and the purchase of the magazine off the newsstand, but also and more to the location of the editorial offices and that of readers. The fact that the typical affectionate reader sends a letter to the editor from cities and towns as peripheral as Del City, OK or from Glenwood, IL and receives a reply from Manhattan is by no means a disregardable element in the analysis of how diverging their representations of the world must be – although we are left with little doubt about which

representation is more likely to influence and numb the other. The tension can sometimes become explicit to the point that a reader from Cincinnati, OH felt entitled to object: "Why should voters consider the one-sentence blurb of a New York-based magazine when deciding on local issues?" (*Esquire*, January 2007, p. 14).

Cultural distance is central to the analysis of language with regard to slang: writers need to create a common body of knowledge to share with the audience, a list of interests and preferences that allow them to tie a solid, though playful, connection with readers. By way of example, the choice of slang words which were fashionable in a particular year or decade, such as *groovy*, *radical*, or *awesome*, is an effective device to evoke a common set of shared memories in order to praise or jokingly dismiss the values and the features attached to that specific time (the pacifism of the Seventies, for instance, or the greediness of the Eighties), leading the reader to do the same. Finally, my idea of political distance is the unbalance of the political capital[6] enjoyed by editors and writers on one side, and by the average reader on the other: in order to reduce it, magazines tend to enhance the illusionary contribution of readers, who are invited to become reporters, narrators, denouncers, and even heroes. Slang can play a decisive role in the reverse side of this process, i.e. the undertoning of the magazine's enormous political capital, and its influence (both real and potential) on the audience's daily agenda: the use of slang – mentally associated with adolescence and playfulness – contributes to construct an identity of the ideal writer as younger and less committed than she probably is, thus making her

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[6]   Political capital, as understood here, is not the public exposure and networking power gained by politicians during their active career (Bourdieu, 1986); conversely, it is the degree of agency enjoyed by every single citizen, and her chances to modify, or at least influence, the status quo of her society, the trend of an ongoing social or economic process, and other people's opinion on a social matter (for a discussion, see Schugurensky, 2000).

sound less worthy of being taken seriously by society, while the real writer and the real editor are free to act their age in the editorial process, in complicity with 'adult' and 'serious' publishers and advertisers.

By bridging this threefold distance with readers, magazines consolidate a bond which leads to the creation of a sound audience that ensures yearly subscriptions and regularity in purchase, thus allowing advertisers to tailor publicity after the body shape of a specific ideal reader. The ideal writer and the ideal reader, as described above, are pushed to mirror and identify with each other, also with the help of slang. However, this identification is illusionary: my working hypothesis is that slang contributed to create or reshape subject positions into which readers are pushed both linguistically and with the non-verbal contribution of images.[7]

The focus of this study is on mainstream monthly magazines that are published and distributed in the United States but at the same time belong to global corporations stretching their markets and their networks abroad. Although this study is not concerned with a comparison between domestic and international versions of U.S. publications,[8] the local/global tension that the use of slang brings into the picture is undeniable: defining the role of American slang, an all-domestic feature of language, intrinsically local and bound to a specific social context at the time of its inception, cannot be done without

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[7]   Ad hoc comments will be made on images whose captions include slang in their text. Despite its salience as a semiotic mode itself, color will not be taken into account since the magazines which constitute the corpus for this study have different policies as to color and paper quality; some of them use color predominantly as a marker of continuity throughout the issue, thus making it semantically irrelevant for this analysis. However, specific observations will be provided when necessary.
[8]   For an analysis of American slang in the Italian version of *Cosmopolitan*, see Belladelli (2008a).

considering the global economic and cultural networks that produce these publications, and that directly and indirectly shape the tastes and the trends of a large portion of the reading public worldwide. A study conducted on international versions of *Cosmopolitan* (Machin & van Leeuwen, 2003) finds that the 'problem-solution' discourse schema, which is not universally used to address critical situations, has been exported to foreign publications regardless of the public's cultural and linguistic habits. As a result, even in countries like India, where collective support and religion are usually incorporated in the resolution of personal struggles, the local version of the magazine enhances the need to solve problems individually and quickly, and provides advice accordingly, thus spreading worldwide the goal-oriented, individualistic attitude promoted by the model versions, i.e. the magazines issued in the U.K. and in the U.S.A. The corpus of texts analyzed in this study consists of the 2007 issues of six monthly magazines published and distributed in the United States: *Cosmopolitan* (Hearst Corporation), *Glamour* (Condé Nast Publications), *Esquire* (Hearst Corporation), *GQ* (Condé Nast Publications), *Popular Mechanics* (Hearst Corporation), and *Wired* (Condé Nast Publications).

The analysis will start from the use of slang on covers. While describing the strategies used by the media to affect the audience's short term memory in information processing, van Dijk (2006: 365) claims:

> For example […] printing part of the text in a salient position (e.g. on top), and in larger or bold fonts, [will] attract more attention, and hence will be processed with extra time or memory resources, as it is the case for headlines, titles or

publicity slogans – thus contributing to more detailed processing and to better representation and recall. Headlines and titles also function as the conventional text category for the expression of semantic macrostructures, or topics, which organize local semantic structures; for this reason, such topics are better represented and recalled.

As already stressed, whenever slang vocabulary occurs in the mainstream media, one may wonder for which purpose that specific lexical choice has been made: is it a light-hearted and well-intentioned word play for the sake of levity and fun? Is it an illusionary *hommage* to disempowered and non decision-making groups? Is it an attempt to direct and restrict the possible applications of slang to more acceptable, controllable referents, in order to make slang suitable and recyclable by the market? These and more possibilities lie at the basis of this research.

Contrary to what has been claimed earlier, in the developing of this study a suspicious and critical gaze has not always been enough. The look of the critical analyst is also the amused look of the young woman who is entertained and even mentally stimulated by certain uses of slang found in the magazines she analyzes. Becoming aware of this form of strabismus, acknowledging the trajectory of each eye, and understanding the motives of both suspicion and amusement, are also part of the work. Slang, as often said, is entertaining to hear and to use. After a presentation on slang at a conference in the United States, a professor of Old English came up and confessed to me, with a light smile on his face: "Nowadays, even full professors and deans say *cool*. Yet, whenever we say it, we know that's slang". This anecdote leads to

several considerations: first of all, if even full professors say *cool*, why be suspicious when magazines use it, too? Moreover, if the boundaries of formality have collapsed in virtually all private and public discourses, is the 'slang' label still valid? And finally, is slang vocabulary homogeneous, or would it be useful to distinguish, for instance, *cool*, which is known even to university deans, from *neat-o* or *kickass* or *the shizzle*, although they have the same meaning, i.e. 'excellent'?

The first concern should be cleared on the basis of what has been discussed so far. The omnipresence of slang is only additional evidence to what is defined as the 'informalization of discourse', i.e. a large-scale ongoing process of fake equalization of voices in verbal interactions, where traditionally hierarchical roles are apparently leveled out through language. However, the fact that teachers and pupils, or employers and employees, draw on the same solidarity-based (as opposed to the traditional power-based) system of linguistic options – a mechanism that makes young waiters feel socially comfortable enough to greet elderly customers saying "How are you doing, guys?" – is by no means indicative of a decline of unequal power relationships (Fairclough, 2001). The use of a slang word in public contexts, and outside the social group that created it, always hides a goal.[9] A professor who shows *the coolest documentary* during a lecture may wish to awake her students' interest by sharing a laugh with them; conversely, a magazine that presents *the coolest ideas* for the summer aims at drawing attention on a list of vacation packages for which a number of travel companies paid a spot on the page. Both scenarios are worth investigating.

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[9] This claim does not imply that a teenager does not have a goal when choosing slang vocabulary. Only, foregrounding the goals of the media is considered as more urgent here. I thank Roberto Cagliero for his insighful observations on this point.

The last two questions – on the usefulness of the slang label and on the differentiation of slang according to intelligibility – deserve to be addressed before committing to the analysis of a large corpus of texts. In the introduction to the *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, Lighter (1994) foresees a time when the slang label will be useless in dictionaries, given that the boundaries of formality and appropriateness in language are becoming increasingly blurred. In fact, regardless of their diffusion, inflation and intelligibility, slang words are generated under specific circumstances and dictionaries should continue to record this feature. However, considering how the status of racial slurs has changed in dictionaries through the centuries (Wachal, 2002), we must acknowledge that the practice of labeling is undeniably determined by changes in sensitivity and policies. For this reason, it is not the label that has to be removed: what may be needed at this time is a complication of the label in order not to dismiss the history and social potential of the lemma, while recording its 'tolerated' status. Although the study of slang has to move beyond labels as limiting categories, we must acknowledge their usefulness as a *tool* in the analytical process. Therefore, starting a new trend of research focusing on media may help to map slang according to the level of permeation or resistance that lexical items encounter when they get in touch with the mainstream. *Cool*,[10] as might be expected, has a high level of permeation into mainstream discourses, although we have already understood that its acceptability does not necessarily entails an alleged formal 'upgrading' to what is perceived as Standard vocabulary. What would be even more intriguing is investigating which level of permeation has a word of

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[10]   This term originated in the African American community in the 1930s to indicate a detached attitudes towards the racism of the whites, as novelist LeRoi Jones pointed out. Cool was then taken on by the beat generation, and has remained in use up to the present day (Cagliero & Spallino, 2007: 139; my translation).

African origin such as *mojo*: does its use somehow reinforce and reproduce existing stereotypes? Does it apply only to a restricted range of contexts? And if so, what is this resistance due to? My hypothesis is that mainstream magazines are more willing to absorb only a certain slang subcategory, i.e. what Moore (2004) defines as "basic slang". Words such as *cool* or *dude* happen to outlive the generation and the socio-cultural context that created them, and accumulate an increasing number of referents and cultural values through time. Their longevity, together with their diffusion, makes them recognizable and understandable by the majority of the population. As a result, magazines can make sure that (commercial) communication can be performed smoothly, with no risk of losing the reader along the page.

How do we devise a method of analysis that can be fine-grained enough to account for this range of pertinent interrogatives, but systematic enough to substantiate our explanations? Quantitative data would only provide illusionary results, if it is assumed that the higher or lower frequency of particular slang lexemes is ultimately indicative of their higher or lower level of permeation into the mainstream. Given the different length and structure of the magazines under examination, and given that slang remains a low-frequency lexical category in magazine writing, a quantitative account on a single year and on six magazines would only provide some hints on trends, without explaining why they have emerged.

A study on discourse types answers more questions. Slang occurs most incisively in so-called operational discourse types, i.e. the language of instructions, guides, tips, and advice, born within instructional writing. These discourse types have been disembedded to colonize an increasing number of social practices and their discourses:

the *how-to* or *10-ways-to* formats, together with their visual counterpart of bulleted lists and framed boxes, have become the all-encompassing schemas for the representation of a range of topics, from cooking to career counseling to self-help to parental issues. I argue that lexis can be disembedded, too, and that the use of slang in magazines is mainly a matter of disembedding. Similarly to genres, which are generated within a specific network of social practices, and are sometimes transplanted to new social practices because of their effectiveness, slang has been disembedded, as well. Lexical categories, such as professional jargons and slang, have a more or less detectable 'birthplace', which can be described in terms of time and place (intended socially and ethnically). As this study will show, vocabulary items can be disembedded from their social context and used as social technology, due to specific features that suit the needs of other discourses (cf. Chapter Three).

In the realm of the study of slang, investigating processes of linguistic exploitation may not provide the sense of immediate fulfillment one gets from adding an unprecedentedly attested referent to a lemma in a dictionary, or from discovering new in-group slang uses by means of interviews and questionnaires. The pleasure of discovery, in the archeological or anthropological sense, is somehow denied: due to the easy accessibility of sources, the detection of slang in popular culture may cause an apparent sense of detachment from real individual speakers, given that language produced by the media undergoes different stages of collective editing. However, to foreground such processes may trigger another form of pleasure: by engaging in the critical analysis of discourses controlled by economic and cultural élites, and informed by a range of varying – although equally powerful –

ideologies, linguistic research becomes an ethical task which overcomes the human gap between the analyst, who is also a consumer of media products, and consumers of media products, who are encouraged here to be also analysts.

Chapter Two

MAGAZINES IN THE ERA OF TOTAL ENTERTAINMENT

> *Amusement and all the elements of the culture industry existed long before the latter came into existence.*
>
> Adorno & Horkheimer (1947/1997)

As presented in Chapter One, Marcuse (1964) viewed the social potential of slang as lying in the disruptive force which emerges from the bottom of society. However, this view holds true only at the birth of slang vocabulary: mainstream culture often appropriates it and invests it with its values and stereotypes, thus reducing or nullifying its potential. Since this aspect of slang use has been addressed less frequently by linguists, this study is aimed at analyzing and interpreting the strategic use of slang in monthly magazines, i.e. a language act by which the 'disruptive force' of slang is neatly channeled and *redirected* towards the audience as a means of social containment. The choice of high-selling monthly magazines as preferred sites to observe this phenomenon is motivated by their centrality in the press market; moreover, unlike newspaper writing, that has gained a stable status in the realm of linguistic inquiry, the language of magazines in general, and of monthly magazines in particular, suffers from a relative lack of academic interest. Since the term 'magazine' has now come to describe websites, too, it should be clarified that here 'magazine' indicates any

periodical publication printed on paperback paper, mostly financed by advertising, and distributed at the newsstand or via subscription.

Countless weekly and monthly magazines are published every year in the United States: although the exact number is unknown, it will suffice to say that more than a thousand new titles were launched in 1998 (Preston, 1999) and that in 2007 the U.S. top five Computer magazines had an average monthly readership of 2,216,077 (Audit Bureau Circulation, 2007). (Section 2.3 provides an overview of the magazine market in the United States.)

When we think of magazines, we are likely to picture a hair salon or a dentist's waiting room. In our mind, the social practice of reading a magazine tends to be limited to a specific set of conditions: a person waiting, strangers around her, some time to kill. A pile of magazines is available on a little table, to be picked up by anyone at any time. No newsstands and deliveries are involved: magazines are already there, as ornaments, or as a tray of chocolates, for the amusement of the Bored. The issues are from last month, or even older. They have color pages. They are glossy. They are women's magazines.

This scenario may not be universally shared, and some might picture, say, *Weekly World News*[11] when hearing the word 'magazine'. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that that the subtitle of this dissertation – *A critical study on U.S. monthly magazines* – is more likely to be interpreted as 'a study on women's magazines' than 'a study on politically incorrect magazines'. McKay (2000: 4) remarks that the reason why magazine journalism has always been underestimated by the Academia, as opposed to newspaper journalism, probably lies in the naturalized – therefore unconscious – identification of magazines with

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[11]   It is a black-and-white, not glossy parody of sensational publications.

bored females who need to be entertained, thus forgetting about the thousands of periodicals that are produced in every country. In other words, publications have an ideological gender in our imagery, and are assigned a value accordingly: newspapers are masculine, black and white, and have something to say about today's concerns (and so do their journalists); magazines are feminine, colorful, and are so irrelevant to today's concerns that one can read a year-old issue without even noticing. (Section 2.2 provides an analysis of the assumptions and ideologies underlying the notion of 'magazine', 'magazine reader' and 'magazine writer'.)

In order to understand the role of monthly magazines in contemporary Western society, it is necessary to situate this kind of publication at the crossroads between information (not seen as news coverage but rather as the conveyance of notions, skills, or advice) and entertainment. Regardless of the topic sector of each magazine, which may be concerned with realms as different as computers and gardening, there must be a common reason behind the economic flourishing of this market in a time described as the 'digital' era. The most likely explanation seems to be the magazines' ability to keep readers entertained and hooked, as McKay (2000) suggests. However, entertainment is seen by McKay (and also here) not simply as instant amusement but rather – and much more – as a deep yet illusionary sense of satisfaction and inclusion felt by the reader and crafted by the magazine itself.

The Frankfurt School proves inspirational as a starting point for the more general problematization of the role of entertainment in our time. According to the quote at the beginning of this chapter, which argues that amusement existed before the amusement industry, Adorno

and Horkheimer suggest that laughter is a form of trap on which the establishment relies to infuse people with a fraudulent sense of happiness. The age-old manipulative use of the idea of happiness has been recently discussed by Bourdieu (1998b: 25), when he describes the government's wish to 'make people happy' as a way for "those who know where the people's happiness lies to make the people happy, even despite the people, against their will" because they "understand their happiness better than they do".

Everyone must be entertained, but at the same time one is trained to seek amusement only in manufactured objects or tools (e.g. electronics, broadcasting devices, audiovisual material, or paper material): therefore, one learns that, in order to be entertained, she always needs the help of an artificial medium.[12] The socialization into 'total entertainment' – by no means a recent phenomenon, albeit an ever increasing one in the West – is so powerful that the teacher who complains that she must turn her classes into stand-up comedy shows to keep the students awake is the same who laments that a conference speech without a PowerPoint presentation is quite impossible to follow.

The addiction to entertainment has profoundly shaped public discourse. Postman (1985/2005) explains the change of public discourse as a phenomenon characterizing every age that witnesses the introduction of new media. Indeed, the change introduced by new media is mainly epistemological, since the understanding of truth, the sense of reality, the hierarchy of priorities, and the limits of private and public life all depend on the medium dominating a specific time and

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[12] The artificiality of media is a highly debatable matter that I do not intend to explore here; however, this term does not imply a dichotomy between 'artificiality' and 'naturalness'. I simply extend Cassirer's definition of "artificial medium" (Cassirer, 1956: 43) so as to include any signifying technological prosthesis created by human beings as an alternative to face-to-face communication.

place. For instance, Postman claims that public discourse more or less maintained the same range of features throughout the Age of Typography, which lasted from the diffusion of Guttenberg's press in the XV century to the diffusion of television. In order to exemplify the epistemology of the print-culture, he mentions the common expression 'Let me draw you a picture', uttered so as to mock the interlocutor's obtuseness, thus proving that the hierarchy of verbal skills over the production and the decoding of images has so deeply entered common sense. Under the reign of the typed page, the categorization of truth and reality was heavily influenced by the hegemony of books: even in speech, she who could quote more (and quote *verbatim*) was more trustworthy. Memory, literacy, authorship, and handwriting were attributed specific values that have been strongly questioned after the rise of the Age of Television.[13] If we consider education, we could observe that the pedagogies that emanate from the print-culture epistemology have become less and less popular in the last years – let us think of exams, now quite outdated yet not dismissed, that expect students to identify entire texts by providing the authors' name and the year of publication.

Later on, in the twentieth century, "our notions of truth and our ideas of intelligence have changed as a result of new media displacing the old" (Postman, 1985/2005: 26). His hypothesis is confirmed, for instance, by the current hesitation and even resistance, especially in the Academia and the institutions, to accept websites as reliable sources. Electronic texts, indeed, walk on the epistemological crest between the Age of Typography and the Age of Screen: they are typed without ink, they can be published without a publishing company, and they question

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[13] Since Postman wrote in 1985, today we may rename it as the Age of Screen.

the notion of authorship in ways that are utterly ideological. The explicit motivation for disregarding electronic texts is that their content is 'unstable' because it can be modified, and that the author is not always retrievable. The assumptions underlying the unreliability of an electronic text is that its content 'is not good enough to make it to the bookstore', where 'good' stands for true and valuable, and that its author is lacking qualification to have her say. Thus, while the "author of a new kind" (Kress, 2003: 173) is incessantly asked to give proof of her intellectual stature, thousands of books are issued everyday for the benefit of the traditional author's résumé, provided she can find a publisher or the funds to publish her work at her own expenses; as for intellectual authority, paper and page numbers automatically provide reliability to her argumentation. The inconsistency of this double standard is quite evident; however, as Postman suggests, the role of media in shaping the way cultures categorize and perceive reality in a specific time is rarely noticed as we live in it.

There is a close connection between the rise of the Age of Screen and the rise of total entertainment. In the XX century, as television was gradually reducing our attention span, people needed more and more reasons to keep focusing on what was being broadcast. At the same time, television had gradually become the preferred arena for news, politics, and institutional communication. So, public discourse – channeled through that syncopated medium – had to follow the same rules of that medium: don't be boring, mind the attention span, and say what you have to say before they change channel. These new imposed needs contributed to symbolic revolutions in our society, such as the rise of *fast thinking* (Bourdieu, 1998a), an unprecedented urge to generate an opinion of one's own within prohibitive time constraints.

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According to Bourdieu, the only feasible way out under such conditions is the total resort to *idées reçues* (received ideas, or 'commonplaces'): as a result, the audience unlearns to decode new information because "the exchange of commonplaces is communication with no content other than the fact of communication itself" (Bourdieu, 1998a: 33).

The genres and formats of public discourse changed accordingly: in order to be quick, raw data and slogans had to take the place of argumentation and dialectic debate. The topics of public discourse changed as well: in order not to be boring, sensationalism and odd-news-from-around-the-world elbowed their way in, at the expenses of in-depth news commentaries and descriptions of large-scale phenomena. The evolution of public discourse under the influence of television also meant an increasing emphasis on images: political, institutional, and cultural personalities started to value semiotic modes that had not been fundamental to public discourse until then, such as clothing, gestures, and voice. These are the same modes which had been first used strategically by Hitler and other dictators after the birth of cinema.

Entertainment, understood as both amusement and sensory stimulation, played a central role in shaping the rules of audiovisual communication, i.e. be captivating, be good-looking, and gesticulate convincingly. By the same token, the newer screen-based media belonging to the Age of Screen – which is coming to its maturity in these very years – are influencing public discourse. Let us consider the features of the last U.S. presidential campaign. The idea of democracy that Barack Obama has promoted, and which constitutes one of the pillars of his ideology, is based on the understanding of citizenship as a network of people that choose and shape the political agenda of their

own Country.[14] Both during and after the campaign, this idea has been expressed partly verbally, if we think of how heavily he has pushed the word *grassroots* into the U.S. political discourse since his candidature, and partly with the unprecedented use, in terms of strategic effort and results, of a peer-to-peer artificial medium, i.e. the Internet, as a 'democratic' place (or partially so, as suggested by Herman, 2007) for raising funds *all together*, planning strategies *all together*, and even have a picture with the candidate taken *all together*.[15]

Another point raised by Postman, which is central for the role of any medium (in the case of magazines, the written page) in society, is the distinction between *technology* and *medium*. According to him, a technology becomes a medium when it employs a particular symbolic code and places itself into the economic and political context. In his words, "a medium is the social and intellectual environment a machine creates" (Postman, 1985/2005: 84). A magazine, for example, is used as a technology when a child cuts pictures off a copy to make a collage, or when a stalker pastes single words onto a white page to create anonymous letters for her victim. The 'technological' features of a magazine, e.g. glossy paper that becomes gluey if soaked in water, or detachable perfume samples that can be placed inside a drawer to give towels a better smell, change according to the advancement of chemistry, graphic engineering and paper manufacturing. Conversely, as a medium a magazine has more or less remained the same since the XIX century, because its role in society has not undergone substantial

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[14]   Obama powerfully condensed his vision in the "I am here for Ashley" story which concluded Obama's well-known public speech on race, *A more perfect union* (Obama, 2008).
[15]   A backstage photo opportunity with Obama was offered to contributors that donated more than 25 dollars before important deadlines. This information was made available to me after I subscribed to the Democratic Party newsletter for research purposes in 2008.

changes ever since: a means of information, a transportable source of entertainment, and a diffuser of advertisement. The only evolution it has undergone is a progressive differentiation of readers, mirroring the differentiation of consumers in the market (Ballaster et al., 1991).

Nevertheless, technological features go hand in hand with the role of a medium in society, and carry additional meanings to be decoded consciously or absorbed unconsciously. Provided the availability of glossy color paper, the publisher who chooses opaque black-and-white paper communicates a specific understanding of magazines as a medium in society: a less frivolous, less expensive, more rigorous means of information (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; MacLoughlin, 2000). By the same token, she who keeps having her transistor radio repaired instead of listening to the radio online – provided she has a computer – has a personal understanding of how the technological features of that medium (interferences, background hum and so on) shape the meaning of what is being conveyed. I remember listening to the election of Pope Benedict XVI in the offices of a law firm where I used to work in 2005. The boss had read online that the proclamation would be broadcast in a few minutes, so he switched on his vintage briar radio and called the employees in. Someone jokingly observed that the regression to a more conservative Pope was even clearer as it was announced by a buzzing and distorted male voice, 'wartime style'.

2.1 FROM THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL TO CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

In order to provide continuity to the discussion concerning the evolution of critical theory, let us situate the observations made so far within the social analysis inaugurated in the 1930s by the Frankfurt

School. On the one hand, their theoretical framework lies at the basis of any contemporary critical endeavor aiming at the explanation of the relations between society, power and culture in the West; on the other, since Critical Discourse Analysis is conceived as a continuation of such exploration from a linguistic perspective, summarizing the main concerns of the Frankfurt movement at this early stage of the discussion on language in the media will better clarify both the connection between the two critical approaches and my own theoretical position with regard to them.

What has become known worldwide as the Frankfurt School is the critical work of a group of scholars (philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists) that gathered at the Institute for Social Research (*Institut für Sozialforschung*) in Frankfurt am Main in the 1930s, under the direction of Max Horkheimer. Among their main concerns, they committed to providing a critique of fascist ideology and of the notion of authority, to formulating a critical theory of Marxism, and to promoting radical social change through the development of a revolutionary conscience. According to them, before organizing any revolutionary act the masses need to become aware of the hidden (or naturalized) ideologies pervading their own culture and their own media, otherwise no one will ever feel the need to do so.[16] With the support of psychoanalysis, the Frankfurt School theorized that culture and media manipulate the masses at the level of pleasure, so that people are kept constantly and superficially content and satisfied, with no major unfulfilled desires (Fromm, 1955). This satisfied and happily passive personality is exactly the type of 'social character' into which

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[16]   This view marked the ultimate detachment from Marxist teleology, which predicted a time in which the subordinated classes would unfailingly rebel.

the population is made eager to get: "the average person must *want* to do what he *has* to do" (Fromm, 1984: 14).

After the political rise of Hitler in Germany, Nazi censorship and xenophobia forced the group to seek political exile – mostly on account of their Jewish roots – in Geneva, Switzerland, and then in the United States, where they continued their social research at Columbia University in New York City. One of the most innovative peculiarities of their critical production was the enormous value attributed to collective work in the field of philosophy, a discipline that had been considered as an intrinsically individualistic intellectual effort, at least throughout modern and contemporary history. [17]

Adorno and Horkheimer's quotation (at the beginning of this chapter) is found in *The Dialectics of Enlightenment*, a study which aimed at investigating the so-called culture industry, i.e. a form of organized entertainment – which includes allegedly 'pure' amusement (e.g. cinema, radio, magazines), as well as information and what they called *false art* – that is devised by the system, as stated earlier, so as to keep people at a constant level of satisfaction. In order to do that, it is necessary to replace the real needs – incontrollable by nature, since each person has her own dreams and desires – with artificial needs, that are created ad hoc and promoted through the media in order to make people desire only what is already (or will soon be) available, thus leading them to abandon other aspirations in life. In later times, the neutralizing and neutering function of consumerism has been powerfully described by Chomsky (1992: 95):

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[17]   Besides Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and Fromm, the main contributors to Frankfurt School Critical Theory were Karl Korsch, Walter Benjamin, Leo Lowenthal, Jürgen Habermas and Friedrich Pollock.

> These sectors of the doctrinal system [the tabloids, the
> sitcoms, the Super Bowl] serve to divert the unwashed
> masses and reinforce the basic social values: passivity,
> submissiveness to authority, the overriding virtue of greed
> and personal gain, lack of concern for others, fear of real and
> imagined enemies, etc.

The 'social values' listed above can be ascribed to the Frommian 'social character', and are interpreted as functional to the conservation of the current economic and cultural hierarchy: since the majority of the population is instilled with the belief of being able to satisfy all of their needs, and is reassured that the pursue of individual satisfaction is a value, people will be less and less concerned with reality and they will not "set themselves to change it" (Chomsky, 1992: 95).

Subsequently, all desires are reified into purchasable products, to the extent that one is brought to thinking that all aspirations can be fulfilled within the marketplace. If we translate this theory into the current technological and economical environment, we can say that one is more likely to soothe the need to be safe and protected by purchasing a video security system for her house, or booking night rounds from a security service, or buying a gun, than she is likely to trust her own senses or to read critically how the information media keep switching the security alert button on and off in order to emphasize specific political or social topics, regardless of the real security situation in a given area.

The analysis of reality conducted by Critical Theory did by no means limit itself to language: its objects of study ranged from human behavior to economical and political policies, to interpersonal relations,

to art. However, in the last decades a branch of Discourse Analysis has embraced Critical Theory and enriched the study of language in use with the same socially engaged approach. The main legacy that was passed from the Frankfurt School onto Critical Discourse Analysis (and also Social Semiotics) is the view of social change as the ultimate goal of critical research. Raising people's consciousness and sharpening their ability to decode the social practices around them (of which speaking is only one, albeit fundamental) is deemed as the highest intellectual endeavor.

The main contribution of Critical Discourse Analysis to the study of language is the development of a framework which allows analyzing the ways in which discourse reproduces social inequalities. As summarized by van Dijk (1999: 459), this analysis is possible by studying naturally occurring text or talk and their discoursal and social context. Moreover, its theorists and analysts involve the reader explicitly into the process of analysis, and denounce the lack of education to critical thinking in school (see, for example, Fairclough, 2001). This pedagogical perspective conveys a fuller meaning to the idea of social emancipation: indeed, by encouraging readers and students to engage in the linguistic analysis of texts and discourses belonging to their everyday experience, social change is no longer seen as a hope or a destiny to be expected *after* the analytical process, but it is considered as one of its building elements.

Critical Discourse Analysis – that Fairclough, van Dijk or Wodak shorten as CDA, unlike other theorists, such as Gee[18] – consists of a

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[18]   Studies that adopt Critical Discourse Analysis as their theoretical framework may use the acronym or the extended denomination in order to clarify their affiliation to one or the other theorist. I use the latter form for a different reason: abbreviations have a weakening and euphemizing effect on the meaning of what they shorten that I wish to avoid.

three-stage analytical process: description of the text, interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and explanation of the social context where such interaction occurs. This approach, which is suitable both for written texts and spoken interactions, does not consider the three stages as independent and subsequent elements: indeed, the selection of a particular text or corpus of texts implies that the analyst has preliminarily interpreted the object of her study and judged it as representative of a specific social practice or phenomenon on which it is worth focusing for the benefit of social awareness.

One of the elements that make a text worth of this kind of analysis is the degree to which it voices 'common sense', i.e. the system of beliefs and assumptions that are taken for granted and considered as shared knowledge both by the text producer and by the text interpreter (i.e. the reader). For instance, the monthly magazine *Men's Health* deals with fitness, sex, technology, and clothing; in spite of the title, its readers are not in the least surprised when they don't find two hundred pages of medical advice. The title draws on the culture-specific and relative common sense according to which a healthy man is a happy man, and that a happy man is a healthy man: in order to be happy, he must have a satisfactory partner, a satisfactory wardrobe, a satisfactory job, and a satisfactory car. Common sense varies through time and place: in wealthy Western societies, where medical care and vaccines provide a sufficient protection from diseases, 'health' does not only mean freedom from sickness, but also being fit, thin, successful, and good-looking; conversely, societies in which hunger and epidemics belong to people's everyday experience have a different shared understanding of what 'health' is, and whoever reads the content of that magazine after reading its name would be surprised, or at least would have some sort

of reaction. The task of Critical Discourse Analysis is unveiling what is read and absorbed *without* reactions, because it is precisely there that the dominant ideology resides. Gramsci's and Hall's theorizations of common sense could be applied to this example. According to Gramsci (ca. 1929-1935/2000), common sense is the *weltanschauung* of the ruling class, which manages to impose it onto the subordinated classes to the point that it is eventually perceived as the 'natural' way to interpret reality:[19] the reader of *Men's Health* who does not find the magazine name misleading has internalized the dominant interpretation of the word 'health' in her own society. Later on, Hall (1980) added complexity to the notion of common sense – seen by Gramsci as inevitable by the lower classes – claiming that the dominant ideology is the "preferred reading", yet not the only one unfailingly adopted by readers or viewers of mass media.

Manipulation – a practice described and critiqued in studies as early as Packard's (1958) – is another topic that Critical Discourse Analysis has chosen to bring to the fore of language study and that partly explains the role of slang in the mass media (cf. Chapters Five and Six). Unlike persuasion (e.g. in advertising), this phenomenon is described as illegitimate and abusive, occurring when recipients lack the tools to see the consequences of what the manipulator advocates. Van Dijk (2006: 361) formulates a "triangulated" theory of discursive manipulation (emphasis added):

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[19]   According to Gramsci, common sense is the overcoming of basic animal passions and the understanding of 'need' as conscious achievement. Common sense consists of the heterogeneous and diffused traits of a certain generic thought generated in a given time within a given popular environment. Every philosophy tends to become the common sense of the intellectual elite at some point. Common sense is not a solid entity unchanged by time and and space: it is the folklore of philosophy, and it manifests itself – along with folklore – as an incoherent, inconsistent frame of mind that mirrors the social and cultural position of the mass.

(…) manipulation is a *social* phenomenon – especially because it involves interaction and power abuse between groups and social actors – a *cognitive* phenomenon because manipulation always implies the manipulation of the minds of participants, and a *discursive-semiotic* phenomenon, because manipulation is being exercised through text, talk and visual messages.

Among the approaches to language study, Critical Discourse Analysis has been accused of being ideological, where 'ideological' stands for politicized and biased. In the name of scientific objectivity, Wardhaugh (2006: 15) argues that Critical Discourse Analysis

is very much an ideological view. Its proponents maintain that all language use is ideological as are investigations, i.e. that there is no hope of an 'objective' or 'neutral' sociolinguistics. Consequently, critical discourse analysis is ideological and judgmental.

Wardhaugh clearly aims at discrediting Critical Discourse Analysis by trapping it in its very logic: if all approaches are ideological, then their approach must be ideological, too. However, as he fails to make clear, the same logical loop holds for 'objective' and 'neutral' approaches to language study, which attribute discipline-bound, not universal, values to raw data and quantitative description, as much as other approaches attribute discipline-bound values to socio-political context or cognition. On this topic, Chomsky (2000: 20) agrees that, although objectivity

should not be attacked (due to its role in the pursuit of truth), we should question "the cover of objectivity that many intellectuals use to avoid incorporating factors in their analyses that are inconvenient". Critical analysts are not oblivious of their own presuppositions, and they recognize that any observer is inescapably opinionated. Therefore, they choose to include self-analysis in their studies, in order for the reader to understand the analyst's ideological standpoint and judge it autonomously. For instance, Fairclough (2001: 4) introduces himself to the reader as follows:

> (…) I write as a socialist with a generally low opinion of the social relationships in my society and a commitment to the emancipation of the people who are oppressed by them. This does not, I hope, mean that I am writing political propaganda.

The risk of any research on language as social practice, i.e. of 'discourse' in Fairclough's view, and of sociolinguistics in general, is to be easily dismissed from academic research with the charge of being anti- or non- scientific. The view according to which linguistics is a scientific discipline is ideological, too, as it assumes that only measurable phenomena and changes in language can be generalized and commented on, or that a given trend is likely to have the same features if tested against a different sample of data.

2.2   GLOSSY MAGAZINES, GLOSSY READERS?

The discussion carried out so far has highlighted the importance of an act of self-analysis as a propaedeutic step for opinionated analysts and

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opinionated readers to be taken before delving into the analytical process with a critical approach. As the author of this study, it is necessary for me to problematize what *I* perceive when words such as 'magazine', 'magazine reader', and 'magazine writer' are employed, so as to provide the reader with a term of comparison she can test against herself. However, my analysis should not be over-justified to the degree that it stands on its own merit, because any analysis of society and power relations includes the seed of self-destruction: on the one hand, whenever the social analyst speaks for 'the masses', or 'others', or 'people', she implies she is not one of them; on the other hand, whenever she warns from or promotes change, she climbs up the steps of an observatory that is not there, nor should be. (Chapter Four provides more insight concerning this point.) The theoretical and social uneasiness of this position is exemplified by the following case.

The Frankfurt School thought that social awakening would necessarily start from élites of critical minds, given the state of constant drowsiness in which Western peoples were kept by the very system the School described. So they necessarily deemed more important to produce that criticism, albeit elitist, than to escape the accusation of being elitist. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer (1947/1997) mention a recording of jazz clarinetist Benny Goodman playing Mozart with the Budapest String Quartet.[20] They accuse the classical musicians of bending their own art to the popularity of jazz and of adjusting their pace accordingly; moreover, they blame the American musician for making the concert "uniform and sugary". I understand this remark as a critique of a cultural moment in which the situation could never be the other way round, i.e. a time in history in

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[20]   April 25, 1938, *Quintet for clarinet and strings, K581* (written in 1789).

which a popular jazz musician was not supposed to bend his pace to the constraints of classical music. Adorno and Horkheimer use this example to explain that the current notion of art is inauthentic and manipulated from above. If one considers the contemporary referents of the word 'artist', that has come to describe anyone that has surged to some kind of VIP status (actors, musicians, singers, but also models and soubrettes), their warning from the evolution of the notion of art is motivated and useful. However, in so doing Adorno and Horkheimer seem to temporarily lose their ideological clarity, in that they fail to remind the reader that any form of art has been evaluated, shaped and manipulated by the judgment of the ruling class. In other words, any form of art undergoes a process of inclusion or exclusion, and its identity is strongly influenced by the élite's approval or rejection: in the former case, it becomes mainstream, thus losing any additional label and just considering itself 'art'; in the latter case, it is pigeonholed as 'experimental' art, or 'radical' art, or 'folk' art, or '(insert nationality/ethnicity)' art, or artifact. By assuming (in that particular passage) that the trend from authenticity to inauthenticity goes from classical music towards jazz, Adorno and Horkheimer fail to be critical of the dominant, naturalized ideology that gave 'classical' music its very name. This logical passage should be made explicit – and not simply taken for granted, as they seem to do: by giving 'classical' music its very name, the ruling class decontextualized a specific genre and used it as a benchmark against which all other forms of music were measured (and then devalued) for centuries. Furthermore, by implicitly assuming a 'natural' hierarchy in quality (or, at least, leaving the reader to believe

so), they evoke the logic of the fall from the Garden of Eden, or the logic of degeneration, which constitutes a specific ideology altogether.[21]

My critique of Adorno and Horkheimer is just a way to demonstrate that one must *temporarily* suspend self-criticism and leave her ideology (in this case, an elitist one) under water having considered the long-term benefits of such attitude. Indeed, the analyst must ponder the risks of being trapped by her own criticism: foregrounding the ideologies underlying her attitude while foregrounding other people's ideologies could lead to a form of self-induced aphasia, which may preserve the analyst's integrity but which will nullify her contribution.

For all these reasons, let us briefly analyze which assumptions are at play when I mention the key words of this chapter. Although it is quite hard to overcome one's mental models, which are unconscious for the most part, trying to foreground some of them at this point could be helpful.

2.2.1   MAGAZINE

My mental model concerning magazines includes the visual image of a colorful glossy publication. I tend to link the idea of a magazine to a weekly publication span, probably due to my past experience as a long-term reader of a children's weekly magazine, of a teenage girls' weekly magazine later, and to my daily exposure to weekly gossip magazines left in waiting rooms, at the hairdresser's, on trains etc. As a 29-year-old woman, I tend to find monthly publications more 'appropriate' to my needs and interests; when at the newsstand, I am more oriented

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[21]   My critique is by no means isolated, as it comes after a long tradition of criticism of their work, from Lukàcs to Eco. Popper (1994: 80), for instance, defines the work of Adorno and Horkheimer as "vacuous and irresponsible", since their elitist attitude would never promote social change in practice.

towards buying women's magazines and hobby/DIY magazines, although I have happened to buy men's magazines out of curiosity about 'what they teach them about us'. Since neither I nor my family have ever subscribed to a magazine, my mental model tends to include the idea of magazines as objects to be browsed through and bought at the newsstand.

I am now aware that this mental model cuts my understanding off a large portion of the magazine industry and readership. For instance, I do not spontaneously link the word 'magazine' to special-interest magazines, such as publications meant for professionals or amateurs of specific disciplines, e.g. *Circle Track* (about auto-racing technology) or *Strictly Slots* (about slot machines and video poker). This is one of the reasons I include *Popular Mechanics* in my research: I assume that many readers may share my same mental model concerning magazines, and therefore need to broaden their understanding. I choose to use a consciously naïve approach to mental models (see Chapter Four for more details): since van Dijk (2006: 376) reminds that mental models are "unique, ad hoc and personal", I wish to play and come to terms with my own, thus offering the reader a chance to do the same with hers.

2.2.2 MAGAZINE READER

Although I tend to connect magazines with casual findings on tables and chairs, when I think of a magazine reader I picture her in her own house. I also associate the experience of reading a magazine with collective reading, or reading aloud for other people. Generally speaking, I do not have a preferred gender for magazines readers. Conversely, I have two preferred age spans in my mind: children aged

8-13 on the one hand, and adults aged 20-35 on the other hand. I do not tend to think of seniors aged 60+ (of both genders) and males aged 40-60 as magazine readers. I guess this limit is explained by considering my mental model concerning magazines, which tends to limit them to 'trivial' topics: as a result, I instinctively have a hard time considering seniors and mature males as interested in triviality – stereotypical as it sounds.

Becoming more aware of my mental model (or a portion thereof) is the starting point for the analysis of readers as participants in the magazine discourse. Since I have a slight bias gender-wise, I find it healthy and propaedeutic to explore the real data concerning the publications I include in this book. Section 2.3 provides an account of the six magazines and updated statistics and surveys concerning the number and typology of their readers. I expect, for instance, to find a higher average age for readers, compared to what my mental model would suggest.

2.2.3   MAGAZINE WRITER

Given the focus on language that a study on slang requires, I find it necessary to make sure that the idea of a single person writing a column and deliberately choosing to use slang is put aside and overcome. In an era where the Typographical and the Screen overlap as epistemological models, the idea of authorship as individual and deliberate is still a strong mental model. Formal education, or schooling, is based on the transmission of a list of *genial* novelists, poets, historians and politicians who wrote *genial* works for our culture; one is hardly taught that editorial issues, censorship, auto-censorship, and other forms of symbolic and real power exerted on individual effort

have always been in the picture.[22] As a result, unless one is exposed to the complexity of the social practice of writing, the mental model concerning writers, and 'magazine writers', tends to be similar to the one I have just described.

The process of magazine production involves varying layers of editing and revisions, following a hierarchical order according to specific roles and competences, thus excluding the possibility that a given cover story or feature article may be the result of a single person's creation. Moreover, we should not overestimate the contribution of language in the production of a magazine page: graphic designers and editors take care of and make decisions concerning other fundamental semiotic modes (layout, fonts, images, colors, paper quality) that contribute to the overall semantic weight of a given story.

2.3 MONTHLY MAGAZINES IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Before providing details concerning the history and distribution of the six monthly magazines which constitute the corpus for this study, we may take a quick look at handbooks for prospective magazine journalists and journalism students, in order to better understand the ideological framework into which they are taught and trained.

> When a writer chooses to pitch one idea rather than the
> other, or an editor chooses to commission one feature rather
> than the other, they are already selecting which information

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[22]   An exception is offered by the outstanding works by Stephen Greenblatt and New Historicism, a school of literary theory committed to foregrounding the social practices and the power unbalancies encapsulated in literary works. Cf. Grenblatt (1988).

their readers will have access to. Even where the subject
matter is the *frothiest of entertainment* the same holds true
although it may matter less in absolute terms (McKay, 2000:
45; emphasis added).

Given the crucial role of triviality in the daily manipulation of people's
perception of the world and its concerns, the common sense underlying
the above assumption – i.e. frothy entertainment has less influence on
people than serious topics have – is quite appalling if we consider that
prospective writers are taught into thinking that it is the topic of their
texts that determines its influence on readers, instead of the way it is
represented linguistically and put into perspective.

The media coverage of the last presidential campaign in the U.S.A.
exemplifies this concern. Many journalists, not in a sarcastic fashion,
described the new glasses frame chosen by Sarah Palin – the Republican
vice-presidential candidate – as a strong "statement" (see, for example,
Vellequette, 2008: 8; Horovitz, 2008: 15). Paradoxically enough, while
issues that really matter to people are marginalized and euphemized by
the media and political pundits, the sexiness of Palin's eyeglasses is
emphasized by trivializing basic terminology of political discourse (e.g.
'statement') *within* political discourse.

As far as lexical choices are concerned, McKay warns against the
use of slang, arguing that it might be "counter-productive" (2000: 57).
According to her, the more unintelligible and uncommon a slang word
is, the more readers who are not familiar with it will feel excluded,
whereas readers who know it will "get a vicarious sense of what is
cool". Her remark is a good starting point for our discussion in the
following chapters. However, we will see that attracting more or less

readers is not the point here, because the slang occurring in the magazines analyzed here hardly hinders understanding. The crucial point which we need to address is how slang carries across specific ideologies that could not be accepted by readers if conveyed overtly.

However, the attraction of audiences is not in the least underestimated, as the vast majority of magazines survive thanks to advertisement. As Van Dijk (2006) argues, the manipulation of readers' ideology and beliefs deeply alters the way in which they process information and their short-term understanding. By shaping the audience's ideologies, its responsiveness to advertisement is likely to be affected.

In mainstream media such as magazines, the main role of advertising is not making people aware of the existence of a new product. The 'informational' task is only its façade role: the editorial staff has already been shaping the magazine for some time, creating a new need (e.g. an article on 'How to smite co-candidates on a job interview'), reifying a new desire (a two-page list of designer bags that express assertiveness as much as coquetry), and highlighting a gap in the market (You're still unemployed, and these designers don't have cheap collections). These tasks are fulfilled by magazines by means of operational discourse types (i.e. tips, how-to guides, decalogues, and so forth) that work by setting out a problem or a goal and then providing the necessary, and purchasable, tools to solve or achieve it. Therefore, the promotion of Bag Borrow or Steal™, a rental service of designer accessories, is only the last act of a more complex process. The power of advertising in the shaping of magazines is wielded at a higher level: advertisers influence and eventually determine the very life and longevity of publications, by cutting or increasing the number of slots

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they choose to purchase: "the advertisers' choices influence media prosperity and survival" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002: 14).

In their analysis of advertising – still valid and painstakingly timely – Adorno and Horkheimer expressed the idea that "subsidizing ideological media is more important than the repetition of the [brand] name" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1947/1997: 162). This statement applies to the current status of magazines, too. The real commercial effort, i.e. the effort to sell products, is performed by the editorial staff as far as gathering, shaping, and directing consumers is concerned, whereas the advertisement spaces simply function as reminders of the current hierarchical structure of economical and cultural prestige of certain brands over others. This overturning of roles and functions can be explained if we consider the advertisement of abnormally expensive products and brands in magazines that do not enjoy a particularly wealthy readership. Readers are not expected to purchase those specific brands; they are expected to acknowledge that hierarchy, focus on a given product type, e.g. bags, and then attempt to buy their way up the prestige ladder, even if they will eventually stop and choose mid-level brands, i.e. what is really meant to be sold in the first place because that is what most people can afford. The top-level brands will spend their prestige capital elsewhere, such as among the jet-set and higher economical élites; in turn, by means of that very prestige hierarchy (sustained and constantly renewed by its being inaccessible to common people), they will strengthen their role and raison d'être in the market (see, for example, Holt, 2002; Cucinelli, 2007).

Understanding the interconnection between the magazine industry, advertisement, and the audience will help us contextualize the magazines analyzed here within a clearer system of power relations.

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2.3.1 *COSMOPOLITAN*

Cosmopolitan was first published in the United States in 1886 as a family magazine devoted to popular literature. It arrived to its current format as a women's magazine only in the 1970s, under the editorial direction of Helen Gurley Brown. Nowadays, it is published by Hearst Magazines (a subdivision of Hearst Corporation) and has 58 international editions.[23] Its total circulation, which consists of 2,900,000 copies (65.3 per cent sold at the newsstand; 34.7 per cent sold via subscription), makes it the most read women's magazine in the United States.[24]

Here follows its official mission statement, meant for marketing offices rather than for readers.

> *Cosmopolitan* is the lifestylist for millions of fun, fearless females who want to be the best they can be in every area of their lives. [It] inspires with information on relationships and romance, the best in fashion and beauty, the latest on women's health and well-being, as well as what is happening in pop culture and entertainment... and just about everything else fun, fearless females want to know.[25]

Data and statistics concerning its readership provide insightful information on who are the 'fun, fearless females' targeted by the magazine. Readers have a median age of 31.5; 73 per cent is employed; 42.3 per cent is single (i.e. unmarried, as opposed to an 18.5 per cent

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23   Hearst online media kit (see electronic references).
24   ABC data as of December 31, 2007 (see electronic references).
25   *Cosmopolitan* online media kit (see electronic references).

who is either divorced or widow); 51.3 per cent has children. Their median HHI[26] is 58,133 $.[27]

2.3.2   *ESQUIRE*

Esquire was first published in the United States in 1933 as a men's magazine concerned with literature, liberal arts and culture; however, its orientation towards fashion and grooming became clear less than a decade from then. As claimed by Stearns and Knapp (1993: 769), it was "the first durable magazine ever aimed explicitly at middle-class men as men, rather than professionals". *Esquire* is currently owned by Hearst Magazines and it has 16 international editions. It has a total circulation of 721,217 copies (14.6 sold at the newsstand; 85.4 per cent sold via subscription).[28] Here follows its mission statement.

> While other men's magazines are written for highly aspirational readers, *Esquire* is geared toward men who have arrived. They dress for themselves; have both the means and knowledge to invest; can order with confidence in a fine restaurant; have a healthy respect and admiration for women; take vacations that enrich their lives and recharge their energy; and have mastered many of life's basics. What they want is a primer on how to lead a richer, better, fuller and more meaningful life.[29]

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[26]   Household Income. In 2007, the national median index ranked at about 50,000 $ in the United States.
[27]   Source: MRI, Fall 2007 (see electronic references).
[28]   Source: MRI, Doublebase 2008 (see electronic references).
[29]   *Esquire* online media kit (see electronic references).

Despite the target, statistics and surveys provided by MRI prove that 34 per cent of *Esquire* readers are women; that readers have a median age of 42.4 and a median HHI of 60,814 $.

2.3.3   *GLAMOUR*

Glamour was founded in 1939 in the United States with a different name, *Glamour of Hollywood*. It is published by Condé Nast Publications and it has 15 international editions. Its readers have a median age of 34 and a median HHI of 66,015 $.[30] It has a total circulation of 2,353,854 copies (31.7 per cent sold at the newsstand; 68.3 per cent sold via subscription), which makes it the second most read women's magazine in the U.S.A., immediately after *Cosmopolitan*. Here follows its mission statement (bold font in the original text).

> *Glamour* is one of the most influential and critically acclaimed women's magazines on the planet. Every month, [it] empowers over **12.5 million modern women** with the best choices on how to live, look and feel their very best. Our stylish, award-winning editorial consistently reflects our reader's interest in the world around her while fueling her aspirational, yet accessible lifestyle.[31]

The reason it refers to more than 12 million readers is due to an estimated value that considers the average number of people who happen to read the same copy (family members, for instance); *Glamour*

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[30]   *Shape* online media kit (see electronic references).
[31]   *Glamour* online media kit (see electronic references).

estimates an audience of 12,363,000 readers (92.3 per cent are women, 7.7 per cent are men).[32]

2.3.4   *GQ*

GQ, the acronym of *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, was founded in 1957 in the United States with a different name, *Apparel Arts*, although this denomination was soon dropped. Created as a quarterly publication, it later became a monthly men's magazine. It has been published by Condé Nast Publications since 1983 in direct competition with Hearst's *Esquire*. Its total circulation consists of 913,580 copies (26 per cent sold at the newsstand; 74 per cent sold via subscription). Its readers' median age is 34.5; their median HHI is 68,746 $.[33] Here follows its mission statement.

> *GQ* is the authority on men. For over 50 years [it] has been the premiere men's magazine, providing definitive coverage of men's style and culture. With its unique and powerful design, the best photographers, and a well of award-winning writers, [it] reaches millions of leading men each month. [It] is the only publication that speaks to all sides of the male equation. [It] is simply sharper and smarter.[34]

However, 'all sides of the male equation' neglects women, which constitute 29 per cent of the audience, as measured in 2007.[35]

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[32]   Source: ABC Statement as of December 31, 2007; MRI Spring 2008 (see electronic references).
[33]   *GQ* online media kit (see electronic references).
[34]   *GQ* online media kit (see electronic references).
[35]   Sources: ABC December 31, 2007; MRI Fall 2007 (see electronic references).

2.3.5   *POPULAR MECHANICS*

Popular Mechanics is a relatively old U.S. publication, owned by Hearst Corporation and founded in 1902. As opposed to other magazines listed here, it has maintained its format and main topics ever since. Albeit concerned with technology, automobile, and science (like *Wired* or *Popular Science*), its traditional DYI vocation (with models and projects on every issue) makes it both a competitor and a parallel market with regard to those publications. It has a total circulation of 1,234,277 copies (11.8 per cent sold at the newsstand; 88.2 per cent sold via subscription, including over 4,000 subscriptions to the digital edition). Its readers' median age is 45.1; their median HHI is 64,091 $.[36] Here follows its mission statement.

> *Popular Mechanics* is the essential source for the modern man. For installing windows in their home or on their computer, [it] gives readers the information and tools they need to be confident and competent in today's high-tech world.[37]

In order to stand out against the background of other publications which concern technology, *Popular Mechanics* media kit emphasizes that it statistically "reaches more adults [aged] 18-34 with home PCs than *Popular Science*, *PC World*, *PC Magazine* and *Wired*". Statistic data claim that women constitute 12.2 per cent of the total audience.

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[36]   Sources: ABC December 31, 2007 (see electronic references).
[37]   *Popular Mechanics* online media kit (see electronic references).

2.3.6   *WIRED*

Wired, the most recent publication among the ones selected for this study, was created in the United States and launched by Condé Nast Publications in 1993. Its main topic is technology, with an eye on the socio-economical issues involved in a technological world. Its circulation consists of 706,494 copies (12.7 per cent sold at the newsstand; 87.3 per cent sold via subscription).[38] In an interview for an online news network, Weber refused to describe *Wired* as "a print magazine about the things that are going to make print obsolete", as the interviewer suggested, but emphasized that the print magazine allows for long-form journalism and is therefore essential to the multidisciplinary approach of the magazine (Darrell, 2007). Here follows its mission statement.

> Every month in the magazine and every day online, *WIRED* explores the ideas, innovations and people that are reshaping our world. In a time of increasingly rapid change and 24/7 access to unlimited information, [it] determines what to look for: it is the guide to what's to come. [It] is the only media brand whose mission is to map change – and then turn the points into a chart by which to navigate the future.[39]

As far as readership is concerned, *Wired* readers' median age is 35, and 27 per cent are women; their median HHI is 82,912 $[40] and 42 per cent are married.

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[38]   Source: ABC Statement December 31, 2007 (see electronic references).
[39]   *Wired* online media kit (see electronic references).
[40]   It could be argued that the HHI estimate of *Wired* readers may have been conducted according to slightly different criteria, as the median figure is markedly higher than the ones calculated for the other magazines.

Chapter Three

WHAT *IS* SLANG: IS IT THE ONLY QUESTION FOR LINGUISTS?

> *(My rule, in the matter of unpleasant terms, has been to deal with them as briefly, as astringently, as aseptically as was consistent with clarity and adequacy; in a few instances, I had to force myself to overcome an instinctive repugnance; for these I ask the indulgence of my readers.)*
>
> Partridge (1937: v)

The title of this chapter echoes a seminal article written by Dumas and Lighter (1978) entitled "Is slang a word for linguists?", where the lack of a largely agreed definition of the term was brought to the fore, and answered by proposing a framework that would help distinguish slang vocabulary from other lexical categories, such as regionalisms and jargon.[41] According to this theory, the label 'slang' applies only to a word that meets at least two out of four conditions: a) its use would lower the dignity[42] of formal or serious speech (e.g. 'The annual fee

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[41]   Regionalisms are expressions conveying the geographical provenience of the speaker, e.g. a *logan* is a shallow pond in Northern New England speech (Cassidy & Hall, 1996: 401). Jargon is the specialized vocabulary of a community of interest, used by all participants regardless of their hierarchical position, e.g. *widow* to indicate an isolated word or syllable at the end of a paragraph (in publishing).

[42]   As hinted in Chapter One, most definitions of slang include elements of judgment and evaluation. In this case, the reference to dignity contains a perhaps involuntary, yet internalized negative evaluation of slang. This chapter is partly

consists of one *grand* tax included'); b) it use would reveal the speaker's familiarity with the topic it raises or with the discourse community who habitually uses the term (e.g. 'The U.S. Army is recruiting *chicks* now'); c) its use would be avoided in a conversation with a person of higher status or authority (e.g. 'Sir, my colleagues had a *kickass* idea for tomorrow's presentation'); d) its use would either euphemize a potentially uneasy or taboo topic (e.g. 'I'm definitely buying a convertible before I *kick the bucket*') or dismiss a topic on which the speaker does not want to elaborate (e.g. 'Do I miss my ex? She's just *bad news'*).

Dumas and Lighter's attempt to systematize the attribution of the 'slang' label to vocabulary came after the publication of a series of ethnographic studies and surveys, where speakers (e.g. students) were often asked to make lists of slang terms, or to distinguish slang from other lexical categories, without being provided with a working definition of slang. A call on rigor and scientificity was felt as appropriate at that point of the development of slang lexicography. However, the artificiality of their 'two-out-of-four' test would be later questioned – Spears (2000: v) claims that "no standard test (…) will decide what is slang or colloquial and what is not", although no explicit reference is made to Dumas and Lighter.

But the media do not consult slang lexicographers and linguists. If our aim is to study how the media use slang and which are the causes and the effects of this appropriation, we need to acknowledge that writers and editors draw on their own perception of what slang vocabulary is and on what they estimate the audience will perceive as such. For this reason, I *could* use Dumas and Lighter's framework to

devoted to foreground the naturalized stereotype that has shaped slang lexicography so far.

elicit slang from my corpus of magazines. But this choice would probably leave out key lexemes only because their 'slang' status is shaky (let us think of *cool*, which is becoming less and less socially marked downward and censored) or pay excessive attention to sporadic uses of slang lexemes only because they are considered as 'precious', i.e. never previously recorded in dictionaries.[43] (Chapter Four explains the guidelines followed in this study, which goes in the direction of a more popular-based *notion*, rather than *de-finition*, of slang.)

Three centuries of lexicography and almost one century of language theory have provided a range of definitions of slang, either in the introductions to dictionaries or in theoretical articles and essays. However, a need is felt for studies on the effects deriving from the use of slang, especially in the media. When single outsiders take on the slang of a certain group, the damage rests on them and on their ability to avoid the social awkwardness resulting from misuse: at worst, outsiders will remain outsiders. As Halliday points out, "Slang is more subject to a conscious choice, and so is often used by people who are deliberately adopting a certain speech variant for social purposes" (Halliday, 1978: 158). But whenever the 'center' disembeds slang from its social context and discourses to squeeze it into mass-media packaging, such as is done in magazine writing, the damaged group are the insiders: banalization and officialization deprives such vocabulary of its communicative punch and of the social potential it carries. For this reason, the debate over a sound definition of slang is no longer a priority, and more attention must be paid to its popularity and its

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[43] The paternalism inherent to the whole idea of 'discovery' has the same origins and theoretical implications of any form of colonialism. Moreover, this attitude in language enquiry is of little or no relevance for the community of speakers who create and continue to use a given slang item as a meaning making tool.

unprecedented applicability to a large spectrum of discourses, to the cost of a certain degree of leakiness of the label 'slang', but to the benefit of a deeper understanding of language manipulation.

Through the decades, waves of strictness and indulgence have alternated as far as the quest for the ultimate definition of slang is concerned. This can be observed by comparing the introductions and prefaces of slang dictionaries, which usually provide a working definition of slang, in order to make the compiler's criteria of selection explicit. But dictionaries are not the product of disinterested linguistic inquiry; as editorial products, they also serve marketing strategies under the rules of competitiveness among publishing companies. A dictionary may be implemented and revised by its original editors through the years (e.g. from Partridge, 1937, first edition, to Partridge, 1967, sixth edition); or new editors may abridge extant collections of lemmas according to new criteria (e.g. Partridge, 1974, where the editor Ja. Simpson picked the entries in use before the First World War out of Partridge, 1961, in order to create a dictionary of historical slang); or the same editor may compile slang dictionaries with different titles for the same publishing house (e.g. Ayto, 1998, entitled *The Oxford dictionary of slang*, which is based on Ayto & Jo. Simpson, 1992, entitled *The Oxford dictionary of modern slang*).

Definitions of slang may therefore be influenced by methodological choices, but also by technical needs. Blurring the boundaries between slang and colloquialisms, for instance, can justify the editorial need to produce a new edition in which the former corpus of lemmas is increased of thousands of entries. In other words, the 'grey area' in which slang is often described to reside seems to serve editorial and marketing-bound needs, instead of telling more about the real

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features of slang. Chapter One has pointed out that many dictionaries mention the existence of this 'grey area' when they pair slang to other adjacent lexical categories. Spears (2006: xv) observes the same trend – quoting early dictionaries such as Farmer and Henley (1890-1904) and Barrère and Leland (1889) – and makes a strong claim as he admits that "previous slang chronicles have puzzled over deciding what the boundary between slang and colloquial is, if, in fact, there is one". Ayto (1998: v; emphasis added) declares that the added material provided in his new edition should cater for "that *uncertain borderland* between slang and colloquial usage. One person's slang is another's colloquialism, but the wider scope of this dictionary should ensure that few genuine candidates for 'slang' status escape its net": in so saying, Ayto fails to be critical about the notion of 'genuineness', which embodies a manifest judgment of purity vs. impurity in language, thus contradicting the pretences of objectivity that he wishes to communicate as a 'scientific' compiler. Along the same lines, Kipfer (2007: xii; emphasis added) acknowledges that "Slang is a *grey area* that shares boundaries with the relaxed vocabulary identified as 'informal' or 'colloquial', and inevitably this dictionary will include some of those terms deemed such by other books".

Some may find it startling that Kipfer's statement is written in a section of her introduction entitled *Apologies*. The apologetic tone underlying many of these collections of slang words is well explained by the reciprocal judgment that lexicographers exert on one another. For this reason, it is useful to take a closer look to how dictionary compilers describe their own work, in order to expose the ideologies that underlie different branches of lexicography, especially the ones devoted to non-Standard varieties.

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3.1 THE IDEOLOGICAL STANDPOINTS OF SLANG LEXICOGRAPHY

In 1960 Flexner described the peculiarity of American English, which he believed to be more likely to develop slang than other languages due to the geographical and social flexibility of its speakers: "We have few religious, regional, family, class, psychological, or philosophical roots. We don't believe in roots, we believe in teamwork" (Flexner, 1960: ix). As a language observer, why did he feel free to include himself by using *we* inclusively? Or, more precisely, if he considered not cherishing roots as a sign of language creativity and openness, why did he insist on defining the founding values of his own speech community as compared to others, who should be less likely to develop slang, in his view? A plausible answer could be that Flexner wrote his introduction for an all-American audience, at a time where American English slang was hardly of interest for others than speakers of American English. Therefore, choosing inclusive *we* would not be interpreted as a lack of objectivity – as lexicography was still the product of armchair learnedness, and lexicographers still represented themselves as answering a socially acknowledged call to saving national culture from time oblivion. In other words, times were not ripe yet.

Flexner's case shows that the implicit yet naturalized ideological constraints characterizing different stages of slang lexicography must have influenced the definitions of slang provided so far. Sometimes the lexicographer was so empowered by the current dominant ideology to the point that her moral constraints and prejudices were rewarded and welcome, as epitomized by Partridge's (1937: v) quotation at the beginning of this chapter. After reading his claim, written in the preface to the first edition of the *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*,

the slightly disparaging reference to 'armchair learnedness' I just made no longer sounds excessive. Hypocrisy was inherent to the lexicographer's persona – Partridge would describe his work as "a humble companion to the monumental *Oxford English Dictionary*, from which [he is] proud to have learnt a very great amount" (Partridge, 1937: v) – as well as to the lexicographer's methodology. The preface to the first edition was reused for the next five editions (until 1967), and none of the prefaces to the newer editions reformulated or hedged the attitude of "instinctive repugnance" admitted in the 1930s.

More recent works have been characterized by at least less overt ideological constraints. Chapman (1986) presents the dichotomy between slang and Standard vocabulary in a telling – albeit light-hearted – claim:

> As a lexicographer I collect and record slang because it is there, and I take as much professional delight in a faithful transcript of all *this nasty talk* as I do in capturing and recording for our descendants *the differing elegancies* of standard language. (Chapman, 1986: vii; emphasis added).

The idea of Standard English as an immune carrier of 'elegancies' seems to introduce a class discrimination between the users of the two lexical categories, as if Standard vocabulary had a variety of options and nuances (like the upper classes) while slang had limited resources and lacked sophistication (like the lower classes). Moreover, the stress on 'delight' echoes the paternalistic attitude that has already been observed in the work of lexicographers who conceived dictionaries as collections of rarities, following the colonizers' logic of monstrosity as

something odd yet worth showing (Lat. *monstrare*) which shake the senses but does not in the least destabilize the status of the viewer.

Ayto and Simpson (1992: vi) cannot escape the moralistic trap, either: "however *regrettable* this aspect of English [i.e. prejudicial and coarse vocabulary] may be, its inclusion in a dictionary of slang does not sanction its use, but simply records the facts as far as they are available" (emphasis added). The need to enhance the role of the lexicographer as the reluctant but necessary 'recorder' of unpleasant material (already made clear by Partridge many decades earlier) goes hand in hand with the shift of attention on 'facts', rather than on the emotions that motivate the resort to taboo and coarse vocabulary – as well as the cultural powers that label it as such.

Another form of ideological elitism is represented by the equivalence between non-Standard and ungrammaticality. Spears (2000: vi) is very inaccurate in saying that "where possible, the examples are given in natural slangy language, even if it is ungrammatical in formal writing". 'Grammaticality' and 'unacceptability' are not in the least synonyms in linguistics. An utterance such as 'I ain't got no time for this shit' is absolutely grammatical in English, although the auxiliary *ain't*, double negation, and the noun *shit*[44] are not acceptable/accepted in Standard English; 'ain't no got I time for this shit' would be ungrammatical in English.

Lumping together grammaticality and acceptability is particularly dangerous in the field of slang study because it may originate further inaccuracy and enhance the stigmatization of usages that are already stigmatized. One could wonder: is there a possibility that some lexicographers interpret the same lexical choice as 'colloquialism' or

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[44]   As a synonym for 'stuff', 'things'.

'jargon' when found in Standard grammatical structures, and as 'slang' when found in non-accepted grammatical structures? In Jakobsonian words (Jakobson, 1956), to what extent does the focus on the syntagmatic axis (i.e. the structural constraints of a given language) affect and eventually take over the focus on the paradigmatic axis (i.e. the range of alternatives – also lexical – offered by a given language)? This point is crucial for the analysis of slang in magazine writing, as slang vocabulary is likely to be found almost exclusively within Standard grammatical structures in those publications. If this theoretical knot is not cleared out at this stage, one could be tempted to un-label most of the slang used in the corpus of magazines on the basis of the syntactic 'company' it keeps. Let us try to address this issue through a critical overview of the definitions of slang provided by lexicographers (both compilers and theorists) in the last century.

3.2 SLANG, AS DEFINED BY DICTIONARY COMPILERS

Spears (2006: ix) starts off by saying that 'slang' is not a technical term in linguistics (thus echoing the 'is slang a word for linguists' provocation), but rather an umbrella label that enables dictionaries to provide some orientation concerning usage and to guide the reader's vocabulary choices. He articulates his description of slang around two elements, i.e. fun and exclusion of outsiders. In other words, speakers love using slang and hearing it – whether they fully understand its meaning or not. At the same time, they have a quite clear idea of which vocabulary choices one should avoid in formal English. It is precisely this reference to self-regulation that explains the autonomy of the magazine editorial staff (or any text producer working in the mass media) in assuming what is slang and what is not so. Spears is a

lexicographer who captures the need of looking at slang with the eyes of users and not with the eyes of lexicographers, if one wants to have a fuller understanding of the role of slang in language. Spears' recent approach was not conceived in a vacuum but rather after a long tradition of lexicography. For this reason, we need to explore how a century of slang lexicographers have described their object of study to colleagues, students, and readers by means of introductions, prefaces, and notes to their dictionaries.

3.2.1 THE 'FATHERS' OF SLANG LEXICOGRAPHY

The number of slang dictionaries published from 1900 to the present day is hard to estimate, especially if all the regional varieties of English are considered. For this reason, the focus will be limited to dictionaries of American English slang, to which more attention is paid here, of British English slang (given the influence of British lexicography on American lexicography) and of English slang at large. As previously stated, new editions are often conceived as the augmentation of an older body of lemmas according to new criteria and/or under the direction of new editors. Therefore, different editions of the same dictionary will be compared with regard to the methodological and theoretical points stated in each version, so as to suggest how fluctuating the definition of slang is – and how it might be influenced by the all-editorial need for constant dictionary production.

Weesen (1934: v) defined slang as "verily a language apart, a language understandable only in its proper setting".[45] His description reflected the view according to which Standard vocabulary does not

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[45]   Donaldo Macedo (personal communication, March 15, 2009) argues sarcastically that "this definition also applies to academic language". I am grateful to him for the insight provided by this and other comments on this chapter.

need to be contextualized in order to be understood: this assumption, however, fails to acknowledge that the meanings of Standard vocabulary are also frozen negotiations of consensus among social groups. All vocabulary needs to be contextualized: Weesen seems to imply that the English word *cat* does intrinsically or 'naturally' refer to a furry animal, and secondarily, only if contextualized, to a jazz musician.[46] The ideology underlying his description of slang is clear as we observe the telling equivalences which are implicitly drawn.

> Slang (...) represents defiance of established forms and constituted authorities. Such defiance comes chiefly from "the dangerous classes," crooks and criminals, tramps and hoboes. (..) Though less prolific, workers in various fields have the same tendency to remake the language or adapt it to their special needs. (...)
>
> Playing with words has ever been the occupation of the stage. On stage and off the actor has made contributions to the growing language of slang. (Weesen, 1934: vi-vii)

By placing criminals and workers as adjacent social groups (as well as discrete speech communities), Weesen attributes the features of the outlaw to the working class. We could wonder why hoboes and workers create slang to fulfill their 'special needs', whereas actors do so out of a 'taste' for wordplay on the stage and in real life. The lexical choices made to describe the creation of slang by actors (*playing*, *occupation*, *contributions*, *growing*) seem to be motivated by a range of assumptions, such as the idea that actors do not have any conflicts with

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[46]   Wodak's (1996: Ch. 5) distinction among colloquial, group-specific and private meaning may provide further elaboration on this matter.

the established authority, that their love for new words is purely 'artistic' – where art is believed to be disinterested and *super partes*, as it is not really the case – and that their creations are welcomed contributions to language. Conversely, the description of workers and 'criminals' – a category where Weesen explicitly lumps together assassins and the homeless – builds a pejorative representation of them (*defiance*, *dangerous classes*, *less prolific*, *tendency*, *special needs*, *remake* and *adapt language*). In this case, slang productivity is quantified, as if one group should meet or miss an allegedly 'standard' level of efficiency; moreover, language creativity is presented as instrumental to personal or in-group needs, rather than as a contribution to society at large.

Weesen's view reinforced what was probably Mencken's greatest provocation on the matter, considering the time in which the milestone volume *The American language* was first published, 1919: "Everyone, including even the metaphysician in his study and the eremite in his cell, has a large vocabulary of slang" (Mencken, 1962: 557). However, while democratizing the notion of slang by denying that the upper class and the cultural élites were alien to it, Mencken maintained an aristocratic view when he claimed that slang, given its poignancy and wit, could not be the product of a whole community but was rather created by writers and other brilliant minds, and then absorbed and replicated by the masses thanks to the media. This hypothesis, formulated almost a century ago, would be hardly supportable today; yet, the role of the media in the diffusion of slang was clear in his time as much as it is in ours.

Weesen also reminds that studying and recording slang is important for the understanding of Standard language because the label

given to a "slangy expression" is a temporary "position", an intermediate step for many words, "though sometimes a long one", on the way to Standard language (Weesen, 1934: vii). Although this holds true for a number of lexemes in English as well as in other languages, the ascending metaphor – words waiting for their turn to climb the prestige ladder – behind this interpretation of language change is questionable, albeit naturalized in many lexicographical studies on slang.[47]

In the Introduction to the milestone *Dictionary of American slang*, Flexner (1960: vi, ix) defines slang as follows:

> Slang is the body of words and expressions frequently used by or intelligible to a rather large portion of the general American public, but not accepted as good, formal usage by the majority. (…) Slang is used to show others (and to remind ourselves of) our biographical, mental, and psychological background; to show our social, economic, geographical, national, racial, religious, educational, occupational, and group interests, memberships, and patriotism.

Flexner's definition raised a set of new issues for slang lexicography, such as diffusion, public, high frequency, acceptation, and flavor. He considered slang as the "more popular portion of the cant, jargon, and argot of many sub-groups" (Flexner, 1960: vi-vii). Although we should readjust this definition as for the outdated labels of *cant* and *argot*, his

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[47]   Another echo of paternalism, to be added to the ones at which we have pointed so far, is found in this representation of Standard English as casting away slang and then gradually readmitting the prodigal son into the house.

attitude is more ideologically inclusive and up-to-date than most of the views on slang expressed ever since.

The corpus of slang lemmas collected by Wentworth and Flexner constitutes the basis of the more recent works by Chapman and, in more recent years, Kipfer. A useful contribution to the understanding of slang is their distinction between primary slang and secondary slang (Kipfer, 2007: x), the former being what this study has already described as 'slang used within its birth group', and the latter being what outsiders use in order to either mock or adhere to a specific social group. We may say that the slang analyzed in this study i.e. slang as used in magazines, is secondary slang. Kipfer (2007: x) claims that in the latter case "slang is a matter of stylistic choice rather than true identification". However, further distinctions may be needed to separate newer generations using older slang, or different ethnic groups using each other's slang. Lighter's distinction between active and passive slang goes in a similar direction: passive slang is "passed from the nation's active into its passive vocabulary. It is still slang; it is just no longer in vogue" (1994: xiii).

My understanding of active and passive slang is slightly different. An expression of approval such as "Radical!" can be uttered in the 2000s either by younger speakers to mock the Eighties (the decade where the slang expression was in vogue and fully active), or by older speakers to revive the memory of the Eighties, or – as we will see in the language of magazines – by the media to trigger specific mental models[48] connected to the values of the Eighties. *Radical* is no longer in vogue, and its use is considered as embarrassingly outdated unless the user places it within a context of self-awareness or metalinguistic

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[48]   For a definition of *mental model*, cf. Chapter 4.

awareness. However, words such as *radical* should not be categorized as instances of passive slang: a slang word should not be considered as passive as long as both the majority of the generation who used it as active vocabulary and the majority of the younger generations recognize the cultural reference and can use it with metalinguistic awareness.

Kipfer's introduction to the fourth edition of Chapman's *Dictionary of American slang* deserves a longer commentary, as it goes beyond labels and definitions and it attempts to explain the social and psychological implications of the use of slang. She describes slang as similar to profanity in that it "is a surrogate for destructive physical action" (Kipfer, 2007: xi) and it has a clear connection with life preservation and social order. We could extend the notion by saying that slang serves to maintain the status quo, both biologically and socially because it unleashes struggle and violence at the symbolic level. This statement requires taking a step in the opposite direction of the common view of slang as a linguistic element of disruption and disobedience. The shift in perspective only depends on our choosing an internal or external viewpoint: slang is disruptive and disorienting only for those who do not understand it or who cannot use it properly, whereas it is a source of stability and a harmless (i.e. not physically harmful) conveyer of aggressiveness for those who use it actively. Kipfer's expression "destructive physical action" is quite appropriate because slang often embodies symbolic violence, i.e. it serves to euphemize death, murder and physical coercion. For instance, the example 'My colleague had a *kickass* idea for tomorrow's presentation' contains the slang modifier *kickass*, which has an extremely positive connotation in slang, meaning 'a wonderful idea'; nevertheless, unlike

wonderful, the slang alternative does not semantically refer to the raising of the beholder's 'wonder' but to the act of kicking and humiliating her. Although this symbolic violence may not be perceived directly by the user, uttering or listening to a phrase such as 'a *kickass* idea' unfailingly triggers an emotional reaction both in the speaker and the hearer, be it laughter, amusement, or disappointment; this might be due to the symbolic violence encapsulated in it. As Chapter Five will show, both the men's and the women's magazines under examination exploit the symbolic violence contained in slang in order to construe the representation of ideal readers as defying and winning over opponents (co-workers, partners, peers, higher-ups).

The psychological effect of using slang – which is defined by Kipfer as a deliberate way to construct one's own personality vis-à-vis the group – is hardly severable from the social one, as the psychological struggle is linked to the struggle of fitting in a group which has definite features as far as habits, culture, and projected economic/class status are concerned. The status is 'projected' rather than inherent because different generations of youngsters have characterized themselves with a well-defined class image, despite the actual wealth of the single individual (see Poulantzas, 1975): the counterculture of the Seventies and the grunge movement of the early Nineties, for example, required that the youth look unfailingly neglected and ragged, whereas certain movements of the Sixties (mods) and the Eighties (yuppies)[49] demanded a constant display of rampancy and luxury.

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[49]   From Young Urban Professional. The term, which was fashionable during Reagan's Republican era, refers to a young businessman aged 25-30 (Cagliero & Spallino, 2007: 585; my translation).

3.2.2   SLANG DICTIONARIES OF OUR TIMES

Let us analyze other eminent products of slang lexicography from the 1980s to the present day. Lewin and Lewin's introduction to their thesaurus of American slang, in which slang synonyms are provided for Standard lexemes (a questionable, yet ideologically stimulating initiative), reveals a new approach to slang which expresses an inclusive and long-sighted view of what slang represents in our times. According to them:

> Slang is created by all social classes in every kind of circumstance as a more convenient, more private, or more entertaining means of communication. Groups create their own language within a language. The various kinds of slang are a means of identification. Peers recognize each other through its use. (…) Experts in linguistics disagree among themselves over matters of definition. (Lewin & Lewin, 1988: v).

The relation of synonymy by which Lewin and Lewin connect the ideas of convenience, privacy, and entertainment as motivators for choosing slang vocabulary is well explained by the 'organic' idea of slang they seem to share. None of the above elements can be omitted from the triad, provided we conceive entertainment here not as a mere source of laughter but rather as an extra stimulus for the mind, be it a sudden and trenchant reminder of the speaker's social/ethnic background or a culture-specific reference that immediately triggers extra attention.

Thorne (1990: iii; emphasis added) laments the overwhelming number of definitions, too, and then chooses to push the definition of

slang even further: "slang is a *style* category within the language, which occupies an extreme position on the spectrum of formality". Two objections can be made: first of all, slang is a form of open resistance to formality and not simply its "extreme" end; then, in order to avoid the misleading use of the notion of style, that Thorne seems to consider as interchangeable with lexis, his claim should be reformulated to clarify that slang is a *lexical* category, the lexemes of which can be selected or avoided in speech or writing for *stylistic* purposes. The oversimplification is probably motivated by the need to provide a user-friendly introduction that does not require a background in linguistics. Despite this avoidable misconception, Thorne's preface is worth mentioning as he points at the connection with the printed media, reminding that "a relatively new phenomenon is the free use of slang in the quality as well as the tabloid press" (Thorne, 1990: v), although he fails to provide depth to his observation by not questioning the actual freedom included in the 'free use' he suggests. This research on monthly magazines wished to show that there are always specific communicative strategies underlying the use of slang by the mainstream media.

In the introduction to the *Random House historical dictionary of American slang*, Lighter (1994), whose work has been partly illustrated in this chapter, makes a more appropriate reference to style:

> Slang – however you define it – is a term that conveniently designates words and phrases diverging markedly in social ambiance, use, and style from those of the Standard lexicon. (…) [Slang is] a social and stylistic subset of the larger informal vocabulary of U.S. English (Lighter, 1994: x).

Indirectly echoing Flexner's claim concerning the 'uniqueness' of American slang, Lighter seems to be critical of the widely spread assumption according to which every language creates a slang of its own. He defines this view as a "naïve uniformitarian view of world cultures" (Lighter, 1994: xviii), and he claims that slang emerges only when there is a strong Standard variety – formally taught – that, if defied, conveys the defiant a certain social recognition (negative for the authority, positive for the peers).

Evaluations and moral judgments are found everywhere in descriptions of slang. Green (1998: v) says that "at its worst [slang] can be no more than vulgar for vulgarity's sake, stupid, depressingly obvious, the stuff of insult and obscenity. At its best it can be *à propos*, apposite, delightfully and even subtly humorous, a vibrant subset of the English language". Such interpretations of slang reveal much of the dominant strabismus underlying the collection of slang: through a quite fixed rhetoric pattern, the compiler first offers a pornographic view of slang lexicography as being *a dirty job but someone's gotta do it*, then volunteers for it. The delightfulness or outrage deriving from language is not a prerogative of slang: an utterance containing highly formal Standard English vocabulary may just as well delight the hearer, bring her to tears, bore her to death, or trigger a lawsuit. Therefore, finding silver linings in a disgraced job and excusing the excesses of slang is detrimental to both the compiler and the dictionary user.

Spears (2006: xxii) describes Lighter's *Random House historical dictionary of American slang* (1994) as a milestone document which has given proof that "there are a large number of slang terms that have the same qualities of uniformity of meaning across the nation and through

time as the vocabulary of Standard English". This claim is very important for this study, as it goes against the idea that slang is devoted to secrecy and that its use hinders understanding. However, the slang that becomes shared nationwide is inevitably the slang whose values are suitable for the mass media.

3.3 SLANG, AS DEFINED BY FIELD LEXICOGRAPHERS AND LANGUAGE THEORISTS

The urge for rigor in the definition of slang, voiced and answered by Dumas and Lighter (1978), was motivated by what they felt as a gap in methodology: for decades, the journal *American Speech* had been publishing field studies on 'slang' that did not define what the authors meant by it. For instance, in the 1960s a number of studies on college slang were conducted, on the wave of students' movements and the rise of counterculture (see Kratz, 1964; Banchero & Flinn, 1967; Olesen & Whittaker, 1968, among many others). Harsh criticism was exchanged in those articles between lexicographers who distinguished 'college slang' from 'general slang used by college students' and those who did not (as exemplified in Kratz, 1964). However, none of them devoted a footnote – if anything else – to the definition of slang. Thus, Dumas and Lighter's framework, described earlier, was meant to provide a turning point towards a more rigorous approach to the study of slang.

The lexicographers and ethnographers writing on *American Speech* were not the only contributors to the debate on slang in the Sixties and Seventies. Sledd (1965: 699) reflected on the role of English teachers in the United States, observing and denouncing a "pedagogic antipathy to slang". He described slang as "a para-code, a system of substitutes for statusful expressions which are used by people who lack

conventional status and do not conduct the important affairs of established communities". His view of slang, which reflected his interest in education and in the power relations at play within the educational process of his time, should be updated. To Sledd "to use slang is to *deny allegiance* to the existing order" (1965: 699; emphasis as in the original). If we look at slang as used nowadays by the mass media, we will notice that the use of slang by the disempowered may deny allegiance, but the use of slang *per se* often *reassures* allegiance to the status quo and its founding values. Given that young consumers rule a relevant portion of the market, finding 'their' language in public discourse gives them the illusion that their voice matters and that their own values are a strong part of the system of values of their own society. In this sense, reading or listening to such vocabulary reassures the youth about their (false) belonging to decision-making, rather than about their ability as a collective force to change the status quo.

A valuable contribution to the analysis of slang is due to Halliday (1976). He individuated a particular social environment (e.g. prisons, ghettoes) that he called 'anti-society', i.e. a separated yet parallel society whose members – in the struggle to resist the establishment – relexicalize the language which represents such establishment, thus making it a form of expression of the new-born subculture. So slang is able to create a counter-hierarchy of values and power relations: while the voice of 'society' lumps the powerless together with the same degree of stigmatization, the voice of 'antisociety' is able to assign varying levels of authority and power positions to its members. In other words, anti-languages allow for the resocialization of their speakers, who find their own role and their own label, thus replacing the undifferentiating 'outcast' label provided by the language of 'society'.

For this reason, the anti-language is inevitably overcharged with social values, as it must reaffirm the social position of the speakers and of the characters represented verbally. Linguistically speaking, Halliday clarifies that "an anti-language (…) is a systematic pattern of tendencies in the selection of meanings to be exchanged" (Halliday, 1976: 582). This is the fork in the road that marks the division between slang as used within its birth group and slang as used by the mass media, which do not show that systematic pattern of tendencies, but selectively appropriate high-frequency slang choices and disembed them from their systematicity.

3.4 THE DISEMBEDDING OF SLANG

Critical Discourse Analysis, following in the footsteps of the Frankfurt School, has provided a detailed description of this phenomenon of colonization, and has accounted for it by using the term "disembedding". Fairclough (2003: 68), elaborating on a point formulated by Giddens (1991), explains that genres (or discourse types, as he defines them), which are generated within a specific network of social practices, are sometimes transplanted to new social practices because of their effectiveness. By losing the background which justifies their peculiar features, they become "social technology", i.e. decontextualized tools to be used elsewhere. As exemplified above, the instructional genre, born with maintenance manuals and bricolage books, has been disembedded and is now used to address any topic, since its "technological" features (immediacy, brevity, and minimum ambiguity) make texts more effective and easier to read than narrative or argumentative ones. *How-to* is only the formal linguistic feature that can be observed as the surfacing of this phenomenon: what lies

beneath, and should be interpreted critically, is a process of disembedding which always brings along heavy consequences at the societal level.

Slang has been disembedded, as well. This is my extension of the notion of disembedding outlined by Fairclough: indeed, lexical categories, such as professional jargons and slang, have a more or less detectable 'birthplace', which can be described in terms of time and place (intended socially, generationally and ethnically). Similarly to discourse types, then, vocabulary items can be disembedded from their social context and used as social technology, due to specific features that suit the needs of other discourses.[50] Entertainment, youth, nonchalance and abrasiveness (the "technology" of slang) are suitable for magazines when they attempt to construct specific subject positions both for writers and readers, which are determined by an ideology of hedonism and homologation. However, slang carries a social burden which is precisely what has kept it outside the mainstream: it is overtly judgmental, it unmasks the speaker's background and ethnicity (real, desired, or shoplifted at someone else's cost), and it may contribute to reproduce unfair stereotypes under the veil of 'mere fun'.

Chapters Five and Six will analyze the effects of the transformation of slang into an empty technology to the advantage of the mass media.

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[50] On this matter, see also Gee (1990).

Chapter Four

WORKING METHODOLOGY

> *Scholars, researchers, and academics work within a system that legitimates social and political noninvolvement. [This position] is implicitly justified on the grounds of scientific "objectivity", "distance", and "letting the data speak for themselves".*
>
> Smitherman (1988: 434)

The reason for quoting a claim as trenchant as Smitherman's is that, before declaring any methodology, one should keep in mind a) that all methods stem from some kind of ideological standpoint (yet not necessarily self-conscious or driven by a premeditated agenda), b) that they highlight or neglect elements according to parameters that are always subjective, and c) that none of them is the ultimate tool for investigating the fragments of human practices we portion out and set as our objects of study. The inherent subjectivity of methodologies is evidenced by the fact that they are quite likely to be formulated – or at least heavily revised – after the process of analysis is completed. It is often the case that the initial focus of attention proves mute (following the metaphor according to which data should 'speak'), i.e. it does not help to show trends, or explain phenomena, or trigger further insights on the topic, whereas unexpected elements come to light and request consideration.

As far as this study is concerned, more than one unsuccessful attempt was made while seeking the most telling angle from which to analyze the use of slang in magazines. At some point I focused on editorials, since I believed I had to dissect the very core of the editor's voice; then I moved onto readers-editors correspondence, thinking that the voice of readers was worth studying, too; then again I tried isolating fixed samples of text (e.g. the first 10,000 words of editorial material from each magazine issue). None of these attempts seemed to open a window that could show me why and how effectively this lexical category is exploited; for this reason, these approaches were eventually dismissed. Only when covers caught my attention did I believe I had found an incisive way to cut into the material, bring communicative strategies to the surface, and present them under a light that would force myself and readers to be more critical about slang when we read or hear it in the mass media.

This observation does not mean that no method was followed. The analysis of the textual material was conducted systematically, according to the criteria and the propaedeutic steps described in Sections 4.3–4.5.

4.1 TERMINOLOGY AND WORKING DEFINITIONS

However, before presenting the working method devised for this study, it might be useful to provide a brief list of technical and discipline-specific terms used both here and in the following chapters, in order to clarify on which framework the analysis is built.

4.1.1 MAGAZINE WRITING AND DESIGN

The description of the material used for this study includes the use of a specific terminology which belongs to the field of press and editorial

offices. Drawing on Fairclough (1995b), McKay (2000) and McLaughlin (2000), the following working definitions are maintained.

Body copy – The main text; the bulk of a story, not its headline or subheads.

Caption – Identifying or descriptive text accompanying a photograph or other visual elements.

Cover line (or cover headline) – Words on the cover of a magazine indicating what articles can be found inside.

Crosshead (or paragraph header) – Small heading between paragraphs in the text.

Editorial advertisement – Showcased review (either critical or uncritical) of products included in a story. Often comes with prices and/or contact information about the producing company.[51]

Editorial material – Material in a magazine generated by journalists and not by advertisers.

Editorial mention – The inclusion in editorial material of the name of a product. (This is different from editorial advertisement.)

Headline (or heading) – Words in larger or distinctive type which attract the reader to a story.

Lead paragraph (or intro) – The first paragraph of a news or feature story.

Real-life confession (or vox populi) – Opinion from ordinary members of the public.

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[51] The legal status of this kind of mixed discourse in U.S. media has been often questioned. Commercial speech is subject to the Federal Trade Commission's jurisdiction and can be regulated to prohibit unfair, false, or deceptive content. Editorial speech is fully protected by the First Amendment, which concerns freedom of speech (Wilkinson et al., 1995: 245).

Signed (text) – Any piece of editorial material signed by a person (professional writer, interviewee, expert). A story can be **single-** or **multi-signed**, depending of the number of **signing authors** responsible for the sections of which it is compound; it is **expert-signed** when the author is presented not as a member of the editorial staff but as an expert in the field (via appositions, bylines, academic or professional titles indicating her qualification).

Signing author – A writer as represented by the magazine, i.e. an author working individually who signs and submits her own piece of writing to the editors. To be distinguished from actual authorship, that is the result of a collective and hierarchically organized editing process.

Standfirst – Text in type larger than the body copy and usually written by subeditors which introduces the story to the reader.

Story – Overall addressing of a topic or piece of news conveyed by means of one or more texts (usually a main body copy and related sections) listed in the summary as a single entity. In magazine discourse, the word 'story' has lost any connections with the narrative genre as such; therefore, it is used in its broader sense here.

Story unit – Each story compounding a thread.

Strapline – Subsidiary headline that expands on the main headline and runs above it.

Subhead (or subtitle) – Subsidiary headline that expands on the main headline and runs below it.

Thread – Story consisting of more than two units previewed in the summary (or on the cover, thus being a *cover thread*) as a single

entity and designed cohesively, e.g. with equal-sized headlines, yet independently, e.g. with different authors.

Titlepiece – The name of a magazine as conceived both textually and visually.

Turn – Section of a story which is continued on a page other than the one which carries the most of the copy. It is usually indicated to the reader by an instruction, such as 'Turn to page'.

4.1.2 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Critical Discourse Analysis has been built and enriched by the work of scholars, not necessarily affiliated to this discipline, who have committed to objects of study which have led them to hold slightly different ideas and provide different descriptions of the same elements. For this reason, here follows a list of the terminology that has been singled out from their work and deemed the most suitable for this study.[52]

Assumption – In communication, any implicit hypothesis about what the common ground of knowledge is with regard to what exists (existential assumption), what is or can be the case (propositional assumption), and what is good or desirable (value assumption) (Fairclough, 2003).

Discourse – A socially constructed knowledge of the reality developed in a specific social context (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).[53]

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[52] Definitions are not quoted verbatim but rather summarized.
[53] A similar yet less all-encompassing definition is given by Fairclough (1995a: 14), as he describes discourse as "a way of signifying a particular domain of social practice from a particular perspective". The extension of his early notion of discourse might have been influenced by social semiotics, due to the need for not limiting the concept to verbal language: only a few years earlier he had defined it as "language as a form of social practice" (Fairclough, 1989: 16).

Discourses are multi-layered, verbal and non-verbal, latently or manifestly rule-bound; they determine actions and also manifest them (Wodak, 1996).

Discourse type – Relatively stabilized configuration of genres and discourses within the order of discourse (Fairclough, 1995b: 76).[54]

Ideal reader/writer – In media discourse, the ideal reader is the fictional interpreter of media material kept in mind by text producers as their preferred target; real readers/viewers are textually led to identify or at least negotiate a relationship with that ideal subject. By the same token, the ideal writer is a fictional writing subject that is shaped so as to sound like the preferred interlocutor of the ideal reader and to embody the media's values and image (Fairclough, 2001).

Ideological creativity – In verbal language, the producer's ability to draw upon the interpreter's MRs in a creative way – e.g. by establishing textual relations of synonymy or antonymy that are unexpected and would not hold true in other contexts, with the aim of directing interpretation towards an ideologically determined goal. Ideological creativity lies at the basis of language struggle and language change; nevertheless, it may not necessarily contribute to the balancing of social inequalities, especially when used by power institutions or the media (Fairclough, 2001).

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[54] Other analysts define discourse types as *genres*; Fairclough (1995b) disagrees because, in his view, discourse types often draw upon two or more genres and discourses. For example, political interview is a discourse type drawing on different genres, such as political oratory, interview, and private conversation, and on more than one discourse, depending on the situational context – an interview on governmental policies against Islamic terrorism is likely to include elements of political discourse, antiterrorism discourse, and even religious and racial/ethnic discourses.

Members' resources (MRs) – Representations stored in long-term memory, to which the individual resorts routinely and unselfconsciously; they are socially determined and ideologically shaped, yet deceitfully perceived as 'common sense' (Fairclough, 2001).

Mental model[55] – Ad-hoc and personal construction stored in episodic memory and consisting of opinions, experiences and emotions associated with an event or topic; it constitutes the basis of future memories and future learning whenever the topic is recalled; it defines the understanding of any communicative event. Manipulation, especially by the media, can target the formation, activation and uses of mental models in episodic memory (van Dijk, 2006).

Subject position – Social role assigned or self-assigned to a **social subject** participating in a particular discourse, which requires that she fulfill a set of discoursal rights and obligations. If the subject is respectful of those conventions and applies them normatively, she *reproduces* that social structure. If she uses those constraints creatively and resists reproduction, she becomes a **social agent** (Fairclough, 2001).

Voice – Constructed identity of individual or collective agents (Fairclough, 1995b: 77).

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[55]   *MRs* and *mental models* are concepts that refer to the same type of mental constructions. Although I mostly use the former term, I have added van Dijk's definition because his focus on first-hand experiences, and most of all emotions, proves insightful in the analysis of the strategies at play in the magazines under examination. Cf. Chapters 5 and 6.

4.2 CORPUS

The corpus[56] of texts analyzed in this study consists of the 2007 issues of six monthly magazines published and distributed in the United States: *Cosmopolitan* (Hearst Corporation), *Glamour* (Condé Nast Publications), *Esquire* (Hearst Corporation), *GQ* (Condé Nast Publications), *Popular Mechanics* (Hearst Corporation), and *Wired* (Condé Nast Publications).

4.2.1   CRITERIA FOR MAGAZINE SELECTION

The selection has been conducted to meet and combine two needs: on the one hand, to include some of the main subcategories of monthly publications, i.e. the women's magazine, the men's magazine, and the popular technology magazine; on the other hand, given the wide range of publications available on the market for each subcategory, to focus on two major international publishing corporations, i.e. Hearst and Condé Nast, which – among other things – have exported all of these magazines abroad (*Cosmopolitan*, *Esquire*, and *Popular Mechanics* on one side, *Glamour*, *GQ* and *Wired* on the other).

Once the magazine types and the publishing companies were designated, specific publications had to be chosen. Three magazines – *Esquire*, *Wired* and *Popular Mechanics* – were automatically selected because they are the only monthly publications devised by their own companies to target one particular audience sector. Otherwise, 2007 circulation rates have been the parameter for choice: *Cosmopolitan* is the best selling magazine controlled by Hearst which targets young women (among *Marie Claire*, *Seventeen* and *Redbook*); *Glamour* beats

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[56]   The term *corpus* is intended here as a collection of full-size magazine issues, rather than as a tailored and measurable database as conceived by corpus linguistics.

Vogue, *Allure*, *Self* and *Teen Vogue* in the same section of the market; finally, *GQ* sells more than *Details*, another Condé Nast monthly magazine meant for men aged 25-40 (according to the magazine's mission statement mentioned in Chapter Two).

4.2.2   CORPUS FEATURES

The magazines under examination have three levels of variation as to the number of pages. Differences are found:

- between different issues of the same publication (e.g. *Esquire* contains 136 pages in January 2007 and 244 in October 2007);
- across publications (e.g. *GQ* reaches page 472 in October 2007, whereas *Popular Mechanics* hardly overreaches page 140);
- as far as the ratio between editorial material and advertisement is concerned.

None of these elements has hindered the research because no pure quantitative analysis has been made: this study focuses on the *quality* of language strategies that involve the use of slang, both considering the role and communicative effectiveness of slang in the single story and, in broader terms, estimating its contribution to the shaping of the audience's MRs in the long run. Investigating how often such strategies are replicated in a given magazine is a further step that would provide more insightful information about the magazine's policies than about slang. Priority should be given to the study of the ideological exploitation of slang: although any study on language manipulation in the mass media is socially and academically engaging *per se*, reviving and destabilizing the stagnant discussion on slang in the field of

linguistics (as described in Chapter Three) is felt as more urgent at this point than exposing the policies of single publications.

Quantitatively speaking, there is one element making the corpus uneven, although it has not been a problem for this study: due to different editorial styles, the average number of cover headlines across magazines ranges from 4 to 9, as Tables 4.1–4.6 show. *Cosmopolitan*, for example, features as many as nine per month, and it relies on a fixed layout consisting of the month's cover girl standing straight up with a hand on her hip, looking at the camera; conversely, *Wired* displays a limited number of headlines (never more than 5), focusing on a leading story that stands out against the other ones thanks to a larger font and a related image occupying the whole cover. In other words, the amount of cover headlines included in a year of one monthly magazine is likely to be tantamount to at least two years of another one.[57] Editorial choices concerning covers are strongly influenced by methods of purchase and circulation: for example, as mentioned in Chapter Two, over 87 per cent of *Wired* copies are sold via subscription, thus making catchy cover headlines less of a priority in terms of quantity of text per cover. These elements are taken into account in the analysis.

4.2.3   CORPUS STORAGE

The material compounding the corpus was stored digitally by scanning each magazine issue in all its parts (cover, summary, credits, pages) and saving them as Readable PDF files (Adobe Acrobat, version 8.1). This format allows for automatic reading, searching and copy-pasting onto

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[57]   Further research wishing to make linguistic generalizations on specific editorial trends in cover design should consider creating a corpus which includes as many issues as needed to reach an even number of cover headlines per magazine. I plan to extend this study in that very direction in the future.

.doc or .txt files; at the same time, it treats pages as images that can be cropped and visually modified.

4.3 BEFORE THE ANALYSIS: HEADLINE CATEGORIZATION

The 72 monthly issues building the corpus contain 480 cover headlines on the whole. Headlines have been divided into six categories, according to the magazine content of which they provide a preview:

- **advice for readers**: tips and warnings about the target audience's life and behavior – e.g. "Great hair in half the time! 7 speedy solutions" (*Glamour*, November 2007);
- **outsiders' perspective**: opinions or experiences belonging to members of social/gender/age communities different from the target audience – e.g. "The secret things men do when women are not around" (*Glamour*, March 2007);
- **celebrity/special guest**: interview or news involving a guest star – e.g. "What Iggy Pop knows, p. 172" (*Esquire*, March 2007);
- **world facts/news**: magazine coverage of a cultural/social/political event of general interest – e.g. "How NASA lost the Apollo video" (*Wired*, January 2007);
- **products showcase**: critical or uncritical review of items available on the market – e.g. "Test: Seven Smartphones versus the iPhone" (*Popular Mechanics*, October 2007);
- **magazine characterization**: cover slogan describing an encompassing feature of the month's issue – e.g. "The hot issue" (*Cosmopolitan*, August 2007).

Tables 4.1–4.6: Cover headlines divided per month according to content.

COSMOPOLITAN	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	*tot.*
Advice for readers	6	2	6	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	48
Outsiders' perspective	1	4	2	3	3	2	4	3	3	5	3	3	36
Celebrity/Special guest	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	10
World facts/news	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	5
Products showcase	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	5
Magazine characterization	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
total	9	9	9	8	9	9	9	9	9	10	8	8	**106**

GLAMOUR	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	*tot.*
Advice for readers	4	5	3	4	4	2	4	4	3	5	4	5	47
Outsiders' perspective	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	6
Celebrity/Special guest	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
World facts/news	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	5
Products showcase	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	10
Magazine characterization	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	4
total	7	7	7	6	6	7	8	8	6	8	7	8	**85**

GQ	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	*tot.*
Advice for readers	2	3	1	4	3	4	1	2	1	1	4	0	26
Outsiders' perspective	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	3
Celebrity/Special guest	1	3	2	2	4	2	3	3	4	1	3	2	30
World facts/news	2	3	2	0	1	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	12
Products showcase	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	11
Magazine characterization	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	4
total	8	11	6	8	9	8	6	7	8	3	7	5	**86**

ESQUIRE	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	*tot.*
Advice for readers	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	0	8
Outsiders' perspective	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Celebrity/Special guest	4	1	3	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	22
World facts/news	1	3	1	3	2	2	0	3	2	0	0	0	17
Products showcase	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Magazine characterization	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	4
total	6	6	5	5	6	7	2	5	6	3	3	2	**56**

POPULAR MECHANICS	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	*tot.*
Advice for readers	2	2	3	2	3	5	4	5	2	1	6	1	36
Outsiders' perspective	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Celebrity/Special guest	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
World facts/news	3	5	1	1	2	3	2	1	2	0	1	2	23
Products showcase	1	1	4	4	3	0	2	1	1	4	2	4	27
Magazine characterization	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	2	7
total	7	8	8	8	8	9	8	7	6	6	9	9	**93**

WIRED	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	tot.
Advice for readers	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	1	9
Outsiders' perspective	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Celebrity/Special guest	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
World facts/news	4	2	3	3	4	2	3	3	3	3	3	1	34
Products showcase	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	4
Magazine characterization	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
total	5	5	4	5	6	4	5	4	5	5	3	3	**54**

As a second step, a lexical analysis has been conducted on cover headlines in order to individuate the ones containing at least one slang item. This selection has allowed singling out 71 cover headlines out of 480, as listed in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Cover headlines containing slang, divided per magazine.

MAGAZINE	COVER HEADLINE
COSMOPOLITAN	"My boyfriend didn't change his boxers for 3 months!" **Hysterical** and cringe-worthy confessions
	4 things all guys keep private (The first one's a real **doozy**)
	75 sex tricks. Warning: They're so **hot**, this magazine may burst into flames
	9 times you won't burn in hell for being **bitchy**
	A shocking thing 68% of **chicks** do in bed: p. 124. You naughty, naughty girls
	Beauty tricks that save you **buck**$
	Blow his mind! The **awesome** new sex prop – and guess what? It's probably in your purse
	Caught **butt naked**! These horny couples couldn't control themselves. You'll laugh **your ass off**
	Chick behavior that baffles the hell out of guys
	Confessions Special! Guys **spill** their dirty, **dumb-ass** blunders. You'll die laughing
	Erotic sex: 7 boundary-pushing moves all men secretly crave (and you'll **get off** on too)
	Feel sex more intensely: A guide to your body during the **deed**
	Get ahead <u>faster</u>: 12 brilliant (and slightly **badass**) ways to do it
	Girlfriend traits guys find "**freakin' awesome**"
	Guys' sex confessions: Surprising stuff they don't want from you in the **sack**
	Guys **spill**: White lies they tell women <u>all</u> the time
	Hey, sexy! **Hot** new summer hairstyles
	His #1 sex fantasy: No woman has had the nerve to try this on

MAGAZINE	COVER HEADLINE
	him... And he'll **go** totally **nuts** when <u>you</u> do
	Hot new sex trick: This mind-blowing, box-spring breaking technique will intensify <u>everything</u> he feels
	Hottest clothes for spring
	Julia Stiles: The least **bitchy** girl in Hollywood!
	PLUS: Tricks that curb your urge for **junk food**
	Plus: Yummy guy **eye candy** inside
	Sex shockers: Things he thinks about during the **deed** that you really, <u>really</u> need to know
	Sex **smarts**: Secrets of male arousal: A surprising trigger to his deepest sex cravings
	The **hot** issue
	The **hottest** thing to do to a man with your <u>hands</u>
	The sex position he craves: It gives him the **hottest** view...and hits all the right spots
	What even experienced **chicks** forget to do in bed
	Why you <u>should</u> be a jealous **bitch**! And 6 other relationship secrets
	You sex goddess! **Crazy-ass** moves he wants you to do to him <u>there</u>
	TOTAL: 31
ESQUIRE	**Burned-out**, beat down, but not forever: Robert Downey Jr.'s triumphal return begins, um, tomorrow.
	J. Jacobs becomes a **hot** available woman
	That insane **chick** from Wedding crashers
	The most useful issue ever: Essential skills for men who are neither **geeks** nor obsessives
	TOTAL: 4
GLAMOUR	50 shortcuts to a sexier body. Sneaky tricks for **butt**, belly, thighs – every inch of you!
	99 ways to make over your home: Plus some seriously shocking pictures of how **celebs** <u>really</u> live
	America Ferrera: Ugly Betty is **hot**!
	Exactly what to do to lose weight: The natural way to <u>your</u> **hottest**, healthiest body
	Fall bonus: 534 **A-list** fashion finds & **freebies**!
	Get more energy on less sleep: Exhausted? **Fried**? Read this
	Hot at every age! Claire Danes, 28, Queen Latifah, 37, and Mariska Hargitay, 43
	Hottest freebies - the same loot the stars get
	Why pay more? Fashion **steals** for under $50
	Your body: what turns him on (& what **freaks** him **out**)
	TOTAL: 10
GQ	"Who's your **daddy**, America?" Stephen Colbert for president
	Barack Obama **rules**: On the road with the great contender
	Forget George Bush: The **slam-dunk** case for impeaching Dick Cheney

MAGAZINE	COVER HEADLINE
	From cameras to laptops (and even **air guitars**): Our annual guide to the best stuff of the year
	GQ Eats: ◊ A man's guide to mastering his kitchen ◊ The **coolest** restaurant neighborhood in America ◊ ...and the **hottest** dish on TV (Find her on page 122)
	Hot car-porn action! Starts on page 298
	John McCain. Scenes from a **meltdown**
	London '007: Get your **arse** to the **coolest** city on the planet
	Losing it? How to save your hair
	Superbad: Is Chad Johnson the best show in the NFL?
	The 7 habits of highly successful **suck-ups**
	The **coolest** jeans you can buy (They're not blue)
	You throw like Tom Cruise: The 10 **lamest** sports-movie performances of all time
	Your career to-do list: ◊ Be proactive! ◊ Think outside the box! ◊ Stop using **lame** office lingo!
	TOTAL: 14
POPULAR MECHANICS	Avoid car repair **scams**
	Avoid credit card **scams**
	Avoid home **scams**
	Car show report: **Hot** 2008 Nissan Coupé
	Supercar showdown: Audi R8 vs. Porsche, **Vette** and Viper
	What's shaking? Solving auto mysteries
	TOTAL: 6
WIRED	How to **scam** Digg
	How Yahoo **screwed up**
	Martha **geeks out**! How to: ◊ **Land** a fat raise ◊ **Rule** the blogosphere ◊ Take **killer** digipics ◊ Outsmart a mechanic ◊ **Snag** a cell phone deal ◊ Weasel free drinks ◊ Keep batteries charged ◊ Email like a pro ◊ Get fired properly ◊ Bake a Wii cake
	Transformers: 25 years of **butt-kicking 'bots**
	What we don't know about... ◊ The universe ◊ Life & death ◊ Sleep ◊ The brain ◊ Time ◊ Language ◊ Gravity ◊ Earth's core ◊ Black holes ◊ Belly button lint ◊ & other mysteries ◊ With guest **smarty-pants** John Hodgman, *The Daily Show*'s resident expert
	What went wrong in Iraq (Hint: Blame the **geeks**)
	TOTAL: 6

4.3.1   CRITERIA FOR ASSIGNING THE 'SLANG' LABEL

As stated in Chapter Three, the new approach offered by this study is based on the idea that ordinary people and the mass media use, avoid, and censor slang by drawing on their own perception of what it is.

According to this view, top-down adjustments of the label *slang* are no longer satisfactory, and are not provided here; in turn, it is that very 'perception' that is worth exploring. The first reason for shifting the focus on the popular notion of slang, without fearing its alleged 'naivety', 'impreciseness' or 'a-scientificity', is that we cannot explain editorial choices involving the use of slang if we fail to accept that media writers make assumptions on that notion as they construct texts, instead of the ones proposed by lexicographers. The second reason goes beyond the scope of this isolated study on slang in magazines: the word *slang* is one of the few metalinguistic terms that speakers untrained in linguistics employs to describe and dub their peers' and their own speech.

A cab driver taking me from my house in Somerville, MA to Logan airport in Boston once asked me why I was living in the United States. I usually feel nervous when I have to tell strangers I am taking a Ph.D. degree. I have noticed from experience that the news creates an uncomfortable mix of admiration and distance, especially if my interlocutor happens to have received a remarkably lower formal education. It is often the case that she feels compelled to interrupt me and lay out her own schooling history, so as to lower what she assumes my expectations about the tenor of our conversation might be. On my end, I might contribute to the discomfort by breaking the details of my research interests down to a very elementary level, assuming that the interlocutor would lose interest if I used a more technical terminology. The small talk on that cab seemed to be no exception: the conversation instantly froze. But then the driver added: "You'll probably laugh now, but do you know what you should study? Slang". I cannot tell who felt prouder, either he hitting the target with what he thought to be the

wildest of guesses, or I finding out that my thesis had at least one fan. A similar situation occurred with the 84-year-old grandfather of a friend from New Jersey. In spite of my fear of opening a gap between us (generational, if anything), he was willing to engage in the conversation and proceeded to list at least one dozen of 'slang words' that he and his schoolmates used in the 1930s and mid-1940s: none of the examples showed that he was confused as to the lexical nature of slang.[58] Although these anecdotes might sound inappropriate here, they have strongly shaped my own MRs concerning slang and therefore my ultimate commitment to ensuring legitimacy to popular notions of slang. Only those in power can profile others through academic definitions, while those being profiled, particularly if they belong to a subordinate group, seldom have the opportunity to define themselves or others while they are often coerced to accept, adopt, and accommodate to definitions of those in power. Although Chomsky often refers to the consensus of a speech community in determining the 'ideal' speaker, oppressed people seldom participate in the determination of what is colloquial and what is slang even though they may have had important roles in the creation of these categories in the first place.[59]

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[58]   Dumas and Lighter (1978) expressed a different opinion as to whether ordinary people can recognize slang. According to their surveys, students labelled as slang grammatical elements (such as the non-Standard auxiliary *ain't*) or very formal lexical items (such as the verb *to reckon*), thus proving their incapacity to make distinctions between the lexical and the grammatical level of language. Although slang *is* a lexical category, I believe that paying attention to what speakers describe as slang is far more constructive than devising a top-down label and blaming those who do not use it properly, especially when the general lack of a sound metalinguistic knowledge is the School's failure, not the students'.

[59]   I am grateful to Donaldo Macedo for inspiring comments on this point.

All considered, lexical items found in the corpus of magazines have been labeled as slang according to a working notion[60] sketched out thanks to the following elements:

- a number of articles, letters and stories published on the magazines under examination, in which editorial writers and/or readers provide their own definition of slang or dub specific usages and expressions as 'slang', treating the concept as common sense and not as a questionable or shaky category (cf. for example "Say what?", *GQ*, November 2007 pp. 168-171;[61] "It's ten o' clock. Do you know where your network president is?", *Esquire*, December 2007, pp. 195-197;[62] "Rants and raves (editorial correspondence)", *Wired*, April 2007, pp. 27-32);[63]
- a survey conducted in Boston, MA in 2007 with the help of a questionnaire submitted to 32 anonymous respondents, half males and half females, aged 18 to 65 (Belladelli, forth. b);[64]

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[60] I avoid calling it 'definition' because the etymology of the word itself involves the idea of delimitation and boundary setting. Although I understand that any label is assigned through a process of exclusion, my attempt to break the tradition of top-down definitions requires some degree of terminological questioning on my part.

[61] Excerpt from p. 168: *In a futile attempt to pry some information out of our teenage son, my wife recently asked him if he was planning to hook up with his buddies later on that evening. He winced."Do you even know what* hook up *means?" he asked us. Obviously not the same thing it once did."Well," I told him, "you're welcome to have hot gay sex with your pals over here, if you'd like. We'll be home!" Nothing is trendier than slang. Every generation redefines the language to create its own lingo. Who wants to sound like their lameass older siblings, let alone their flabby, dorked-out parents?*

[62] Excerpt from p. 196: *"They're basically D-girls," [Head of NBC Entertainment Ben Silverman] says, using the derogatory industry slang for cute young development execs with little power.*

[63] Excerpt from p. 31: *I was shocked to see a slang word for breast get into the title of Clive Thompson's monthly column. It seems to me Mr. Know-It-All is the real boob. Mary Kate Fredriksen, BOWLING GREEN, OHIO.*

[64] The survey was about the word *choice* used as a modifier. Participants were asked to read four sentences where the word occurred (one case was a regional use, three cases were slang uses), rephrase them and note whatever comment they felt appropriate to make with regard to the usages exemplified. As a result, only the

- my own familiarity with detecting slang, chiefly due to my experience as a free-lance compiler of two dictionaries of American slang published in Italy (Cagliero & Spallino, 2005, 2007);
- personal communications and discussions with native speakers of American English.

The working notion of slang held in this study is the following:

Slang is a lexical category including words and idiomatic expressions that encapsulate a generational or in-group content, thus revealing the user's affiliation to a specific generation or social group. Its use has the power to release such content and generate a spectrum of *emotional* reactions in the hearer/reader, from amusement to nostalgia to repulsion.

Although this notion has been the ultimate criterion for assigning the slang label to the lexical items retrieved from the corpus, additional parameters have been helpful in this process. The status of each item has been searched in Standard English dictionaries, historical slang dictionaries and slang dictionaries, in order to verify the level of consensus about the attribution of the slang label. Here follows a list of the dictionaries used as references in this study:

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comments concerning slang uses of *choice* included evaluative or judgmental expressions, such as *artificial*, *not strange*, *pompous*, *arrogant*, *best to keep it for yourself*, *self-glorifying*, *offensive*, *it's an age thing*, *boastful*, *funny*, *odd*. This side-result of the survey – which had a quite strong lexicographical approach and focused on a specific lexeme – proved insightful for the stress on emotions I am making here.

Standard English

- *Oxford English dictionary* (online)
- *Merriam Webster dictionary* (online)

Historical slang

- *Random House Historical dictionary of American slang* (Lighter, 1994)

American slang

- *Dictionary of American slang* (Wentworth & Flexner, 1960)
- *The Oxford dictionary of political slang* (Barrett, 2004)
- *Slang americano* (Cagliero & Spallino, 2007)
- *American slang dictionary* (Spears, 2006)

English slang

- *The new Partridge dictionary of slang and unconventional English* (Danzel & Victor, 2006)

An Appendix provides a list of all the lexemes that have been labeled as slang in this study, on the basis of either one of the above mentioned dictionaries or the notion of slang held here.

4.4 ANALYSIS

The 71 cover stories have been analyzed according to the framework offered by Critical Discourse Analysis at large. Drawing predominantly on the works by Fairclough (2001, in particular), but also including insightful stimuli offered by other linguists, a set of questions have been devised which allow for the understanding of why and how effectively slang is used in those cover stories, both with regard to the effectiveness of the single story and to the long-term shaping of the magazine audience. Since description always presupposes

interpretation, the list of questions has been revised after a preliminary reading of the material, in order to better focus on the elements that seemed more recurrent and crucial in the texts where slang occurs. Chapter Five offers six case studies selected from the corpus because they epitomize the exploitation of slang found in the magazines under examination. For the sake of clarity, the three stages of analysis (description, interpretation, explanation) have been kept separated in this section, although they are addressed in a more argumentative and less schematic way in Chapter Five.

4.4.1   DESCRIPTION

LEXICAL DESCRIPTION

1) What experiential values do words have?
- collocates: does the text producer use ideological creativity?
- relations of synonymy, antonymy, and hyperonymy among lexical items: does the text producer use ideological creativity?
- overwording and redundancy: do they reinforce a particular point? If so, they may serve ideological struggle. As Fairclough (2001: 96) points out, "an unusually high degree of wording, often involving many words which are near synonyms, (...) shows preoccupation with some aspect of reality – which may indicate that it is a focus of ideological struggle".
2) What relational values do words have?
- socially, culturally, and racially loaded lexical items: how do such choices affect the relationship between the text producer and the audience?

- lexical collocations: since they establish a common ground of notions that is taken for granted, on whose common sense do such lexical choices draw?

- euphemisms: whose sensibility is the text producer trying not to offend?

3) What expressive values do words have?

- evaluative and emotional statements: which and whose feelings do lexical choices embody?

4) Why are metaphors used?

- metaphors and figures of speech: do they silently hint at specific topics?

GRAMMATICAL DESCRIPTION

5) What experiential values do grammatical features have?

- positive/negative polarity: since "negation (…) is the basic way we have of distinguishing what is not the case in reality from what is the case" (Fairclough, 2001: 104), is the text producer committed to representing the world as it is or rather as should be, in her view?

- declarative/imperative mode of sentence: does the text producer uses them in an unbalanced way? Does the imperative mode reinforce the writer's voice as a giver of information and advice?

6) What relational value do grammatical features have?

- pronouns *I*, *we* and *you*: are they used inclusively or exclusively?

- positive/negative polarity: since "negative assertions evoke and reject corresponding positive assertions in the intertextual

context (Fairclough, 2001: 155), does the text producer uses negative sentences in order to silence other voices?[65]

TEXTUAL DESCRIPTION

7) What larger-scale structures does the text have?

- order of elements: is it predictable for its genre, i.e. does it draw on naturalized conventions? Is it creative or disruptive?

DISCOURSAL DESCRIPTION

8) On which discourse type(s) does the cover story draw? Are such discourse types traditional/mixed/disembedded?

4.4.2   INTERPRETATION

9) What assumptions does the cover story make, i.e. what aspects of MRs are drawn upon in order for the cover story to be interpreted as in the mind of the text producer?

4.4.3   EXPLANATION

10) What aspects of MRs are likely to be reproduced (unconsciously) by the readers?

11) What social structures are likely to be sustained or changed via the social process in which the cover story is produced and read/interpreted? In other words, if the strategies devised in a specific cover story are used repeatedly through time, how do they affect social structures, especially as far as social

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[65]   For instance, a statement such as "Avoiding contact may not be too difficult" (*GQ*, July 2007, p. 177) implies that there are some who believe it is difficult, unlike the writer. By choosing this syntactic structure, instead of 'Avoiding contact is easy', the text producer shapes the writer's voice as implicitly opposing (and winning over) other opinions.

inequalities and cultural stereotypes are concerned? Do they sustain them or subvert them?

4.5 AFTER THE ANALYSIS: RECONSTRUCTING SLANG EXPLOITATION

The same analysis conducted on the case studies offered in Chapter Five has been applied to all 71 cover stories in Chapter Six. Cover stories have been divided according to the categorization devised for cover headlines (advice for readers, outsiders' perspective, celebrity/special guest, world facts/news, products showcase, magazine characterization), in order to verify a) whether the strategies involving slang observed in the case studies are a common practice, and b) whether slang exerts its attractive power only on covers or is used consistently in the related stories, as well. The division by content category helps determine the role of slang in the strategic representation of products, readers, role models (celebrities), and the magazine itself.

4.6 THE STRABISMUS OF THE ANALYST

The practice of admitting the analyst's shortcomings is always liberating, as it both addresses doubts that the reader might have concerning the 'validity' of the approach (whatever the terms means in the reader's mind) and sets the analyst free from the burden of hiding elements that might put the authority of her voice in jeopardy.

At least three factors are responsible for the strabismus of my analysis. The first one is that, since I am a native speaker of Italian writing about American slang, I have worked with the constant fear of not being considered as a legitimate describer of that aspect of

language. The need to rely on multiple sources – dictionaries, personal communications and surveys involving native speakers of American English – is probably a way to overcome what I interpret as a hindrance. Instead, it could be seen as a different perspective, contributed by someone who is personally and academically concerned with American English and U.S. culture, but who grew up without any first-hand experiences of in-group slang, especially as a teenager. Studies that draw on different sets of mental models (if compared to the ones of U.S. scholars working on American English) may have at least the ability to destabilize and give unexpected spins to the debate about slang.

The second element that affects the analysis is that I am a consumer of women's magazines, and I also fall into the preferred target of such publications as to age, gender and lifestyle. I am more sensitive to their strategies and patterns, being a reader who has come across a wide range of variants within the realm of women's magazines. With them, I know what to expect and what to be surprised about when I open a new issue; declaring the same mastery in the initial approach to the rest of the material would be insincere. Men's magazines and technology magazines are a new world that I watch with a higher degree of curiosity, and, being less used to read these publications, I tend to be drawn to what they offer, especially if it is missing in women's magazines. For example, it took me a while to go past my disappointment after finding out that *Esquire* and *GQ* host literature and politics within their issues, next to fashion reports on summer shoes, while publishing companies choose not to feed the same intellectual material to the female audience. The fact that women are culturally kept in a less stimulating environment is notorious, yet difficult to accept

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when one is asked to keep the same level of criticism in the analysis of all the material. For this reason, I have forced myself to consider that any target audience is shaped and influenced in some way, and that I only have to seek the manipulation of male audiences in deeper layers of the text.

The question of audience manipulation poses the third factor that contributes to strabismus, i.e. the analyst's condition as a consumer who jumps in and out of the 'audience' community according to the representation she gives of them. Ballaster et al. (1991: 38) stated that "we would resist the assumption that readers are simply victims of the ideology inscribed in the texts they consume". Along the same lines, Johnson & Fisher (2004: 1251) reject passive representations of the recipients of media products:

> It is paternalistic to assume that consumers lack the ability to sift through competing assertions and decide for themselves whether a company's attempts to enhance its image reflects reality, or whether the company's statements should influence their purchasing decision at all.

Nobody would want to be categorized as belonging to the uncritical mass who is controlled and pushed around by the mass media. Since analysts living in technological societies are also mass media consumers, making distinctions between critical and uncritical consumers is a way for them to show respect for the audience's intellect, and at the same time to include themselves in the 'critical' group.[66] Of course, audiences are heterogeneous and made of

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[66] In this sense, this choice can be seen as serving an egoistic task.

individuals who use and dispose of media products according to moods, agendas or purposes that are unique and idiosyncratic. However, I believe that language analysts should be foregrounding inequalities and exploitations conveyed by language whenever they occur, without taking for granted that others have noticed them, but hoping that the group of critical consumers/readers/text producers (which is always there) will just grow in number.

Chapter Five

THE FUNCTION OF SLANG IN COVER STORIES: SIX CASE STUDIES

> **hot** [...] *adj.* **7** lascivious, lewd, sexually suggestive. [...] **10** Good, fine, admirable; [...] popular, well liked. 1924: "I didn't flunk out but my record isn't so hot". Marks, *Plastic Age*, 112.
>
> *Dictionary of American slang*
> (Wentworth & Flexner, 1960)

> **hot** [...] **8.** *mod.* selling well. ◊ *These things are really hot this season*. **9.** *mod.* sexy; sexually arousing. ◊ *Wow, who was that hot hunk you were with?*
>
> *American Slang Dictionary*
> (Spears, 2006)

Adding new definitions to a dictionary headword is a regular procedure as referents change or increase through time. Yet, when one of the most recent dictionaries of English slang inserts a new meaning of *hot*[67] – 'selling well' – and decides to put it before 'sexy' because it is now more

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[67]   The adjective *hot* meaning 'sexually aroused' has belonged to the English language since as early as Chaucerian times. It has gradually left Standard English through the centuries and is now considered as slang. Its most common meanings are the following; aroused; exuberant, flamboyant, uninhibited; sensational; sexually attractive; commercially very successful; (hence, esp. in the 1980s) enjoying a great vogue; known to or easily identifiable by the police (Lighter, 1997: 168-171).

common than it, we have to acknowledge that the mass media and the market have not only taken on the slang of their consumers for almost a century, but have also affected it in such ways that need to be investigated. Screaming '*Hot* shoes for the new season' from magazine covers has eventually contributed to widen, or more precisely to slant the range of possible referents for that slang word towards objects and items instead of human beings.

Keeping this in mind, I read an article on magazine covers, where the author claimed that cover stories reflect "the editors' notions of what might draw a reader to the contents of the magazine" (McMahon, 1990: 384). For this reason, I started my analysis of the material from the empirical reading of the covers of the 72 issues compounding the corpus. At first, the slang used on covers (See Table 4.7) appeared to be closely related to the semantic areas of the topic addressed in the cover story and to have the only aim of adding levity to the headlines. For example, it seemed clear that a cover headline such as "*Hottest freebies* – the same loot the stars get" (*Glamour*, December 2007) used the semantic and emotional value of *hot* so as to enhance the desirability of the items and accessories displayed in a specific section of the magazine, and that *freebie* (meaning a free item) hinted at the possibility that such objects would be somehow obtained for free, thanks to the instructions given in the same section. After reading such cover headlines such as "*Hot* 2008 Nissan Coupé" (*Popular Mechanics*, February 2007), "That insane *chick* from *Wedding Crashers*" (*Esquire*, April 2007), or "Confessions Special! Guys *spill* their dirty, *dumb-ass* blunders. You'll die laughing" (*Cosmopolitan*, April 2007), it seemed to me that the function of slang was nothing but a way of blinking an eye to the reader, a means of attracting the audience by conveying a

younger and more playful attitude to the magazine. After all, as it is naively thought, slang is fun to hear and fun to use.

The perspective changed as I read the cover headlines after reading the cover story linked to them: the slang vocabulary used on the covers seemed to reach out for something that was beyond the overt topic of the corresponding story. Levity and youthfulness appeared less and less convincing as motives for slang use: the rules of unfair competition in the workplace encouraged in "Get ahead faster: 12 brilliant (and slightly *badass*) ways to do it" (*Cosmopolitan*, December 2007) had nothing light or young about them, and neither did the highly critical journalistic report "Forget George Bush: The *slam-dunk* case for impeaching Dick Cheney" (*GQ*, March 2007).

A hypothesis started to grow: that the slang vocabulary placed on covers does not prime the reader on the topic of the story, but rather on the emotional state in which she[68] should be when reading the story that the text producer has devised. Claiming that the integration of slang to the language of cover stories (or to the language of magazine writing in general) is a cool-headed and premeditated act would be naïve and oblivious of the actual dynamics of magazine editorial offices; it would also assign an excessive value to written text in best-selling monthly magazines which, due to their features, are also (and often more) a catalog of glossy images and advertisement to be viewed and browsed without even looking at the summary. However, there must be a strategy behind the creation of stories that have slang on the cover and not even the slightest colloquialism in the body of the text, or

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[68]   An author's note. Persisting with the use of generic *she* becomes more clumsy in a chapter that deals with four (out of six) magazines that have an almost exclusively male readership. At some points, it may even hinder immediacy in understanding. However, it proves quite effectively how generic *he* is internalized in our reading and writing practice.

behind the pervasive use of *hot* in headlines anticipating topics as different as lingerie and cars.

This chapter offers the analysis of six cover stories, in the attempt to locate a more convincing motive for the use of slang both in covers and inside their corresponding stories. The first working hypothesis is that the slang on covers has a different role than the one inside the magazine: while the former is supposed to be viewed by the reader before the purchase, the latter is more functional to the argumentation that is developed in the story, be it the most efficient tires or the secret of happiness. The second hypothesis is that magazines living on advertisement cannot afford to write on cars and happiness in the full interest of the reader, suggesting brands of inexpensive but long-lasting tires or encouraging more charity donations and less shopping, because the needs of the corporations that invest in those magazines are the priority. For this reason, slang may contribute to the conveyance of particular messages that, while entertaining the reader and keeping her trust in the writer, eventually shape the audience after the demands of a specific slice of the market.

In Chapter Six the analysis will be extended to all the cover stories listed in Table 4.7, and generalizations will be attempted on the role of slang in cover stories.

5.1 "BEAUTY TIPS THAT SAVE YOU BUCK$" (*Cosmopolitan*, May 2007)[69]

The story opens with a headline that reads "Lust-worthy hair for less". The story, which is three pages long, is presented as a single story unit compound as follows: two sets of bulleted tips, namely "Trim salon costs" and "Maximize your color"; three off-body framed tips, one of which is entitled "Serving sizes", whereas the other two are visually matching and have the same headline, namely "Freebie!" (Figg. 5.11 and 5.12); two framed areas of editorial advertisement, respectively "Splurge versus steal!" and "Bargain buys" (Figg. 5.9 and 5.10).

> The first slang lexeme is found on the upper right-hand side of the cover page, inside a circle, within the expression *(to) save bucks* (Fig. 5.1); the last letter of the word *bucks* is graphically rendered as a dollar symbol, thus resulting in semantic redundancy which reinforces the idea of money. The cover headline is repeated in the summary, with no additional information or images (Fig. 5.2). The standfirst contains slang in the noun phrase, 'a *buzz* cut' (Fig. 5.3), and so does the lead paragraph, which features a number of slang idioms that all pertain to the semantic area of saving: 'you *sock* your money *away'*, 'saving a *bundle'*, '*minting* money', 'save *big bucks*' (Fig. 5.4). Slang is found in the tip sections, within the following expressions, two of which cover the semantic field of money: '*spiked* your dyes with Dom Pérignon', 'chunky highlights tend to look *skunky'*, 'don't *hit the* dye *bottle'*, and 'a fast boost that won't *blow* your *wad'* (Figg. 5.5 through 5.8). The framed sections of editorial advertisement contain slang in their headline and subhead: both '*Splurge* or *steal*!' and 'Why *shell out* when you can save?' are a continuation along the leading money theme (Figg. 5.9 and 5.10). Finally, two of the off-body tips – which appear on separate pages – are connected both visually, through identical font, color and layout, and textually, by means of the same

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[69] In order to compensate for the impossibility to reproduce the complete stories here due to copyright restrictions, the next sections provide an off-body description of the slang vocabulary used, both in terms of co-text and position within the texts. A selection of excerpts is also available in Figures.

headline featuring the slang noun *freebie*, and visually through the identical use of font and layout (Figg. 5.11 and 5.12); the latter tip also contains the slang adverbial phrase *on the house*. Once again, the slang vocabulary used here pertains to the semantic field of saving.

Fig. 5.1 Source: *Cosmopolitan*, May 2007; cover.

Fig. 5.2 Source: *Cosmopolitan*, May 2007; summary.
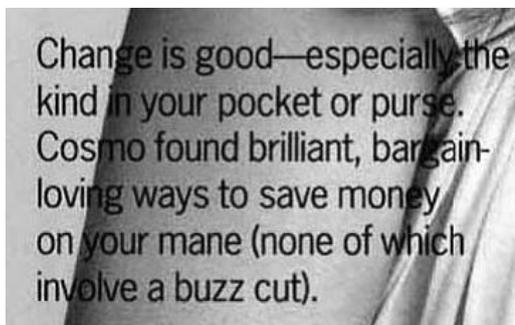
Fig. 5.3 Source: *Cosmopolitan*, May 2007; p. 157.

■ Whether you sock your money away or spend it with Victoria Beckham abandon, one thing is certain: Everybody loves a bargain. And when it comes to your beauty routine, there's nothing better than saving a bundle on the stuff that makes you look sexy. That's especially true if we're talking about hair. Just consider all the luxe temptations: expensive haircuts, flirty highlights, fancy shampoos, exotic straightening treatments—oh, and did we mention fancy blow-dryers and silky hair brushes? Fortunately, you can have all the above (plus more!) without robbing a bank or minting money like the Trump family. We tracked down inexpensive but indulgent ways to save big bucks on every aspect of your hair routine. So bring on the teases and the thrilling extras— your mane is about to look its very best (for much, much less).

Fig. 5.4 Source: *Cosmopolitan,* May 2007; p. 158.

Fake Salon Color

Considering how much you pay for color at the salon, you'd think they spiked their dyes with Dom Pérignon. Nope, the secret ingredients are conditioners that impart a shiny glow, says Patrick Prinzo, a stylist at Tela hair salon in NYC. Look for them in at-home kits like Revlon Colorist Expert Color and Glaze System, $15.99. And stick with a shade that's one or two

Fig. 5.5 Source: *Cosmopolitan,* May 2007; p.162.

Apply It Like a Pro

Chunky highlights tend to look skunky, and they're a pain to maintain. Instead, just do thin streaks around your face and part (where the sun would hit your head naturally)

Cover Up Roots

Don't hit the dye bottle at the very first sign of roots. If you only have an inch or less of regrowth, mask it with a quick-coloring kit (try Revlon Color-Silk Root Perfect, $3.69). Pick a shade similar to the color you had done, and keep in mind that the point is not to match your color exactly but simply to make your roots less noticeable, says Prinzo.

Cheap Save!

Get a gloss treatment if you want a fast boost that won't blow your wad. "Glosses enrich your natural color without depositing any dye," explains Prinzo. Try an at-home version, like John Frieda Luminous Color Glaze, $9.99, or treat yourself to the salon experience. Most glosses take only a few minutes to activate, so you'll pay far less than you would for a full head of highlights or a single-process color, says Prinzo.

Figg. 5.6, 5.7, 5.8 Source: *Cosmopolitan,* May 2007; p. 162.

Splurge Versus Steal!

Some tools cost more than a week's vacation, while others are like a day pass at a theme park.

SPLURGE

STEAL

HAIR DRYERS

CHI Nano Dual Air Flow Ceramic Dryer, $255.95

The key difference: The splurge has bacteria-killing nano silver all over the outside, whereas the

Infiniti by Conair Tourmaline Ionic Styler, $39.99

Fig. 5.9 Source: *Cosmopolitan,* May 2007; p. 158.

Fig. 5.10 Source: *Cosmopolitan*, May 2007; p. 160.

Fig. 5.11 Source: *Cosmopolitan*, May 2007; p. 158.

Fig. 5.12 Source: *Cosmopolitan*, May 2007; p. 160.

Considering the overall distribution of slang vocabulary along the cover story – from the cover itself to page 162 – the first observation that can be drawn is that, except for three slang lexemes, namely *buzz*, *skunky* and the idiom *(to) hit the bottle*, the whole slang vocabulary chosen for this cover story functions as overwording focused on money, either saved or spent. Besides socially unmarked verbs, such as *(to) save* and *(to) spend*, the text producer opted for a list of slang equivalents, namely:

- **(to) save**: (to) save [big] bucks; (to) sock money away; (to) save a bundle; (to) get st. on the house; (to) get a freebie; (to) get the steal [version of an item];
- **(to) spend**: (to) mint money; (to) blow one's wad; (to) shell out; (to) get the splurge [version of an item].

But are they really equivalents? All of the above slang options are characterized by an underlying reference to greed and excess: constructing the lexical cohesion of a text drawing on this range of alleged 'synonyms' (whose semantic equivalence would not hold in other texts or discourses) implies that saving money is tantamount to saving *all* the money, and that spending money equals to spending *all* the money. The text producer shows a good degree of ideological creativity as she establishes a relation of synonymy – valid only in this text – among all these verbs. By the same token, the relation of antonymy that could be established through Standard English (*saving* versus *spending*) is reinvented in a creative way, thus enabling the text producer to shape the boundaries of the reader's subject position around the idea of lack of self control and inability to find a balance

between quality and value. Ideological creativity is also found in another connection, less eagerly pursued by the text producer and therefore less overt. There seems to be a reference to drinking, as exemplified by the slang expressions *on the house*, *(to) hit the dye bottle* and *(to) spike [with Dom Pérignon]*. The reference to drinking may serve to enhance the characterization of the reader as a person who naturally tends to self-indulgence and unhealthy habits.

On the whole, the slang vocabulary chosen in this story seems to be motivated by a series of assumptions made by the text producer with regard to the ideal reader's habits and needs. It is taken for granted that the reader seeks professional care for her hair: the whole story often makes reference to '*your* stylist' and '*your* salon', assuming that the reader has a reference salon. It is also assumed that the ideal reader would be happy to spend less money, or even nothing at all, and that she would rather spend her own time (making home-made treatments, browsing through several salons, asking for information) than her own money. The third assumption made here is that the reader would still want people to think she can afford the cost of professional hair care: the instructions included in the tips are conceived for a single person working on her own head, and no reference is made to the possibility of having friends or family members help the reader with dyes and cuts. In this view, the slang overwording of the 'saving' topic seems to have a clear euphemizing function which is aimed at not breaking the money taboo.

Most of the slang found in this story does not have an evaluative or expressive value, except for the two words chosen to define poorly treated hair: *buzz* and *skunky*. Both modifiers convey a feeling of undesirability and discomfort, which clashes with the overall focus on

comfort and gratification. Conversely, the story is laced with emotional statements and positive evaluations, provided by Standard vocabulary: '*Love* your cut', 'bargain-*loving* ways to save', 'everybody *loves* a bargain', 'luxe *temptations*', inexpensive but *indulgent* ways', '*thrilling* extras', 'style is *romantic*', and '*treat* yourself to the salon *experience*', to mention a few. Slang seems to be used here to mark emotionally the difference between following the advice offered in the story and refusing it.

The lexical choices made in this story are not the only features that help the text producer shape the writer's and the reader's subject positions within the story. Among all the grammatical elements of these texts, personal deixis and polarity seem to play a decisive role.

The deictic pronouns *we* and *you* are the most functional to the establishment of a specific relationship between the reader and the writer in this story. *We* is found in the lead paragraph, in the first set of tips and in the first framed section of editorial advertisement. It is used once inclusively ('That's especially true if *we*'re talking about hair') and four times exclusively, considering *we* as the editorial staff conceived as a team ('*we* mention', '*we* tracked down', 'trust *us*', and '*we* found [plumping proteins]'). However, the focus of deixis is on the reader, who is addressed 57 times by means of *you*, *your* and *yours*. Personal deixis has a specific relational value in this story. Exclusive *we* is used so as to construe the ideal writer's subject position as a caretaker and an advisor, who nevertheless is able to step back and leave space to the reader, shaped as the protagonist of the hair care process.

Despite her pre-eminent position, the ideal reader is construed as a woman who needs constant reassurance and advice, as shown by the strategic use of negative polarity, especially as far as the imperative

mood is concerned. The instructions, suggestions and warnings which are found in the negative form, such as '*don't* get too scissor-happy', '*don't* hit the dye bottle', or '*don't* assume that you have to sink large funds', contain a reference to excess and hint at the reader's inability to control herself, thus enhancing the writer's subject position as a necessary and welcome controller of an otherwise uncontrollable reader.

As far as the discoursal organization of the story is concerned, it can be said that the texts draw on at least four recognizable discourse types, namely Instruction, Recipe and, to a smaller extent, Editorial advertisement and Interview. The first two types belong to a macro-discourse type named *operational discourse*. (Operational discourse is meant here as an umbrella term for all kinds of discourses that draw on instructional discourse types, such as tips, recipes, how-to guides and instructions.) The features of Instruction (imperative mood, schematic layout with bulleted lists) are used traditionally by the text producer. The resources of the Recipe discourse type (e.g. list of ingredients separated from the instructions, process illustrated chronologically) are also used in a relatively traditional way – the prototypical recipe would also include images of the final outcome or of intermediate steps in the preparation of food – but the discourse type is disembedded from its birth discourse, i.e. cooking, and then embedded into the beauty/healthcare discourse.

Editorial advertisement is a mixed discourse type that has become very common in magazine writing. Besides the traditional advert space sold by the magazine, there is a family of mixed discourses (e.g. infomercials) which blend the voice of cultural authorities (journalists, testimonials, experts) with the voice of advertisement, turning the ideal

writer into a professional buyer entitled by her own authority and by the reader's trust to browse through the options of the marketplace in search of items to suggest. Interview is used only partially: statements and answers given by hair stylists are recorded, whereas the original questions made by the editorial staff are omitted and only retraceable from the context.

The pre-eminence of operational discourse types is reflected in the whole textual organization of the story from the cover to the end: on the one hand, the cover headline ('Beauty *tips'*) anticipates that the main discourse type will be of the advisory kind; on the other, the layout of the story is utterly operational, as small, framed sections and bold paragraph headers create a 'tray' of independent pieces of advice for the reader to take ad hoc to achieve a single final goal, i.e. to obtain professional-like results on a budget.

Throughout the cover story, almost all slang expressions belong to the semantic field of money. Vocabulary continuity, limited to slang, reveals that the text producer's writing process is done with money management in mind, instead of hair care. This is understandable in the editorial perspective: the goal of the cover story is to display about twenty brands in the sections "Splurge versus steal!" and "Bargain buys", and in particular to display the *steal* items, which are the ones that readers are more likely to afford. That the real topic of the cover story is budget management is clear from the cover: neither the cover headline nor the summary headline is accompanied by visual or textual references to the subtopic of beauty that is going to be addressed (skin care, body care, hair care, clothing, and so forth). *Saving bucks* is the focus of interest chosen by the text producer to lead the reader towards the story.

The coherence of the whole story depends on a series of larger-scale cultural and ideological assumptions: a) that readers think of their hair primarily in terms of maintenance and style (rather than, for example, as a display of their religious or ethnic identity); b) that readers think of hair care in terms of professional care, which is obtained at a monetary cost; c) that readers are happy to spend less money, as long as the surface-result is similar to the one obtained with more expensive treatments; d) that beautiful hair is obtained through money, instead of through healthy food, for example. There is a deeper underlying assumption: that readers value surface luxury, i.e. they seek to be categorized by others as professionally and expensively groomed, regardless of the time/energy/self-training/advice-seeking cost (besides monetary cost) that is nevertheless necessary to the accomplishment of a surface-expensive result. This assumption, that remains hidden but indirectly points at the idea that the lack of wealth is a shame and must be hidden from other people, is unmasked by the use of slang. The euphemistic effect of slang, which conveys a joking and down-to-earth character to the statements concerning budget management, is an open attempt to dribble a tabooed topic for the U.S. society and Western societies at large, i.e. lack of wealth. In this story, however, the impossibility to afford expensive hair care all the times is not presented as a social condition but as the reader's poor ability to manage her own wealth and gather the 'right' information.

Reproducing the ideology hidden in this kind of stories is vital to the survival of a magazine such as *Cosmopolitan*. Encouraging the readers to hide their actual financial situation and to pretend to have a higher lifestyle shapes the type of consumer needed by the market which pays for the advertisement that materially sustains the magazine.

Choosing discourse types such as recipes helps construing the ideal reader as a versatile woman who is able to be self-sufficient and practical when it comes to grooming but who chooses to seek professional help because she can afford to do so. Furthermore, this kind of stories contributes to reinforce the ideal writer's subject position as a reliable advisor and as the repository of the reader's secrets – in this case, her actual financial condition – and is ready to advise her on how to keep up appearances.

5.2 "GET MORE ENERGY ON LESS SLEEP" (*Glamour*, September 2007)

This story is presented to the reader by means of a cover headline, placed in the lower right-hand side of the cover: the subhead contains slang, as it reads "Exhausted? *Fried*? Read this" (Fig. 5.13); the summary, which only repeats the headline and provides the page numbers, does not contain slang. This four-pages-long story consists of one story-unit with a unifying headline and standfirst. The largest portion of the story space is occupied by a numbered list of six tips entitled "The best ways to get more energy", which ends with a bio-sketch of the co-authors of the story (two doctors) and a baseline redirecting the reader to the magazine website for more information. The other sections belonging to the story are, in the order, three off-body signed confession lines entitled "My energy trick", one off-body section of bulleted tips entitled "7 seriously energizing foods", one column-size section of editorial advertisement entitled "Will this stuff really rev you up?", and the caption of a page-size picture.

The article opens on page 368 with a headline whose subhead reads "Exhausted? *Fried*? More energy, please!" (Fig. 5.14), thus recalling the cover headline; below, a standfirst is found which contains the slang expressions *doc*, *quick fixes*, and 'keep *crashing*' (Fig. 5.15). The main set of tips includes the following vocabulary: 'to get *a nice chunk of zzz's*' and '*Chilling* with something lower-tech' (Fig. 5.16); 'a hurriedly *scarfed* lunch' and 'Here's the *deal'* (Fig. 5.17); 'natural *uppers'* (Fig. 5.18); 'Try [...] to *zero in* on a single task', 'Your mind can end up *zooming* line a hamster on a wheel', 'No one feels *peppy 24/7*', and 'when you feel *zonked* and *blah'* (Fig. 5.19). As far as the signed real-life confessions are concerned, slang is found in the phrases 'silly but *boppy* songs' (Fig. 5.20) and 'Diet Coke used to be my *insta-fix*' (Fig. 5.21). The off-body tips have two colloquial clippings, *combo* and *veggies* (Fig. 5.22). The editorial advertisement contains slang in the verb '*hitting* [the office coffee-maker] and in the noun phrases 'the latest energy *gimmicks'*,[70] 'This *jacked-up* Slurpee', and 'The *docs* [say]*'* (repeated for each advertised item) (Fig. 5.23).

Fig. 5.13 Source: *Glamour*, September 2007; cover.

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[70]   Lighter (1994: 849) dates the origin of this noun back to 1922; he also specifies that its use in Advertisement, meaning "a clever feature or idea that will lure customers" was first recorded in 1946 and is now considered as Standard English. This is one example of a slang item that stops being considered as such as soon as it reaches the media: conversely, it should be considered as a slang item which is simply taken on by the media to make the writer's voice sound more similar to the audience's alleged speech.

Fig. 5.14 Source: *Glamour*, September 2007; p. 368.

So, doc, what can I take for more energy?" As M.D.s who've treated thousands of women over the years, we can't *tell* you how many times we've heard this question. And the problem seems to be getting worse—no offense, but we think a 30-year-old woman back in 1980 would've run circles around you poor, tired souls these days. Part of the reason is that, as young women, you have more distractions than any generation before you—cell phones, Treos, TiVo, YouTube, it's endless. And your schedules are way too packed. There's no time during the day when you're not doing *something* (or, more likely, 15 somethings). Adding to the problem, women aren't getting the sleep or foods they need for fuel. They tend to see energy as something they can go out and buy—in a pill, Red Bull can or "caution, contents are hot" container; you're the Starbucks Generation. But if you keep relying on quick fixes, you'll only keep crashing. Thankfully, the solutions don't involve swearing off skim lattes, tossing your smart phone into the nearest river or dropping out to go backpacking in Nepal. These are the energizers that really work, in order of effectiveness (after all, you're a busy woman, so if you have time to do only one or two, start at the top!).

Fig. 5.15 Source: *Glamour*, September 2007; p. 368.

1 **Sleep well!** You wanna know why everyone's so tired? *The Daily Show*, that's why! We're joking, of course, but the point is that sleep is the first thing to go when anything remotely more amusing (which is everything) comes up. But if you're serious about getting more pep, there's no substitute for rest. You need between seven and nine hours of it a night. At the very least, you must figure out a way to get a nice chunk of zzz's *a few* nights a week. Why not skip that marathon blow-drying thing you do with your hair on Mondays and Thursdays in favor of waking up later? To make the most of whatever sleep you *can* get, give yourself at least a half hour of wind-down time at night. Young women often watch TV or surf the web until just before their head hits the pillow, but the screen's light stimulates your brain instead of calming it. Chilling with something lower-tech—a book or magazine—will help you doze off more quickly and sleep more soundly.

Fig. 5.16 Source: *Glamour*, September 2007; p. 370.

Eat often. No breakfast, a hurriedly scarfed lunch, then a rabid search for something sweet at 3 P.M.—sound familiar? Here's the deal: Your body needs food every three to four hours to keep blood sugar levels (and energy) stable. People struggle with this since it can take planning, but we're sophisticated adults, not raccoons—we shouldn't have to forage for food! As for what to eat, the most energizing foods have carbs for a fast boost, *plus* fat and protein, which stick with you longer to keep energy up. What to avoid? Think of any cheeseburger-induced stupors you've had: Saturated or trans fats stiffen blood vessels for hours. When vessels can't dilate properly, circulation slows and your body doesn't get the oxygen it needs for fuel.

Fig. 5.17 Source: *Glamour,* September 2007; p. 370.

90 percent of 70 studies done on the subject.) Physical activity gets extra oxygen flowing through your body and releases natural uppers like dopamine and endorphins into your brain. Plus, a fit body is more efficient—it takes less energy to do the same tasks—which means that every movement you make will feel easier and less tiring. So get at least 30 minutes of heart-pumping activity daily (it's fine if you do it in spurts). We're big fans of walking. It's simple and effective, and you don't need a lot of equipment to get started—you just need to get out the door.

Fig. 5.18 Source: *Glamour,* September 2007; p. 370.

Constantly toggling back and forth between things is mentally exhausting—and can be extremely stressful. Stress causes your heart rate and blood pressure to rise and hormones like cortisol to surge, using up valuable energy. Try, just try, to zero in on a single task, finish it, then move on to the next. It's invigoratingly Zen—you'll see.

6 Flick off your worry switch. Women's brains have the brilliant ability to process lots of information at the same time—but that also makes you much more likely to ruminate than men. Your mind can end up zooming like a hamster on a wheel, and here come those stress hormones again! As much as possible, get issues out in the open and out of your head. Research has found that keeping them to yourself heightens anxiety.

One more important thing to know about energy: *No one* feels peppy 24/7, not even Rachael Ray. Follow every last bit of our advice and you're still bound to have days when you feel zonked and blah; just expect a whole lot less of 'em.

Mehmet Oz, M.D., is medical director of the Columbia Integrative Medicine Program at New York-Presbyterian Hospital in New York City. Michael Roizen, M.D., is chair of the division of anesthesiology, critical care and comprehensive pain management at the Cleveland Clinic. Their next book is You: Staying Young.

Fig. 5.19 Source: *Glamour,* September 2007; p. 371.

MY ENERGY TRICK:

"I HAVE A SPECIAL PLAYLIST ON MY IPOD FOR SLUMPS. IT'S FULL OF SILLY BUT BOPPY SONGS— THINK R.E.M.'S 'SHINY HAPPY PEOPLE.'"
—STEPHANIE BREWER, 30, HARRISBURG, N.C.

Fig. 5.20 Source: *Glamour,* September 2007; p. 370.

MY ENERGY TRICK:
"Diet Coke used to be my insta-fix, but running cold water over my wrists works too. The shock wakes you right up!"
—ELLEN SEIDMAN, 39, MAPLEWOOD, N.J.
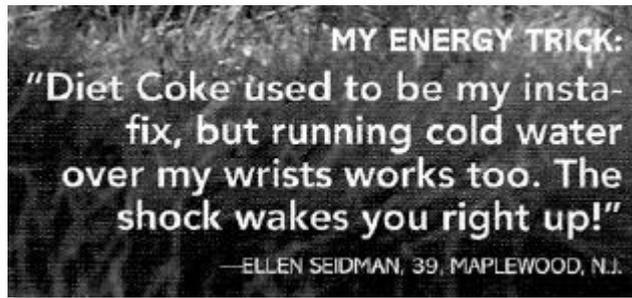
Fig. 5.21 Source: *Glamour*, September 2007; p. 371.

7 SERIOUSLY ENERGIZING FOODS

These snacks have the right combo of carbs, protein and fat—try one the next time you need a lift.

1. A handful of dried fruit and nuts
2. One tablespoon of peanut butter on whole-wheat crackers
3. Sliced veggies dipped in hummus
4. Air-popped popcorn sprinkled with shredded Parmesan cheese
5. Pita chips with bean dip and sliced avocado
6. Low-fat cottage cheese with fruit and almonds
7. A fruit smoothie made with low-fat yogurt or milk

Fig. 5.22 Source: *Glamour*, September 2007, p. 370.

WILL THIS STUFF REALLY REV YOU UP?

The good doctors' take on the latest energy gimmicks

■ **LIFE FITNESS INSTANT ENERGY BEANS** *($10, cvs.com)* Chewables with 80 milligrams of caffeine per two tablets that taste a bit like Tums. The docs say: "These have about as much caffeine as a large cup of coffee—if you want to pop two instead of hitting the office coffee-maker, go for it. Just don't rely on caffeine as your only energy source."

■ **FULL THROTTLE FROZEN FURY** *($1 to $2, at 7-Eleven stores)* This jacked-up Slurpee has 30 milligrams of caffeine, 92 calories and 24 grams of sugar per 12 ounces plus the herbs guarana and ginseng. The docs say: "It's like a weak cup of coffee with extra sugar. Drink a 40-ouncer and you're almost at the level of a sugar-tolerance test that we give to screen for diabetes! Skip it."

Fig. 5.23 Source: *Glamour*, September 2007; p. 371.

The range of semantic areas covered by slang is quite wide, if compared with the story analyzed in Section 5.1: we find the language of stress, as in *fried, (to) crash, zonked, (to) feel blah*; of impatience, as in *quick fix, (to) scarf, here's the deal, insta-fix, (to) zero in on st., (to) zoom, 24/7, gimmicks*, and *(to) hit [the office coffee-maker]*; of relax, as in *(to) get [a*

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nice chunk of] zzz's and *(to) chill*; and of energy, as in *uppers*, *bumpy*, *peppy* and *jacked-up*.[71] Slang overwording, i.e. slang terms that are used as a constellation of synonyms in a given text, are found for the following Standard vocabulary:

- **short-cut solution**: quick fix/insta-fix/gimmick;
- **euphoric**: bumpy, peppy, jacked-up;
- **tired**: fried, zonked, *crash(ed)*.

The language of tiredness is linguistically ambiguous: *fried*, *zonked* and *crashed* are very popular slang past participles used to define a person who is intoxicated by drugs or alcohol. The choice of these modifiers is a sign of ideological creativity: indeed, the text producer establishes a relation of synonymy between the Standard vocabulary used in the texts, for example *tired*, *weary*, *exhausted* and *worn-out*, and the above listed slang vocabulary, which means 'tired' only in this context but which may hint at drug abuse in other contexts. The slang verbs which describe hurried actions seem to be chosen strategically, too, yet for a different reason: they all hint at the act of frantically consuming something (food, drinks, space); besides, even *zooming* pertains to the domain of drug abuse.

The slang found in this story contains clear references to 'abuse', both meant as consumption of psychotropic substances and as 'uncontrolled use' *per se*. Even the words that in theory should express positive values for the story, such as the modifiers which refer to energy and vitality, belong to the language of drugs: an *upper* is any

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[71] Lighter (1997: 237) dates it back to 1935: "*Narc.* under the influence of a drug; high; (*hence*) excited or exhilarated".

drug which causes instant vigor, such as cocaine, whereas *jacked-up* is another synonym for *drug intoxicated*.

One explanation for these lexical choices might be that the text producer uses slang in order to enhance a warning which is overtly expressed in the story: doctors say that pills, coffee and multitasking are harmful, whereas the secret of everyday vitality is eating the right food, reorganizing one's schedule, and sleeping. However, as seen in Section 5.1, what is *said* in a story can be interpreted in a very different way after considering the cover headline, i.e. the text that is specifically created in order to attract the reader by drawing on a need, a fantasy or an issue that will motivate her to follow through. The cover headline of this story does not warn from bad habits, nor does it suggest better ones: it promises *more energy on less sleep*. And if the reader follows the story through to its last page, she will find a bulleted list of editorially advertised products which provide instant energy (Fig. 5.23).

Therefore, a more likely explanation emerges: slang keeps the reader reassured on her incurable dependence on the *quick fixes* available on the market, and well focused on the need to find the 'right' one. The key to the success of this story seems to lie in its ability to remind the reader that she is disorganized and that it is the magazine's responsibility to teach her how to improve her life quality. To support this interpretation, it is worth noticing that the doctors' byline at the end of the main set of tips includes a bibliographical reference to their forthcoming book on women's issues (cf. Chapter Six). So, several items are advertised which can support the reader's individual struggle against her own unruly nature.[72]

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[72] Some diachronical analyses on women's magazines highlight that the success of such publications historically laid on their advising function as "a young woman's mother" (Walker, 1998: 9-10); in the Sixties the magazine-reader relationship

Such a hypothesis can be sustained only if the whole vocabulary used in the story is considered; after understanding which evaluations are made with the help of slang vocabulary (*you're addicted, you're compulsive*), Standard vocabulary needs to be analyzed in order to see which evaluations are made with regard to women's behavior. None of the slang lexemes and idioms used here has a clear evaluative or expressive value, except for *(to) have a nice chunk of zzz's*, due to the evaluative modifier *nice*, and *to feel blah*, which contains an onomatopoeia – expressive in its own essence – which functions as an adverb. As far as Standard vocabulary is concerned, it is worth noticing that tiredness is described evaluatively as a *struggle* and as a *problem* (twice), whereas working when one is tired is defined as *mentally exhausting*, *tiring*, *extremely stressful*, and *hard*. The vocabulary which conveys a positive value is concentrated in the advice provided by the ideal writer:[73] the solutions offered are *exciting*, and it is precised that *thankfully* they do not entail any sacrifice, whereas the *good* doctors' selection of foods is a *better* choice because it contains the *right* combo of nutrients.

The pre-eminent position played by the 'guest' writers of this story, i.e. two doctors, becomes even clearer as we consider the discoursal structure of this story. As the subhead claims, the doctors themselves wrote the tips ("Doctors and best-selling authors [...] have an exciting message [...]"); this explains why the tips are written in the first plural person. Besides the discourse types already mentioned, such

abandoned the domestic/familiar dimension and shifted towards an expert-client relationship, thus updating yet maintaining a predominant advising function.

[73]   As stated in the standfirst, the set of tips is offered by two doctors and best-selling authors; in the editorial advertisement, the editorial staff's description of the items is paired with the one given by the doctors. However, when no polyphony and no contrasting voices are at play (as it is the case here), I refer to the 'ideal writer' in the singular form, being a single 'voice' shaped for the reader to listen to.

as Editorial Advertisement and Confession, the discourse types used in this story belong to the medical macro-discourse. Within the discoursal frame of 'Advice', in the form of bulleted tips, several elements are found that belong to medicine-related discourse types: doctor/patient medical Interview ("So, doc, what can I take for more energy?", Fig. 5.15), medical Report ("The other day, a 36-year-old woman came in for help [...]", p. 370; "Diagnosis: chronic multitasking", p. 370), and medical/scientific Description ("Women's brains have the brilliant ability to process [...] information", Fig. 5.19). Another discourse type should be added, although its presence is not explicit: editorial Interview. Neither editorial advertisement nor the unframed set of tips are construed as if the doctors had written them: the writing hand shifts from the doctors to the editorial staff, who juxtaposes the magazine's opinion to the doctor's one, as exemplified by the clause "The docs say" found in Figure 5.23. This textual structure, with the visual help of bold font, draws on an implicit Interview discourse type, which is not explicit due to the lack of its main trait, i.e. the question/answer alternation.

None of the discourse types used here is disembedded because the medicine-related types are placed in the context of an article written by real doctors who have medical experience and patients. However, at least two features of the discoursal organization of this story are ideologically creative: on the one hand, doctor/patient interaction, usually spoken and one-to-one, has been translated intersemiotically into the written mode and adapted in such a way that an unusual interaction is established between two doctors (writing as one) and the reader(s) pushed into the subject position of the patient(s); on the other hand, the 'patient' seems to be ideologically

molded in an ambiguous way. The analysis of two grammatical features of the texts that build the story will clarify this claim.

By comparing the number of full forms of auxiliary and modal verbs (17) with Standard and non-Standard contracted forms (49),[74] it can be argued that the text producer has chosen to enhance the oral-like quality of the text in order to make the language event more lively in the reader's mind, and closer to the reader's own experience of doctor/patient interactions. Moreover, non-Standard contracted forms (such as 'of 'em' for 'of them') give the writer/doctor a peer-to-peer attitude that might be even more friendly and relaxed than the one of the real-life doctors belonging to the reader's MRs. Therefore, slang vocabulary is not the only means of informalization available for the text producer.[75]

The patient's subject position is shaped with a specific goal in mind, too, as demonstrated by taking personal deixis into account. The personal pronoun *you* and its paradigm occur 59 times in the story. However, the number of addresses to the reader is higher: in six cases the reader is given advice and information about herself through an indirect address, i.e. by means of the noun *women*, such as in 'When *women* come to us complaining […], we tell *them*' (p. 370), or '*women* aren't getting the sleep or foods *they* need' (Fig. 5.15). The grammatical and lexical structure of the texts creates a convergence of *you* and *women* into the same subject position, i.e. the reader/patient. The ideological creativity of the text producer consists of establishing this convergence, while attributing only negative evaluations to *women*. In

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[74]   Since the elision or contraction of auxiliaries and personal pronouns have the same informalizing function of verb contractions, the group also includes the following items: 'Works every time', 'sound familiar?', 'You wanna know […]?', and 'of 'em'.

[75]   I explored the interconnection between tense, vocabulary, and deixis in Belladelli (forth. a).

so doing, on the discoursal level the doctors make a distinction between *you*, who is open to receive advice and to change, and 'the average woman' who is constantly in error. But since *you* and *women* are textually blended into the same character, as a result the reader is implicitly guided into perceiving herself as the average woman who is constantly in error.

The text producer seems to have created this story drawing on the following small-scale assumptions: a) readers are stressed out and welcome professional advice on stress-related issues; b) readers do not want to feel tired and are in search of more energy; c) readers multitask and are not able to organize their daily schedule effectively; d) readers are employed in office jobs; e) readers own a series of technological items (TiVo, smart phone, PDA, etc.).

The analysis of this story seems to unveil that the focus is not on sleep but rather on 'drugs', not meant as illegal narcotics but as edible energizers, as outer energy to be ingested. Since the first cause of sleep deprivation is multitasking and work-related disorders, the hidden message of the story is 'don't question multitasking: look for energy outside yourself'. Taken as a whole, the construal of the ideal reader's personality can be summed up as that of a compulsive multitasker who has no intention of giving up her life habits. Impatient multitaskers need *quick fixes*, which are found in pills and energizers, i.e. the real topic of the story.

Stories of this kind have a specific function: keeping readers aware of their imperfection.[76] The story draws on three large-scale assumptions. The first assumption is that women generally seek professional or medical advice for silly reasons (the women's voice is

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[76]   Cf. Chapter 6, in particular Section 6.2.

construed as such in the texts) and they want treatment for something for which they are responsible (the example of the 36-year-old is a case in point). The second assumption is that women consume in the attempt to fix their own problems, so they will relate to statements such as the one found in the standfirst: '[Women] tend to see energy as something they can go out and buy'. So why advertise four energizers at the end of the story, specifying price, contact information and availability in stores? The third assumption is that women need to be told what better energizes them because they cannot tell the difference. The fourth assumption is that multitasking is not a social or work-related problem, but is simply a matter of bad planning or of compulsive behavior. All of these assumptions ultimately work as one in order to reinforce the stereotype according to which women have a dependent or co-dependent nature, and they need the support of authoritative (male) figures and of tools and objects to compensate for their lack of balance.

5.3 "GQ EATS" (*GQ*, August 2007)

There is a group of cover stories that are better defined by the label *cover thread* because the headline placed on the cover serves to provide a frame for more than one story. It is a thread because it consists of stories bound to one another, yet dissimilar as for text type, topic, function, and scope.[77] "GQ Eats" is a case in point. As shown in Figure 5.24, the cover leads the reader towards three stories: the first is a multi-signed how-to guide on cooking; the second is a single-signed

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[77]   The two objective parameters for separating the stories belonging to a cover thread are a) that the headline initiating each story stands out visually (as for size, font type, or position) against the headers found in the rest of the story, and b) that the page numbers for each story are provided in the Summary. Stories belonging to the same thread are not necessarily placed on adjacent pages.

article on Brooklyn restaurants (containing *coolest* in the cover headline); the third is an article-interview concerning the anchorwoman (dubbed as 'The *hottest* dish' on the cover) of a TV cooking show. An additional frame is offered on page 107, where an editorial standfirst announces a sixteen-page section on food consisting of three stories. Due to their differing lexical, grammatical, textual and discoursal features, the stories deserve a separate analysis. However, their contribution to a common ideological goal seems to emerge. All the cover thread considered, it will be shown that slang is used for reassuring the readers on the ideal writer's marked heterosexuality, physical strength, and socio-cultural sophistication.
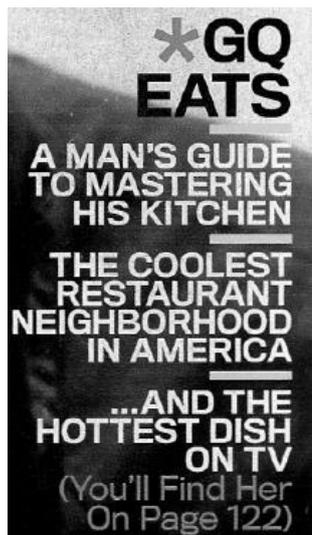
Fig. 5.24 Source: *GQ*, August 2007; cover.

5.3.1 "A MAN'S PLACE IS IN THE KITCHEN"

The first story is organized as a mosaic of sections, some of which are even cut in halves and placed on non-adjacent pages. The following unifying components are found: a headline, a subhead and a standfirst.

The subhead contains the slang idiom *(to) bring home the bacon* (p. 108); a standfirst in bold print, containing 'pounding *the crap out* of a chicken cutlet' and '*going to town* with a Vidalia onion' (Fig. 5.25). The framed and unframed sets of tips are heterogeneous: some are unsigned and blended with editorial advertisement ("Arm yourself", "5 things you need in your kitchen", "5 things you don't", which contains *cool*, as seen in Fig. 5.26, "Start cooking", and "Know your space", which contains *foodie type*, Fig. 5.27, and *(to) splurge*, Fig. 5.28); some are signed by experts who write in the first person ("*Get a handle on* cast iron + How to season a new cast-iron pan", as shown in Fig. 5.29, "A man's guide to setting the table", which contains 'What's the *big deal*', as in Fig. 5.33, and "What men – not all men, of course, but most – do wrong in the kitchen", which contains '*butchy* girls and *girlie* boys', shown in Fig. 5.31, *beer gut*, and 'before it's full *blown* and irreparable', Fig. 5.32; some are condensed answers given by experts during interviews, with a note saying 'As told to [name of editorial writer'] ("How to run your kitchen" and "Listen to Jacques Pepin"); one is signed by an editorial writer ("Renovate this!"), which contains 'it pretty much *kicked my ass*', 'I *lost my shit*', and '*splurge* on your surrounding materials', as seen in Fig. 5.30.
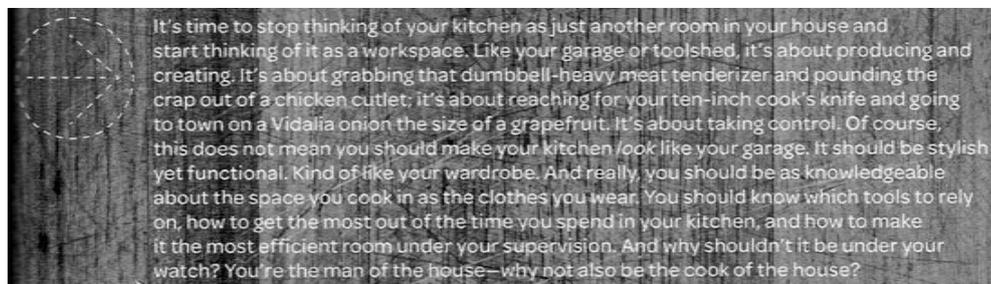
Fig. 5.25 Source: *GQ*, August 2007; p. 109.

5

THINGS

YOU DON'T

1.
KITCHENAID STAND MIXER
Yes, they look cool. But seriously, when was the last time you actually made a cake?

|>| AND YES, IT'S OKAY TO WEAR AN APRON. It doesn't make you look like your mom; it makes you look like the cook of the house. Get a durable cotton one that reaches to your knees, and leave those chili-pepper-printed ones for annoying foodie types. Buy one at Chefthreads.net.

Figg. 5.26, 5.27 Source: *GQ*, August 2007; pp. 110, 112.

|>| THERE'S NO SUBSTITUTE FOR A HIGH-POWERED GAS RANGE, **one that clocks in at up to 18,000 BTUs. What do you get with all that heat? Water boils in a couple of minutes. Steaks sear crispy and crusty. Just about everything you cook comes out better and faster. But if you splurge for a Viking or Wolf, et al., be sure you can accurately regulate the fire. Sometimes the biggest problem with powerful burners is that they can't maintain a low enough heat to slow-cook or braise without burning.**

Fig. 5.28 Source: *GQ*, August 2007; p. 115.

GET A HANDLE ON
CAST IRON
Cookbook author **Mitchell Davis** explains why the original nonstick pan is more essential than ever

Fig. 5.29 Source: *GQ*, August 2007; p. 111.

RENOVATE THIS!

How to survive a
major kitchen overhaul
without destroying your marriage or your sanity

....

First off: I want to acknowledge the fact, right up front, that renovating a kitchen is hardly life-and-death stuff. But that's not to say it's easy. It's not. I just finished mine two months ago, and it pretty much kicked my ass. Herewith, a few key lessons learned.

1.
Prepare for marital strife. I can honestly say that, in nearly ten years of marriage, my wife and I had never argued about money... until we were halfway through our renovation, and I lost my shit. She actually said to me—and I swear this is true—that the red knobs on the Wolf range were "worth $5,000" to her, and that this was "non-negotiable." (Which, in fact, it was.) Realize that there will be certain decisions that will, for some reason, become a source of great tension and resentment. If you're not careful, a fight over granite versus marble can metastasize into a surprise referendum on the state of your relationship.

2.
Prepare to spend. The two things everyone tells you when you begin a renovation: It'll take twice as long as the contractor says, and it'll cost you twice as much as you think. In our case, neither was true. Doing some due diligence on your contractor—talking to some former clients to see how they liked him—will help you find a guy who can get the job done on time. As for the budget, we didn't exactly double it, but we came close. The main culprit? Those unforeseen plumbing and electrical problems. Damn you, steam pipes in need of rerouting!

3.
Move out. The single best decision we made was to leave our house for a couple of months and sublet a place down the street. Workers could arrive early and stay late, and it saved us from dealing with months of lead dust, incessant noise, and bad take-out food.

4.
Think about IKEA. The estimate we received for custom cabinets was $40,000. The final price of our IKEA cabinets, delivered and installed? Five thousand dollars. Is there a difference in quality? No doubt. But is it a difference that's worth $35,000? Not to us.

5.
Gap kitchen, Prada accessories. If you do go with IKEA, take some of those savings and splurge on your surrounding materials: We went with marble countertops, a Wolf range, and a cork floor. It's all about the allocation of the money.—ANDY WARD

Fig. 5.30 Source: *GQ*, August 2007; p. 113.

WHAT MEN
(NOT ALL MEN, OF COURSE, BUT MOST)

DO WRONG
IN THE KITCHEN

By **Gabrielle Hamilton**, chef-owner of
Prune restaurant in New York City

• • • I spend most of my time with butchy girls and girlie boys, and that makes me generally loath to make sweeping statements about anybody based on their sex. Every time I hear someone start a sentence with "Men always..." or "Women tend to...," I just groan. So I'm not sure I have the right credentials to be giving men any advice on how to succeed in the kitchen. But maybe, just maybe, I have observed over the years a few truisms about how guys are in a kitchen, and I could just gently nudge you away from a few of these habits you might, just might, share.
• • •

Fig. 5.31 Source: *GQ*, August 2007; p. 115.

• • •
If you don't know how it tastes in the beginning, you can't know how it's going to taste at the end. **Taste as you go.** Use your finger and just swipe a dab and see if, honestly, your idea of mixing honey and mint and chili peppers for the lamb chops was a good one or a bad one. Early detection in bland or ill-conceived food—like lead poisoning and beer gut—is the key to quickly rescuing the thing before it's full-blown and irreparable.
• • •
And really, when it comes down to it, the only thing we women can't stand is being lied to. So if it's sandwich night, then just say so. If you don't have the time that a certain dish requires, then make something else. But don't put a confited duck leg that you bought at the gourmet shop into a pot with a can of white beans and call it cassoulet. Girlie girls, manly men, girlie boys, and everyone in between will appreciate the honesty.
* Not that heat doesn't have its attributes. For another point of view, see the right column of this page.
Prune is at 54 East 1st St., New York City, 212-677-6221

Fig. 5.32 Source: *GQ*, August 2007; p. 115.

Fig. 5.33 Source: *GQ*, August 2007; p. 115.

Regardless of the age and gender of the signing authors, the slang vocabulary chosen in this story seems to express a single point of view, namely the one of a physically strong, heterosexual, adult male. First of all, *(to) pound the crap out*, *(to) go to town [with a knife]*, *(to) get a handle*, *(to) kick one's ass*, and *(to) lose one's shit*, all carry a noticeable amount of symbolic violence, a feature of some slang lexemes, as mentioned in Chapter Three. Secondly, *(to) bring home the bacon*,[78] '*butchy* girl' (to define a not overtly feminine woman), '*girlie* boy' (to define a not overtly manly man), and 'annoying *foodie* type' (to define a male using colorful aprons) all encapsulate a sexist and slightly homophobic ideology. It should be noticed that the use of this last slang expression is ideologically subtle. In the section where the phrase is placed, readers are asked to buy monochromatic plain cotton aprons and to leave 'those chili-pepper-printed ones for annoying *foodie* types'.

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[78]   Lighter (1994: 61) defines it as "to earn wages (since 1909)".

Albeit extremely indirect, the homophobic hint underlying the color choice for aprons is clearly grasped by the reader within a story entirely focused on finding the strong and masculine side of cooking. So, the relation between the writer and the reader is indirectly but powerfully shaped as taking for granted that both would dislike being mistaken for homosexuals.[79]

Finally, *cool*, *beer gut*, *what's the big deal*, and *(to) splurge* all suggest a relaxed and detached attitude, typical of someone who has a certain amount of life experience. Unlike the cover stories presented in Sections 5.1 and 5.2, the verb *(to) splurge* carries a positive connotation: spending a great amount of money on a single purchase is seen here as an affordable and deserved treat, not as an uncontrollable temptation that will be later regretted. While the stories from *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour* construe 'splurging' as a fantasy – and offer affordable ways out – here 'splurging' is construed as a reality and as an option. The suggestions found on pages 113 and 115 ('If you do go with IKEA, take some of those savings and *splurge* on your surrounding materials' and 'Just about everything you cook comes out better and faster. But if you *splurge* for a Viking or Wolf, et al., be sure you can accurately regulate the fire.') lack any reference to excess or uncontrolled craving.

The lexical choices made by the text producer also show an effort to represent men as rarely committed to cooking just because they do not have the right tools that would put them in a position to be in control of the whole process. If Standard vocabulary is considered, particular insistence is found on three semantic fields:

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[79]   Cameron (1998: 962-963) reminds that the analysis of the discoursal level, and not only of 'objectable' words, can help to investigate "the construction (and contestation) of gendered and sexist meanings".

- **control**: (to) master; (to) orchestrate; (to) organize; (to) plan; (to) regulate; (to) seize control; (to) take control; (to) take directions; early detection; under (one's) supervision; under (one's) watch; accurately; in sync; knowledgeable [about the space];

- **DIY (Do-it-yourself)**: (to) assemble; (to) build [the dish]; (to) create; (to) produce; (to) renovate; (to) rescue [the thing]; renovation; task; tool; toolshed; work; workspace; worktable; work area; equipment; expanse of counter; garage; material; overhaul; counter space; project; irreparable;

- **functionality**: (to) maximize; (to) succeed; credentials; durable; efficient; essential; functional; indestructible; perfect; powerful; resistant; solid; ultimate; useful; better and faster.

A metaphoric relation is established between the kitchen and a DIY room, as much as between cooking and carrying out a manual project. In order to do that, the text producer shows ideological creativity in exploiting the semantic ambivalence of the nouns *counter* and *tool*, i.e. two elements which can be related both to kitchens and to workshops or garages. By means of this constant equivalence, the act of cooking loses all the attributes which stereotypically link it to women, thus becoming ideologically acceptable to whoever refuses to be represented as other than a manly man. The struggle behind the ideological restyling of cooking can be seen also on the grammatical and textual levels.

In this story, the preservation of manliness and assertiveness is enhanced also by means of a range of modalized expressions with a strong deontic value that replace the usual imperative mood, typical of

instructional texts. Alongside with 78 occurrences of imperatives, the story features 21 instances of expressions modalized by means of modal verbs and modalized expressions that have a strong deontic value.[80] Within operational discourse, the use of *should* (as in '[The knife's] weight *should* be perfectly balanced'), of *(to) want* (as in 'you never *want* an accumulation of pots'),[81] of *(to) have to* (as in 'you don't *have to* buy'), and of *(to) need to* (as in 'You *need to* give yourself time to organize') obtains the same perlocutionary effect that a suggestion/advice in the imperative mood would. Unlike imperatives, though, deontically modalized expressions shape the advice as a suggested moral behavior to be followed in the higher name of Propriety and of other values shared by the community (of readers), instead of a suggestion from the writer to the reader. This pragmatic strategy is utterly functional to the shaping of the ideal writer's subject position as a spokesperson for the community of men who identify with the magazine's values: while women's magazines are generally constructed around the writer-reader confession bond, hinting at an imaginary group is ideologically suitable for men's magazines, which are usually built around a more collective camaraderie-driven loyalty between writers and readers.[82]

There seems to be an effort to euphemize two features of cooking, namely decorating/garnishing and cleaning up. These are still taboo

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[80] On the intersubjective function of central modal verbs, cf. Degani and Belladelli (2009).

[81] *Want to* is considered as an emerging modal by Biber et al. (1999: 484), who describe it as belonging to "a range of relatively fixed expressions with meanings similar to the modal auxiliaries".

[82] A study on lexical choices in men's and women's magazines finds that "The list of positive keywords in men's magazines ['wine', 'ass', 'fuck', 'beer', 'bastard', 'booty', 'balls'] suggests that men's magazines try to reproduce the casualness and closeness of conversations among friends" according to the gender-specific acceptability of tabooed vocabulary (Del Teso Craviotto, 2006: 2009).

practices in male chauvinistic cultures; for this reason, the text producer resorts to the DYI metaphor, thus restyling those actions as strong and virile steps in the cooking process: *garnishing* becomes *building* and *assembling* a dish, while *washing the dishes* is segmented and addressed as a *project*.

The blame on laziness (so deeply condemned in the case studies analyzed in Sections 5.1 and 5.2) is also euphemized in order to please the readers by not being too critical of their habits. The whole story is built on the small-scale assumption that men would be great cooks if they owned the right tools and the right kitchen; thus, this hypothesis draws on another small-scale assumption, i.e. that a poorly organized kitchen and the lack of exclusive control over it – in other words, the women's control of the kitchen space – are the main hindrances to men's participation in the cooking process. In this perspective, not being enthusiastic about cooking is not represented as a fault on the man's end: being lazy is justified by the inadequacy of the kitchen, not the man's. Moreover, these small-scale assumptions are rooted on a more encompassing large-scale ideological assumption: manly men have the cultural and social right to be tired and lazy after a day's work. Once this stereotype is reproduced so convincingly in the story, exhortations such as 'So please, read the recipe!', or 'So put down this magazine and get in there and start cooking' (p. 115) will not generate any guilty feeling in the audience, unlike what is often done in women's magazines. In fact, encouraging readers to get up from the couch eventually flatters them, since it reinforces a positive bond within the community of lazy men (therefore manly men) who are happy to be acknowledged as such.

5.3.2   "NO EAT TILL BROOKLYN"

The second story has a simple structure: it consists of a headline, worded in non-Standard English (a choice that will be discussed later); a standfirst surmounting the headline; an eight-column signed article, a part of which is cut out and printed at the end of the magazine; a section of editorial advertisement on restaurants, "Brooklyn's finest", divided into two numbered lists entitled "The five best newcomers" and "...and the four that started it all"; finally, two page-size photo collages with a caption for each.

> Most slang lexemes are found in the body copy of the article: 'Italian but becoming *artsy'*, 'bourgeois-black and *cool'*, '*hipster-*lesbian tattooed *lefties'*, and 'a Caribbean *vibe'* (Fig. 5.34); 'the once *grungy*, now gastronomic Diner' (Fig. 5.35); 'at no time [...] did I *shell out* more than a few quarters' (Fig. 5.36); 'Being Hebrew has never been so *hip'* and 'there is an edge of *creepiness'* (Fig. 5.37); 'it wants it *bad'* and 'Both were far *spiffier* than anything else' (Fig. 5.38); and 'It's wonderfully *oddball'* (Fig. 5.39). Slang is also used in the section of editorial advertisement, namely in the expressions 'a particularly *comfy* garden', *mishmash* of chandeliers', and 'The steak [...] is *bad*. The fries are fabulously fresh' (Fig. 5.40).

Brooklyn is huge, more than eighty square miles, and the renaissance isn't everywhere. Besides Red Hook and Williamsburg, the boom is occurring in a relatively small section known as Brownstone Brooklyn, which is only a few square miles. As described by residents, this includes Carroll Gardens ("Italian but becoming artsy"), Fort Greene ("bourgeois-black and cool"), Park Slope ("hipster-lesbian tattooed lefties with kids"), Prospect Heights ("reggae stores and a Caribbean vibe"), Boerum Hill ("Heath Ledger and projects"), and Cobble Hill ("so sunny and shady it's like Greenwich Village but much better because it's not full of weird people carrying their tiny little dogs"). All were resettled either by frugal newcomers to New York City who preferred to share an apartment with two roommates in Brooklyn rather than with four in Manhattan, or by professionals seeking the jumbo brownstones—row houses clad in dusty-colored sandstone—that are so emblematic of Brooklyn.

Fig. 5.34 Source: *GQ*, August 2007; p. 118.

Saul was the first stop on my eating tour of twenty-one Brooklyn restaurants, none of them in business before 1998. I went there wearing a sports jacket and self-consciously noticed that almost all the other patrons were wearing jeans and T-shirts—and behaving impeccably despite their apparently careless attire. Saul is one of the best restaurants in the borough, but it can no longer be thought of as part of the new wave. Along with three other seminal restaurants—the once grungy, now gastronomic Diner (1998), the revered-beyond-belief Grocery (1999), and the hour-wait-at-all-times Al Di Lá (1998)—Saul (1999) paved the way. Those four are near-classics, more traditional than the restaurants that opened in the past five or six years and began to redefine Brooklyn.

Fig. 5.35 Source: *GQ,* August 2007; p. 118.

As soon as I arrived, I ordered fried oysters, knowing I'd need something to nibble on while waiting for friends. Nobody gets to Red Hook on time. This is the only one of the areas that cannot be reached by subway, and the few entry roads are so bumpy and potholed that anybody journeying there by car should shrewdly make arrangements to travel in another person's automobile. This has to be said: Driving to, from, and within Brooklyn requires fortitude—the grid is ill-conceived, construction is everywhere, and obstructions such as the Gowanus Canal make getting around a challenge that defeats Internet search engines; the usually reliable MapQuest.com is perfect about half the time. An unexpected bonus is that evening parking in Brooklyn remains a cinch; at no time in the course of those visits did I shell out more than a few quarters, and those for a Park Slope meter.

Fig. 5.36 Source: *GQ,* August 2007; p. 120.

tracks in a structure that's practically a miniaturized version of Manhattan's famous Flatiron Building. The shape (I believe it's a trapezium) does not allow for parallel interior walls, and the uneven floorboards make walking while drunk (routine among evening patrons) an act of daring.

Although celebrated for its grilled doughnuts, which are just fine, Moto should be proudest of its baked-apple pancake, offered only at brunch. It's actually a Dutch Baby, a fluffy, sugary, satisfying item that seems half brioche and half upside-down cake. No other dish there will make you as happy, unless you're Jewish, and then you might be exceedingly proud of the herring, which tastes as if it just came out of a barrel off a boat from Eastern Europe. It comes with matzoh, and not just during Passover. Being Hebrew has never been so hip.

The best restaurant in Williamsburg is Dressler, although it's so noisy our soft-spoken waitress had to yell. She said to us, "It's a problem for me. I'm still yelling at people when I get home." Dressler's bar is lovely, with filigreed light boxes, but there is an edge of creepiness, too—the peonies, heavy and dying, seemed funereal. The dining room ups the gothic effect. One friend said, "The chandeliers seem to be growing fungus." We were told the wall panels and chandeliers were fabricated by artisans working out of the old Brooklyn Navy Yard, which is now an industrial park, but I felt like I was visiting Dracula's country house.

If the room isn't particularly comforting, the food compensates. Plenty of restaurants feature hot food, others cold. At Dressler, the best items are warm. The Warm Spring Pea *(continued on page 177)*

Fig. 5.37 Source: *GQ,* August 2007; p. 121.

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6.
THE GROCERY
CARROLL GARDENS
Rhapsody on a theme of complicated comfort food. A score of 28 for food in the 2004 Zagat Survey made this restaurant mythical—and forever altered the reputation of Brooklyn cuisine. It's small and unimposing, with a particularly comfy garden. No art, no flowers, few frills; an orange was our table decoration. The undersized plates are filled to the brim with ambitious cooking. I loved the arugula flan, the sliced duck, the haute chicken-and-waffle salad. (A bit of honey would have done wonders for the waffle.) Remarkably democratic, with owners and staff pitching in, rushing about to please guests.

7.
SAUL
BOERUM HILL
Such a remarkably articulate staff that a question about wine elicited a response of "quite a conundrum." The food is articulate, too, the most flawless and rational in the borough. The archetypal new-Brooklyn look: fewer than fifty (too
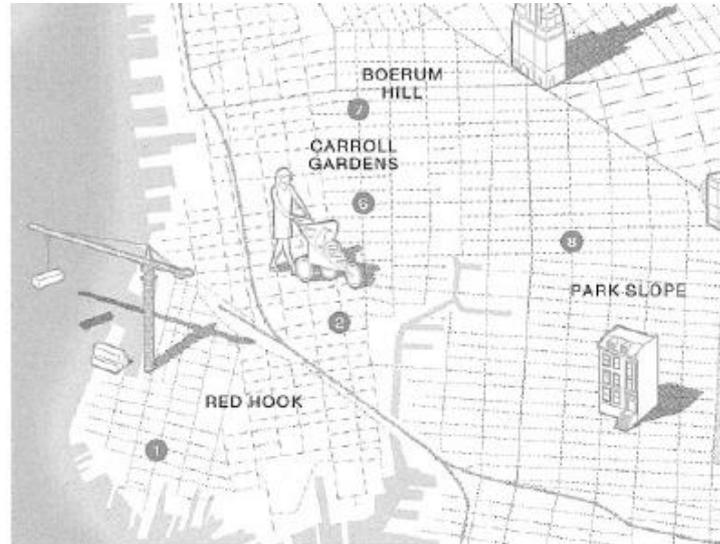
hard) seats, hardwood floors, brick walls, tin ceiling, overhead fans, and white tablecloths covered with white paper. The chef-owner, Saul Bolton, is a master of grains—I loved his extra-rich organic grits and his sorrel risotto. Baked Alaska, once prized, now largely forgotten, comes in miniature form, accompanied by memories.

8.
AL DI LÁ
PARK SLOPE
Easy to understand the appeal: Italian food, huge portions, sensational prices, butter everywhere, and the

dessert menu will make you believe that at heart it's an ice cream shoppe. No wonder the lines (no reservations) stretch long. Blue tile floor, rough-hewn tables, exposed pipes, mishmash of chandeliers. The beet ravioli is bliss. The *affogato*—vanilla gelato topped with hot espresso—uses decaffeinated coffee, possibly a nod to an aging clientele.

9.
DINER
WILLIAMSBURG
The menu is minuscule. The wine list is uniquely weird, with an emphasis

on "chilled" reds. The venue is a 1920s Kullman diner, renovated but looking abused after nearly a century under the Williamsburg Bridge. The waitress sits down, recites myriad specials, never tells you what they cost. (Luckily, not too much.) The famous burger is from grass-fed beef, not juicy but unusually flavorful. The steak, from the same kind of cow, is bad. The fries taste fabulously fresh. Soups and salads are distinctive, and the flourless chocolate cake is so transcendent you'll forget you're sick of this dessert.—A.R.

Fig. 5.38 Source: *GQ,* August 2007; p. 121.
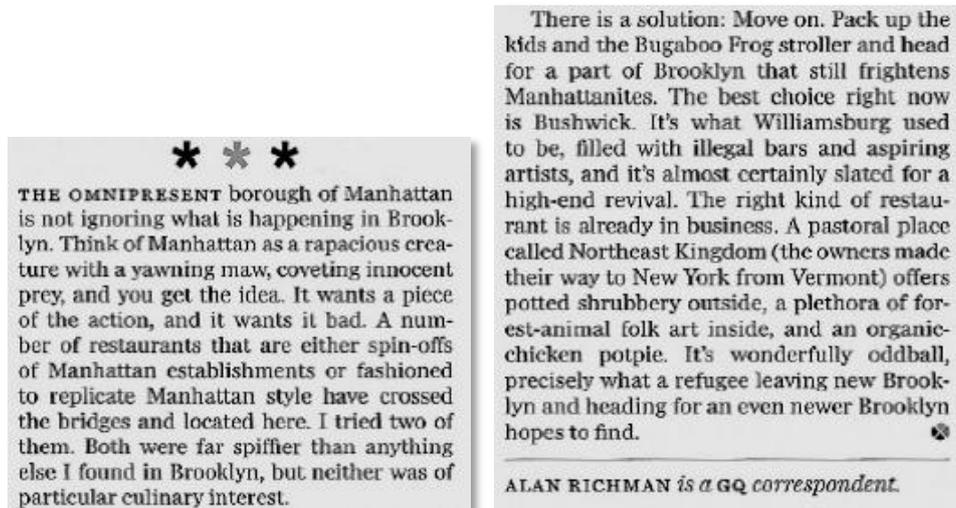
Figg. 5.39, 4.40 Source: *GQ*, August 2007; p. 177.

The first observation that can be made is that some of the slang listed above is discriminatory and judgmental. As Figure 5.34 shows, these expressions are inserted between quotation marks because the signing author reports them as comments uttered by Brooklyn 'residents'. The residents' prejudices are also supported by a number of (alleged) quoted claims in Standard English, such as '[Brooklyn is better than Greenwich Village] because it's not full of weird people carrying their tiny little dogs' (Fig. 5.34): since that Manhattan neighborhood is well-known for having a high concentration of gay clubs, the reference to its inhabitants is devised by the text producer so as to represent the speakers as gay-haters. In a story devoted to teaching Manhattanites about Brooklyn's cultural renaissance and its suitability for dining *and* living, why is the representation of real-life Brooklyn residents so negative? Why should a reader feel encouraged to move to a borough where people are racist and homophobic? In order to understand that, one should notice that the text producer construes another point of

view on Brooklyn, i.e. the first-hand description (allegedly) told by a friend of the writer who moved to Brooklyn. Here follows the quote:

> "On our block, any given day, you will see busloads of Orthodox Jews going to Monticello, New York, where they study; Tibetan monks; old-school Irish guys; well-dressed elderly Caribbean men with canes; and sometimes Foxy Brown's parked Bentley, because she's visiting her mother. There's the Reverend, who is a black guy who wears overalls and a weight belt and has a sign taped to his door, THE REVEREND IS IN. Then there are the Caribbeans. On one side of us is a family from St. Kitts, on another side a Trinidadian family, and behind us, Barbados. We can smell their curries from all three, and all three are different. We love our block."
> (*GQ*, "No eat till Brooklyn", August 2007, p. 118)

So, the negative picture of Brooklyn provided by the racist residents is shortly followed by a fond description of a multicultural, safe, and family-friendly Brooklyn, given by a person who is friends with the writer and therefore implicitly shares his same values. The above quote embodies the point of view of a family, which can be inferred by considering the use of exclusive *we*, as if the speaker were referring to him and his partner, and the reference to mothers, daughters, elderly people, and 'families' themselves.

There seems to be an effort to make an exotic appropriation of Brooklyn: in a time where the concern with political correctness has reached its peak, sophisticated Manhattanites (the writer, his friend, and, by extension, all the readers that identify with their sophistication)

are invited to watch unrefined humanity from the peep-hole. Hearing politically incorrect statements on minorities (the gay and lesbian community, Italians, African Americans) seems to be refreshing to the well-spoken readers and writers of *GQ*, who are both proud and tired of being socially and culturally house-broken. The fantasy of moving to Brooklyn gratifies the mind of the ideal reader, who feels naughty and tough just by imagining to blend with naughty and tough people even for one day. In order to shape the ideal reader as such, the text producer attributes political incorrectness to a periphery that is culturally and geographically at the margins of the well-spoken Manhattan élite, and at the same time construes Brooklyn as a transgression fantasy by drawing on the MRs of the American audience about Brooklyn, built on account of first-hand and second-hand experiences, news, cinema and literature. By analyzing all the Standard lexical items chosen to describe Brooklyn attributes (area, inhabitants, dining, viability), a preference emerges for the semantic areas of dream, temptation and roughness.

> **Brooklyn**: exciting; hidden; more appealing; unfussy; tempting; new; sentimental; fiercely independent; stimulating; unconventional; unpredictable; decidedly void of snobbery; urban chic; emblematic; elegant [casualness]; proud; bumpy [roads]; ill-conceived [roads]; pot-holed [roads].

It can be argued that Brooklyn, along with other suburban areas surrounding centers of cultural and economic power, can be valued and praised only as a temporary runaway, as a cultural one-night stand performed by a member of the 'center' who is eager to embrace the unpredictability and the attitude of the 'periphery' without questioning

her own place at the center. Moreover, readers may find this article comforting because it gives them the illusion to compensate for the loss of their group identity, which is typical of the white élite. Whenever a socially loaded judgment is expressed (e.g. by the use of a slang expression, such as in the above-mentioned quotes), the speaker automatically unveils her own social/ethnic affiliation with another group. For example, whoever says 'This neighborhood is Italian *but* becoming artsy' (emphasis added) is implying that an Italian neighborhood is usually boring and dull, otherwise she would not put an adversative clause after the first proposition. So, by fantasizing about a day trip to Brooklyn, the reader also fantasizes about escaping social individualism and containment for one day to join a community where the identity of the individual is also shaped by group identity, and where ethnicity, instead of individual skills alone, helps define the Self. The stylistic quality of the headline, "No eat till Brooklyn" make more sense if we situate the whole story in this fantasy: the absence of the auxiliary *don't*, which is proper of many varieties of non-Standard English, from African American English to non-native English, enhances the characterization of the writer's voice as the one of a man that has taken a walk on the wild side and invites the readers to *get ethnic* themselves. In this sense, the effectiveness and success of this article depends on its ability to compensate for the ideal reader's loss of ethnic identity, which is the price to be paid for entering the élite.

On the societal level, articles such as this one contribute to the stability of the social status quo because readers satisfy their need to transgress and to judge social and economical minorities without really putting their own status in jeopardy. Therefore, the power unbalance between the élite and the disempowered, metaphorically embodied by

the Manhattan-Brooklyn implicit tension, is reproduced and reinforced without disparaging the weaker part, at least on the surface. This is made possible because the overt message (i.e. the one interpreted from uncritical reading), which is conveyed by the article and the editorial advertisement is that the periphery is a good place to be for a day or for a lifetime.

5.3.3 "COOK FOR US, PADMA!"

The third story which belongs to the cover thread "GQ Eats" is the shortest and the least telling on the linguistic level. It is a two-page story consisting of two page-size photographs of model Padma Lakshmi in her underwear, eating a short rib. The headline and the standfirst are on the first page, while the one-column article is on the second page, superimposed on the picture. The function of the story is clear: every month *GQ* publishes a half-naked beauty for the enjoyment of its prevalently male audience. The irrelevance of the text compared to the visual component of the story can be also deduced considering that the ratio is between one-column article and four page-size pictures of the model eating different foods (one in the summary, one in the frame on page 107, and two in the story).

> The only slang items found in the article are 'Lakshmi's *legit'* (Fig. 5.41) and 'it's complete *bullshit'* (Fig. 5.42).

Okay, I know what you're thinking: That's what all runway models turned actresses turned tabloid wives turned cookbook authors turned hosts of Bravo's surprise reality hit *Top Chef* tell reporters to make them think they're really just one of the guys. Except that Lakshmi's legit.

"She can eat," says her *Top Chef* colleague Tom Colicchio, the celebrated New York City restaurateur. "I've been out with her. And she doesn't order a salad—she's adventurous. She actually can cook pretty well, too."

Until then, you can picture her nude, bathed in chocolate, which is what she wanted to do for this photo shoot. (We tried; things got messy.) Or you can just turn on Bravo and catch her on *Top Chef*, most likely wearing a not exactly kitchen-sensible slinky spaghetti-strap dress and stilettos. Don't expect an apology. "People always comment about my clothes," says Lakshmi. "They don't think a fashionable woman can love food and be knowledgeable and actually cook, and it's complete bullshit. On the show, all I have to do is think, talk, and eat, and I think I'm dressed to do all those things."

We couldn't agree more.

Figg. 5.41, 5.42 Source: *GQ*, August 2007; p. 123.

The whole article reports the interviewee's answers to some questions as to whether she suffers from being considered more as a former model and as novelist Salman Rushdie's wife than as a cooking expert. The interviewer shows to be on her side since he defines her as a *legit*, a slang lexeme (both a modifier and a noun) which is often used in sport slang to define a person whose opinion is legitimated by knowledge and experience. On Lakshmi's end, she speaks as if she were trying to catch the audience's favor when she defines her opponents' criticism as *bullshit*. The only observation that can be drawn is that the text contributes to the reinforcement of the previously shaped identity of the ideal reader and the ideal writer as manly heterosexual males by adding elements of camaraderie, which is also underlined on the grammatical level by a few strategic uses of inclusive *we*, as in the headline itself.

5.4 "THE MOST USEFUL ISSUE EVER" (*Esquire*, June 2007)

This cover thread encompasses the whole *Esquire* issue on which it is published and it has the same structure of the *Cosmopolitan* thread "The *hot* issue" (see Table 4.7), thus falling into the category *Magazine characterization* explained in Chapter Four.[83] As shown in Figure 5.43, the magazine titlepiece is surmounted by a strapline, which reads "Essential skills for men who are neither *geeks* nor obsessives". The structure of this thread, however, is dissimilar from the one analyzed in Section 5.3: in this case, a series of tips on a variety of fields are offered both in special sections, listed in the Summary under the header "The skills every man should have" and organized according to topic (such as is seen in Figure 5.44), and in 58 framed boxes – easily recognizable due to their identical graphic layout and the header "The useful part" – scattered on the whole magazine and related to the content of the page on which they are placed. Since the sections and the boxes have different textual and discoursal features, they will be addressed separately.
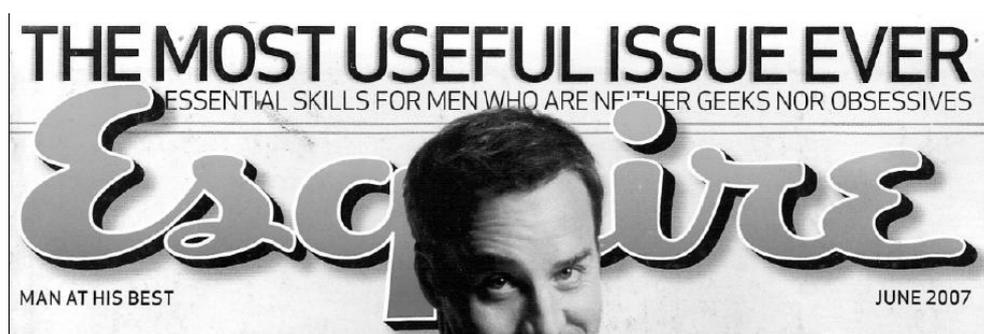
Fig. 5.43 Source: *Esquire*, June 2007; cover.

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[83]   The case studies analyzed here will be considered according to their content category in Chapter 6, where a systematic account of the use of slang in cover stories is given.

Fig. 5.44 Source: *Esquire*, June 2007; summary.

5.4.1 "THE USEFUL PART" BOXES

Table 5.1: Tip boxes according to text type, in alphabetical order (*
contain slang in the header or body copy).

BULLETED AND UNBULLETED INSTRUCTIONS	
A civilized way to get lime into a beer	* How to spot a lemon
How not to get bedbugs	How to tune your guitar to Metallica's 'Enter Sandman'
How not to get ripped off at the shop	How to use a shaker
How to avoid underarms stains	* How to win at rock-paper-scissors
How to buy her a bra	More unconfirmed advice that Mandy googled
How to deserve a table at a good place	Piven's guide to avoiding nightmares
How to get a buyback	Piven's guide to summoning a second wind
* How to get your band on satellite radio	Roadfood insider for GPS
How to hit a wild animal	* The right way to pay for drinks
How to keep your coaster on the bar	The rules for buying a suit
* How to make a big jump	Three good things to know
How to make a good break in pool	Unorthodox tips to improve your gas mileage
* How to make a good sex video	Wear it with confidence
How to massage a woman's foot	What to look for in a dirt bike
How to milk a goat	**NARRATIVES**
How to open a beer when you don't have a bottle opener	'The rebuilding' primer
How to open a beer with this magazine	A recommendation from Lyle Lovett
How to open a bottle of wine without a corkscrew	How to fall off a bike
How to order top-shelf liquor	How to write AF
How to overcome stage fright	
How to photograph a woman	**RECIPES**
How to pick a lens like a pro	Bob Barker's vegan enchilada bake
* How to pop a wheelie	How to make the perfect batch of margaritas

Despite the similarity in length (about 60 words per box), the boxes differ with regard to text type. Most of them consist of numbered or bulleted lists giving instructions in the imperative mood; some appear as plain body copy, although the mood and the chronological order of the instructions are identical to the ones used in the lists; some are first-person narratives, signed either by editorial writers or as if written by experts or celebrities; a few are recipes. It could be said that the first two groups draw on the same discourse type because their function is always Advice and their syntactic structure is identical, despite a different layout. The first-person narratives may draw on several discourse types, but mainly on face-to-face Interaction, Instruction, and Editorial Advertisement. In any case, instructions in the imperative mood are always included, even in texts that start as a first-person narrative.

> As shown in Table 5.1, only seven boxes out of 58 contain slang, either in the header or in the body. Following the order given in the table, the items found are *blowjob*, *cowgirl*, and *money shot* (Fig. 5.45); *gig* (Fig. 5.46); *wheelie* (Fig. 5.47); *con* (Fig. 5.48); *lemon* (Fig. 4.55); *green* (Fig. 4.49); *psyched up* (Fig. 4.50).

The Useful Part

HOW TO MAKE A SEX VIDEO

By Jim Powers, adult-film director and AVN Hall of Famer

1. Make the room as bright as you can. And get a handheld light for the hardcore action.
2. Don't forget the close-ups. Easiest things to shoot are blowjobs or cowgirl.
3. If you're not making noise, you're gonna come off like a corpse.
4. You want 30 minutes of footage, averaging five minutes per position. And you always end on the money shot.
5. If you want it to be good, have someone else shoot.

The Useful Part

HOW TO GET YOUR BAND ON SATELLITE RADIO

Sirius has hired some of the best music bloggers around and given them free rein to run a regular show called Blog Radio. Send the bloggers-turned-deejays a CD and a note, and maybe invite them to a gig. If they like your music, you've got a shot. Find their blog sites and e-mail addresses by searching for the show at sirius.com.

Figg. 5.45, 5.46 Source: *Esquire*, June 2007; pp. 50, 56.

The Useful Part

HOW TO POP A WHEELIE

Popping wheelies is all about balance. Position yourself toward the back of the seat, near the fender. Make sure you cover the brake with your right foot at all times. Give it some gas, cover the clutch, pull up on the handlebars, and give it some more gas. The front end will come up, and then you have to find your balance point by putting a light drag on the brake. Throttle accordingly, and when you're done, stomp on the brake. —TODD POTTER

The Useful Part

HOW TO WIN AT ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS

This is a con I read about twenty-five years ago in Chuck Wielgus and Alexander Wolff's *The In-Your-Face Basketball Book*, but it continues to work with unprecedented success. The next time you have to settle a minor dispute, challenge your adversary to a game of rock-paper-scissors. Count to three and pick whatever option you want, but make sure your throw is extremely (and obviously) late. Your opponent will accuse you of cheating, and you will say, "Sorry, my fault. Let's do it again." Make note of whatever choice your opponent made; in all likelihood, he will attempt the same throw again. When faced with this situation, players inevitably try to use reverse psychology. They will almost always replicate their previous throw, based on the assumption that you will be expecting something different. But you are not. Victory is yours. —C.K.

Figg. 5.47, 5.48 Source: *Esquire*, June 2007; pp. 127, 58.

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The Useful Part

THE RIGHT WAY TO PAY FOR DRINKS

1. Have your money ready.
2. Tip at the very least one dollar on a beer or highball and two dollars on a cock-tail, and not less than 20 percent before tax on a round of fancy drinks.
3. Tip even more at the be-ginning of the evening.
4. Don't pay or tip with change. (If there's change on the bar, you can leave it as long as there's some green there, too.)
—DAVID WONDRICH

The Useful Part

HOW TO MAKE A BIG JUMP

Try to stay as calm as you can. You might think that getting all psyched up is the way to go about it, but jumping a dirt bike hundreds of feet through the air tends to make you a little more on the shy side of things. So when the time comes, I ride my bike up to the takeoff a couple of times at the speed I think I should jump, but at the last second, I stomp the brakes and visualize myself continuing the takeoff, flying through the air, and landing smoothly on the down side. That usually gives me the confidence to get the job done, but a little prayer never hurts.
—JEFF "OX" KARGOLA

Figg. 5.49, 5.50 Source: *Esquire*, June 2007; pp. 114, 126.

What differentiates the use of slang in these boxes from the one analyzed so far is that the referents of the slang words used are not always reformulated or explained by means of a Standard English synonym or periphrasis. For example, while *fried* is placed within a net of lexical cohesion together with synonyms such as *exhausted*, *tired*, and so on (as seen in Section 5.2), the words *concert* or *performance* (for *gig*) do not occur in the box, and neither does *trick* for *con*, the idiom *popping wheelies*, or the sex positions mentioned in Figure 5.45. Lexical cohesion between slang and Standard vocabulary is sometimes devised in a less overt form:

- **antonymy**: *calm/psyched up*; *change/green*;
- **hyperonymy**: *lemon/car*.[84]

When both interlocutors are familiar with the language of a specific field, overt lexical cohesion is less needed because the text interpreter (in this case, the reader) does not need to retrieve the meaning of those words from the context/co-text. Therefore, the text producer must have created the texts holding the assumption that the readers are as familiar with those slang words as she is. The analysis conducted on the first three cover stories allows taking this observation one step further: by devising the text as it is, the text producer shapes both herself and the reader as sharing a common ground of experiences and a common vocabulary, regardless of the familiarity that the real reader may have with those words. As a result, whoever does not share the same vocabulary will feel excluded. The claim by McKay (2000) mentioned in Chapter One, according to which the use of slang is counterproductive when it hinders understanding, is confuted by this very phenomenon. In the process of manufacturing audiences, 'excluding' someone from the ideal community of readers is just as crucial as including her, because it triggers the urge for homologation. Slang is the most effective lexical

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[84] *Lemon* is a slang term first recorded by Lighter (1997: 422) in 1862 to refer to a disagreeable person. Later on, it came to mean "a defective machinery, especially an automobile" and to indicate an ill-working car that has been camouflaged by the former owner (or car seller) in order to look newer or in better conditions to potential purchasers. The idiom *(to) hand someone a lemon*, i.e. to fraud someone in general, is now considered by Lighter as Standard English.

An author's note: by choosing which slang lexemes are well-known and which ones deserve a definition, I am making personal assumptions with regard to our common ground; the reader's failure to understand words I have taken for granted, or her contempt for unnecessary glosses concerning words she already knows, may produce the same feeling of exclusion – of which I am not fully in control, yet ultimately responsible for as a text producer.

category in this sense, being the reminder for most people of adolescence, i.e. the time in which fitting in is a priority.

It becomes evident that the function of slang in those boxes is to enhance the trust bond between the advice-giver and the reader. For instance, the car-sales manager who is asked to warn the reader from suspicious used cars defines them as *lemons.* In so doing, he steps out of the potentially threatening role of car seller (the usual culprit of unfair car makeovers) and stands on the reader's side; at the same time, the reader is textually led to identify with the purchaser – by means of instructions such as 'Feel under the body' and 'Run a magnet over the exterior', which shape the reader as the potential victim of that unfair practice.

The small-scale assumptions that the text producer has in mind when creating the texts can be summarized as follows: a) readers want advice on the topics dealt with in the magazine, which are mainly cars/bikes, women, drinking, and clothing; b) readers are already familiar with those topics (and know the specialized terminology for them, i.e. jargon and slang); c) readers have also fun reading advice on activities they will hardly ever have a chance to perform, such as crossing the air at hundreds of feet from the ground with a dirt bike ("How to make a big jump") or milking a goat ("How to milk a goat").

The large-scale assumptions, which go beyond the mere functioning of the boxes, are that a) there is always a 'right' and appropriate way to fulfill a task; b) men who identify with the ideal man promoted by the magazine know and prefer that very way; c) men know what they are doing at all times. As can be deduced, this kind of stories plays a key role in the reproduction of a stereotypical male who is classy and proper (such as the one promoted also by *GQ*), yet younger

and more attached to a present, or a close past, dominated by stag parties, drinking and outdoor activities. These stories also reproduce the stereotype of a self-ironic male – a more appealing figure with which readers are made to identify, thus counterbalancing a potentially boring model, if only characterized by sophistication and stiffness.

5.4.2   "THE SKILLS EVERY MAN SHOULD HAVE" STORIES

In addition to the advice on a variety of matters, the editorial staff gives special relevance and space to five topics – driving, fighting, fatherhood, drinking, dressing, and influence – by devoting a multi-page story to each of them. Many slang items are found in this portion of the cover thread.

The first story, "The road trip", consists of a nine-page signed article that showcases eight new cars by narrating the author's trip from San Antonio to Seattle driving a different car after each intermediate stop. The article is textually organized into eight sub-sections with section headers and subheads.

> The slang found is *badass*, *Chevy*, *overkill*, *go apeshit*, '*beat* that *rap'* (Fig. 5.51); *loosey-goosey*, *ham-fisted*, *ballsy*, *ride* (Fig. 5.52); *Subie*, *deal sealer*, *awesome*, 'best *cheap-ass* car', *shitbox* (Fig. 5.53); 'I mainly *get* my *kicks* by dropping' (Fig. 5.54); '*hot buzzword'*, *giant-ass*, '*fat-cat* car', 'you didn't work *your ass off'*, *schlub* (Fig. 5.55); 'Ford isn't *half-assing* it', *Chevy*, *cool*, *crazy-ass* (Fig. 5.56); '*dorkier-*looking Civic', *kick-ass* (Fig. 5.57). The story also features the following sections, namely seven signed framed sections, six of which are slang-free and entitled "Innovations" and one of which is entitled "Most unwelcome technological advance" and contains *buzz killer* (Fig. 5.55), and three contributions by experts: "What I've learned: Tom La Sorda", a bulleted list of memories, one of which contains *cool* (Fig. 5.58), "Why I drive what I drive: Brian Williams", and "A few words on maintenance: Renato Ziraschi", two body copy first-person narratives with an editorial standfirst.

TEXAS SUSHI

The Toyota Tundra is the biggest, most badass truck a Japanese car-maker has ever built. But that doesn't mean Pappy is going to buy it.

The Useful Part

A RECOMMENDATION FROM LYLE LOVETT

I've always just kinda been a pickup-truck guy. Right now, I'm driving a 2002 Ford F-350 crew cab. But when I'm out on the road, one of my very favorite things to do is rent something that I wouldn't othe-

he **U.S. truck market** is not just imbued by a sense of patriotism, it's a cutthroat battlefield ruled by brand loyalty. Chevy people buy stickers depicting Calvin pissing on Ford. Ford people buy stickers depicting Calvin pissing on Chevy. And Japanese-truck drivers buy stickers… well, no, they don't. Because there aren't any Japanese-truck drivers, at least none willing to show their faces at the ranch.

The biggest problem for Japanese automakers is that they design sensible trucks that deliver exactly what people need instead of what they want—which is total overkill. So what's Toyota to do if it wants to be taken seriously in the U. S. market? Go apeshit, of course. How did it do? Let's consider the anti-Japanese-truck arguments as they re-

late to the new Tundra I'm driving from San Antonio to Dallas.

ARGUMENT 1: Japanese trucks take bread out of American workers' mouths. As I approach my black Tundra SR5 4x4 four-door in the San Antonio airport parking lot, the first thing that catches my eye is a sticker on the back window: TOYOTA TUN-

THE BIGGEST PROBLEM MAKERS IS THAT THEY DELIVER EXACTLY WH STEAD OF WHAT THEY

DRA: BORN IN TEXAS, BUILT BY TEX-ANS. Indeed, the Tundra is built in a brand-new factory in San Antonio.

ARGUMENT 2: Japanese trucks are wet napkins. Nissan thought it'd beat that rap when it dropped a 305 horsepower V-8 in the Titan, but when you're up against Dodge

Fig. 5.51 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007; p. 68.

It's not often that a carmaker's fortunes hinge on a single vehicle, but that's where Mitsubishi Motors North America finds itself with the Outlander. A few years back, Mitsubishi got loosey-goosey with its financing arm. You know the stereo-typical used-car ad: "Come on down to Crazy Eddie's! We're *giving* cars away!" Well, Mitsubishi went completely Cra-

zy Eddie—zero money down, zero percent financing, and zero payments for a year. Come on down!

This ended badly. As of September 2002, 62 per-cent of Mitsubishi's loans were "special credit instruments," which ballooned in-to a $673 million loss. It's been struggling ever since.

Why should we care? After all, the car market conforms to Darwinian law. And I don't hear a lot of wailing over Isu-zu's agonized retreat from our shores. But here's one reason: the Evo. It's a $30,000 tur-bocharged BMW eater that makes even the most ham-fisted driver feel like a World Rally Championship hero.

The world just won't be as in-teresting a place without the Evo in the U. S. market. Which brings us back to our humble savior, the Outlander (left), a $29,000 crossover that Mit-subishi prays will help it mind the financial gap and kill time while it prepares the rollout of a whole new line of cars based on the Evo's platform.

I have plenty of time to get to know the Outlander during my one-thousand-mile drive from Dallas to Phoenix. And here's the good news: With eighteen-inch wheels, relative-ly low-profile tires, and a per-formance-minded all-wheel-drive system, this crossover has strands of Evo in its DNA. Too bad I'm pointed straight across

the plains of Texas, where the only steering input will be for swerving around tumbleweeds and illegals. What I need is out-right power, and in that depart-ment the Outlander is just okay. Its 3-liter 220 horsepower V-6 gets the job done, but by mile four hundred I've had plenty of time to wonder why Mitsubi-shi didn't slap its ballsy 3.8-liter V-6 under the hood. It proba-bly comes down to money.

So what's the verdict? Is the Outlander strong enough to help Mitsubishi hold on? After a thousand miles, I'd say prob-ably yes. It strikes me as a nice little ride with a lot of equip-ment for the money. Which means there's hope yet for the Evo. Hope against all hope.

Fig. 5.52 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007; p. 70.

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CHEAP SEATS

Twenty years ago, $15,000 didn't buy you much more than a trash can on wheels. Today it buys amazing options, like the Suzuki SX4.

The Useful Part

HOW NOT TO GET RIPPED OFF AT THE SHOP

(Cont'd. from previous page)
3. Dealerships will suck your money out of you. Straight up, that's what

In 1982, my parents bought a Subaru GL Wagon, a little four-cylinder four-wheel drive that is conceptually similar to the Suzuki SX4 that I'm driving from Phoenix to San Diego. That Subie cost about $8,000, which, adjusted for inflation, works out to more than $17,000 in today's dollars. The GL had manual windows and door locks, no air-conditioning, no air bags, no antilock brakes, and something like 85 horsepower under the hood. That's what you got for your inflation-adjusted $17,000 a quarter century ago.

Here's what you can get for $15,000 today: four-wheel drive; an eminently respectable 143 horse-power motor; air-conditioning; power windows, locks, and mirrors; keyless entry; front- and rear-curtain air bags; sixteen-inch alloy wheels; and antilock brakes. You get a seven-year, hundred-thousand-mile power-train warran-

BUT HERE'S THE AMAZING THING: THE SX4 MAY BE THE BEST CHEAP-ASS CAR YOU CAN BUY, BUT IT'S FAR FROM THE ONLY OPTION.

ty. And the deal sealer: You get a three-mode all-wheel-drive system that can be locked into off-road-style four-wheel drive or switched into two-wheel drive via a console-mounted switch.

After yesterday's highway-only slog, I jump off the inter-

do this with a $15,000 Suzuki $15,000 Suzuki car.

But here's the amazing thing: The SX4 may be the best cheap-ass car you can buy, but it's far from the only option. You've got Hyundai and Kia hawking the Elantra and Spectra, each of them with 138 horsepower, six air bags, and a hundred-thousand-mile warranty. Even the lowliest Chevy Cobalt gives you 148 horsepower and a level of refinement that makes you forget the rolling crapfest that was the Cavalier. Then there's Scion, with its Japanese-funky styling underpinned by Toyota hardware. These days, $15,000 buys you choices. Good choices. So here's an ad slogan that Suzuki can feel free to crib: "The SX4: priced like a shitbox, but actually not a shitbox!"

Fig. 5.53 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007; p. 72.

The road between L. A. and Vegas doesn't offer up much in the way of fun, but I try to get my thrills where I can find them. For instance, you know that a car has some serious grip when you try to test its limits on an on-ramp and attain such speed that you have to hit the brakes—*hard!*—to merge with the highway traffic. I mainly get my kicks by dropping it to third gear on the highway and listening to that wild V-8 nestled behind my head bellow its way past 8,000 rpm. I don't believe I'll ever get tired of that.

Fig. 5.54 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007; p. 75.

LAS VEGAS TO SAN FRANCISCO

FOCUS. PLEASE!

Or: A few reasons why Mercedes should stick to what it does best—making really expensive luxury cars

The hot buzzword in the car business is *focus*. In other words, play to your strengths and know your role, rather than trying to offer something for everyone. Ford has sold Aston Martin and is looking to move Jaguar and Land Rover because it wants to focus. GM and Nissan's tentative courtship fell flat because it would've resulted in a loss of focus (also known as a "giant-ass mess"). And Mercedes looks to be ditching Chrysler so it can focus.

Once upon a time, Mercedes made a medium-sized sedan, a big sedan, and a couple of convertibles. Within the past two model generations, the venerable E-Class, S-Class, and SL-Class have been joined by the CLK, CLS, M, GL, G, R, and SLR. The result of this ever-expanding three-pointed alphabet is that some of the models no longer ring quite true. Remember the bargain-basement C230 coupe a few years back? Or what about the current R-Class? Does a Mercedes minivan help the brand? Really?

Mercedes, then, has its hands full without dealing with Chrysler's problems. Which is why I find myself in a CL600 on the way to San Francisco. From the moment you stick the key in the ignition, one thought comes to mind: How could this possibly come from the same company that gives us the Jeep Compass? The CL600 is a signature fat-cat car that does everything it can to ease the burden of being you. With a 510 horsepower twin-turbo V-12 underfoot, merging onto the highway certainly isn't stressful. And once there, you can settle into the punishing banality of stop-and-go traffic while the CL caters to your whims. The seats, heated and cooled, offer a massage function with four different intensities. (I prefer "slow and vigorous.") The cruise control, Distronic Plus, keeps an eye on the car in front of you, pacing it all the way down to a stop. The doors and trunk squeeze themselves closed, no vulgar slamming required. And did I mention the night-vision screen? Because you didn't work your ass off to make partner *not* to have night vision, like the schlub driving the E-Class.

What does all this mean? A few things. For starters, at $144,975, the CL600 may be the best luxury coupe, pound for pound, on the market. It's fast enough to match 911's in a straight line yet more understated than a Bentley. World-beating flagships like the CL are the reason that Mercedes has the most revered brand in the world. And when you've got that kind of brand equity, every model doesn't need to be a segment-busting smash hit. Mercedes will always sell a certain number of cars, not because of those vehicles' innate brilliance but because of what that three-pointed star signifies—a legacy of hard-earned snob appeal. Chryslers sell, but there's no built-in safety net. For every hit like the Chrysler 300C, you can easily have acres of unsold Jeep Commanders. And if you're Mercedes, maker of the finest $150,000 can buy, you don't need that kind of trouble. You need to concentrate on building profitable luxury cars. That's what you're good at. That's what you've been doing for a hundred years. You need to focus.

The Useful Part

HOW TO SPOT A LEMON
By George Wallrich, car-sales manager

1. Sloppy paint. Feel under the body. Factory paint jobs are smooth around the edges.
2. New screws. Pop the hood and check the screws. They should appear old and a little rusty.
3. Cheap bodywork. Run a magnet over the exterior. If it sticks in some places but not others, the car was cheaply repaired.

MOST UNWELCOME TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCE: AUDIO SPEED TRAPS

The boys at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee have cooked up one hell of a buzz killer: a radar-proof speed trap that clocks your mph simply by listening to the sound of your car passing by. Using hidden roadside microphones, the device calculates a car's speed by measuring its Doppler shift—the drop in frequency from when a sound approaches to when it passes. Because the system measures changes

INNOVATIONS   FOG-PROOF WINDSHIELD

A fogged-up windshield is as dangerous as it is annoying. But thanks to a nanoparticle research crew at MIT, there's a new glass coating that could eliminate the impediment. Its fog-proof windshield is

Fig. 5.55 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007; p. 76.

SAN FRANCISCO TO PORTLAND

THE SAVIOR

What's a car company to do when it's $18 billion in debt? Hitch its future to a new crossover, of course. And pray.

The Useful Part

NORTHODOX TIPS TO IM-

I f the 1980s were all about the minivan and the '90s were ruled by the SUV, the '00s will be remembered for the crossover, for the simple reason that drivers want the size and versatility of an SUV with the mileage and handling of a car. Which is good for Ford, since it's betting its comeback on one. Perhaps you've heard of it: the Edge? Of course you have. You can barely watch a half hour of TV—any half hour—without seeing that commercial.

To its credit, Ford isn't half-assing it with the Edge the way GM did when it introduced the underpowered Chevy Equinox crossover and the god-awful ugly Pontiac Aztek/Buick Rendezvous. At about $25,000, its savior comes equipped to compete with a 265 horsepower V-6 and no glaring aesthetic or dynamic flaws. It's competitively priced and backed by that $80 million marketing campaign. In one

THERE'S SOMETHING A LITTLE SAD ABO HAVING TO PAY PEOPLE TO SING SONGS THE EDGE WHEN OTHER CARS ARE NAM DROPPED IN LYRICS BECAUSE THEY'RE (

ing into the crossove both feet. But there's little sad about having like Kelis to sing song Edge when other car dropped in lyrics bec you know, cool.

So how does it run ly well. Barely off I-5, traffic-free rural road w miles of crazy-ass cur wish out loud for the is exactly the reason tence of crossovers: ways have a sports car a sedan when you nee not drive something you a little bit of all thr crossovers, the Edge ed to be overtly sporty it doesn't play along. (angle corner, I actually into a four-wheel drif on. I wouldn't have w that in an Explorer.

The Edge may not personality like the Sub ca. But it's quietly comp fined in just about any could throw at it. Thi what Ford needs right car that will take it bac the heap, or at least one repaying $18 billion in l Edge do that alone? N

That's one big hole. F in the right direction. perhaps biggest quest er hundreds of thousar Explorer owners will

Fig. 5.56 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007; p. 78.

GREEN BASTARD

The next generation of hybrids are being built for many reasons. But saving the environment isn't one of them.

Ghosn never wanted to build one. But for credits against California's emissions laws, he felt like he had to. And thus you have the 2007 Altima Hybrid: a kick-ass hybrid that Nissan is selling at a loss to please the suits in Sacramento.

Bastard child or not, my drive from Portland to Seattle is uneventful, which is a sign of how far hybrids have come. The Altima has a reasonable amount of juice—198 net horsepower—and it surges out onto the highway on a wave of torque. The Toyota-designed drivetrain doesn't beat you over the head with its hybridness. The sixteen-inch tires look like they belong on a proper car, not a golf cart. The Altima just feels like a nicely appointed, sporty Japanese sedan, albeit one that can occasionally reach forty miles per hour on electricity alone.

Hooray for hybrids, then? Not entirely. The Altima hybrid may be technologically sophisticated, but it's economically crude. It costs Nissan money to build

Hybrids are at a crossroads. They emerged from the primordial ooze looking bizarre and futuristic. But then came the next generation, and a new question emerged: What happens when a hybrid looks just like a regular car? The answer, it would seem, is not much: Ford had to put zero-percent-financing incentives on the eminently normal-looking Escape Hybrid last year, and Honda sold only 5,598 Accord Hybrids in 2006. But you know what model Honda did sell a lot of last year? The much slower, dorkier-looking Civic Hybrid. And you made fun of BMW drivers for buying cars as class symbols.

Fig. 5.57 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007; p. 80.

"One day, you're going to be across the bargaining table from me saying, 'Dad, we can't do that....'"

> Minivans are cool. Everyone has driven one. Admit it, your hand's on the Bible. If you're on vacation, there's nothing better. If you have kids, there's nothing better. We've sold eleven million of them, so we know people buy them.

> I think the domestic industry is going to fight back. It has to.

Fig. 5.58 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007; p. 70.

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The other four stories differ from the first: they are much shorter, they share the identical visual layout, and all of them start with a signed first-person article followed by a mosaic of framed and unframed sections.

The story "How to win a fight" features *scumbag* in the summary (Fig. 5.44); *bad news*, *head butt*, and *fucking*[85] in the signed section of tips "The fistfight: A primer" (Fig. 5.59); *asshole* in the expert-signed section "How to avoid jail" (Fig. 5.60); *lick*, *sucker punch*, and the phrase *six sheets to the wind* in the signed narrative "How to heal yourself" (Fig. 5.61). It also features sections that do not contain slang, such as the expert-signed "The moves" and "How to negotiate".

The story "How to be a good father" contains *dope* and *shit* in the signed narrative "First, lower your expectations" (Fig. 5.62); 'I *was like: Dude*' in the celebrity confession column entitled "What I've learned: Fatherhood" (Fig. 5.63). It also features the editorial advertisement "Trips to take with your kids before they are 18", the signed list of bulleted tips "How to afford college", the expert-signed lists of tips entitled "How to calm a crying baby" and "How to teach your kid to throw a knuckleball", and the editorial framed list "Things worth bequeathing/Things not worth bequeathing".

The story "How to dress for the occasion" features *big-time*, 'dressed like *shit*', *asshole*, 'you look *sharp*', and 'what *the stink*?' in the signed narrative "First, you have to want to" (Fig. 5.64); *sharp* in the section "Dressing for the occasion: Potus edition" (Fig. 5.65); *killer* in the descriptive caption found in the section "The super suit" (Fig. 5.66). It also includes the editorial advertisement "Things to carry" and the lists of tips "How to dress to go to the White House" and "The rules".

The story "How to get the upper hand" contains only one slang lexeme, namely the verb *(to) sweat*, in the unsigned list of tips entitled "The rules: Influence" (Fig. 5.67); it also includes the expert-signed two-page section "Useful advice from people who can help you", featuring first-person contributions of ten professionals, and the list of "People you can't bribe".

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[85]   *Fucking* is considered here as slang only when it functions as an adverb used as an intensifier. Lighter (1994: 839) dates this use in American English back to 1890.

How to WIN A FIGHT

The Fistfight: *A Primer* By Tom Chiarella

Don't. You are smarter than this. There is too much you can't control. Even as it starts, know that it will be fast, faster than you could ever imagine and over before you can think much. If it isn't, then you know you are in the middle of some bad news. So just don't. • But if you must, make it faster for him than it is for you. First, look for the door; don't let anything start until you can see a clear path to it. • Grab something small and hard that looks menacing—car keys, pool balls, beer bottles, highball glasses. • Don't punch—it breaks fingers. Big, bloody compound fractures. Hit with the heel of your palm—in the chest, in the lips, or on the nose. • Don't hit people on other parts of the head. It kills them—destroys lives, makes cops more likely to arrest you. • Scratching is bad, since it never really hurts the other guy, leaves marks for the cops to see, and leaves the other guy looking like he was beating off a house cat. • Biting, however, is good, especially through clothes, since it always really, really hurts. • Head butts: fine, but be close when you deliver them, aiming for the spot where nose meets forehead. • Elbows are always harder and more effective than you'd expect. • If you have glasses, take them off. • Don't fight in your coat. • If you are heavy, use gravity as a muscle, dragging the guy to the floor, but for God's sake—stay on top. • If you are small, make yourself smaller. Crouch. Make one small jab, fucking hard one time, right below the nose, and step back. Retreat, sidestep him, pop him as he misses you. Never let the bigger guy get you down. • Keep your mouth shut. It might sound kind of kung fu to shout or grunt, but eventually someone will be shrieking or pleading. This must not be you. • If you get the other guy down, end it. Let the crowd pull you off. • Don't kick him when he's on the ground, because you can rupture a spleen or break his back. • Don't use a flourish—no pile driver, no knee-drop. Just walk away. • But remember: No one gets knocked out cold like in the movies. A fight is never over. Find the door again and leave. • And tell yourself the truth: You may be smarter now than you were before, but even then you were smart enough never to get in a fight.

Fig. 5.59 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007, p. 88.

How to Avoid Jail

By Timothy B. Rountree, attorney-in-charge, Criminal Defense Division of the Legal Aid Society in Queens County, New York As told to Buddy Kite

First, if you're going to fight, don't actually use a weapon. There's misdemeanor assault and there's felony assault, and the charges are distinguished by the seriousness of the injury. A pop in the nose? That's a misdemeanor. But with more-serious injuries, the case is elevated and will play out in court.

Gather witnesses. Ask them to give their names and numbers to the cops. It's up to you to get strangers to speak up.

You shouldn't talk to the police. You can't explain away what happened to the point where the officer will release you. If you know you're going to be arrested—and it's almost guaranteed that if the cops show up, you will be—tell the cop you'd like to get a lawyer. At the precinct, call a lawyer or have a relative or friend call one. You will usually be granted this call, but it depends on your behavior. After the arrest is processed, you will be taken to court. It helps to have a friend or relative meet you there.

No attitude and no arrogance. Normally you'll get out of this arraignment process within twenty-four hours, but if you're an asshole in their eyes, they can sit on the paperwork. Be deferential.

If your lawyer doesn't think you have a good self-defense claim, have him negotiate for a dismissal. That way you don't have to plead guilty to anything. You just accept it with community service or a fine.

Fig. 5.60 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007; p. 88.

How to HEAL YOURSELF
The Endorsement: *The Meat Bandage*
BY CRAIG DAVIDSON

I've taken my licks. Been hit so hard and so repeatedly that I've felt the contour of my skull bone buzzing beneath my scalp like an X-ray hologram. Punched with such keen malice, it was as if my nerve stem had been packed with dynamite: *ba-boom*. One time, this jack roller crushed me one walking out of a bar—you could call it a sucker punch, but any fool not six sheets to the wind would have seen it coming, and I was eight sheets gone—right along the supraorbital ridge, where socket rings eye, and I experienced this crazy sensation of my eyes bugging out of my head, this telescopic view of the sidewalk, curbed cars, the moon and stars.

Fig. 5.61 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007; p. 89.

First, Lower Your Expectations
BY TOM CHIARELLA

I hate new fathers. Bunch of arrogant know-it-alls, smug in what they clearly perceive to be the singular glow of the creation of their loins. You have to look at the baby, "talk" to their toddler. I just want to shake them—those fathers. I want to tell them: Kids get hurt. Kids get sick. Kids make bad, bad choices. Don't smile at me knowingly when we pass in the park just because you can afford a really expensive European stroller. You don't have a clue.

The expectation of safety and normalcy? Forget that stuff. Put it out of your mind. To be a good father, you have to give up the expectation of a payoff. Forget trophies and medals. Forget report cards, even. You have to observe. You have to listen. You are a large figure in this person's life. No getting around that. With each year that passes, allow yourself the possibility of becoming smaller. This both protects them and teaches you. And don't be overly proud of your own parental habits. You'll get your chance to tell it like it is, to lay down the law. Fathers do. Just don't relish that, because that shit can snap you in half when it backfires, and you will be old when it does, and so will they. Old enough to wander away.

When I look at pictures of myself as a young father—joyfully lifting my son by one arm at a picnic somewhere, indifferently sleeping with him on a long-gone couch, watching, arms folded, as he played soccer—I think what a dope I was. I remember that I thought it would be easier when I didn't have to change diapers, or that I'd have more time for myself once they were in school, or that things would be much better once the younger one outgrew his asthma. What was my rush? Why did I want time to pass? Why did I even want to hope for change? I had a son. Then I had another one. I should have opened my eyes wider every day to snap myself out of the torpor of pride and pleasure; I should have used every day to think about what I didn't know about being a father. And I should have sat there awhile in stillness, flush in the lessons provided by the company of my sons, then—as now— the most quarrelsome and deep pleasure I'll ever know.

Fig. 5.62 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007; p. 98.

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The other night I was walking down the stairs behind one of my daughters. I was tired, and she was goofing around, you know, like kids do, doing all this stupid stuff on the stairs. And I was thinking, Please just go down the stairs and let's get you to bed. It's after your bedtime. I've had enough for one day. And then I sort of caught myself. I snapped out of it. I was like, Dude, you should be dancing down the stairs behind her!

FOREST WHITAKER, ACTOR

Fig. 5.63 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007: p. 99.

First, You Have to Want To
BY DAVID GRANGER

At some point in my tenure as a sportswriter, I figured out why big-time athletes disdain the vast majority of reporters. It wasn't because we were small and weak. It wasn't because we asked impolite questions and wrote articles they didn't like. No. It was because we dressed like shit. I came to this conclusion after seeing a photo of myself sitting in the Cincinnati Reds' dugout interviewing their star slugger. I can still see the blue short-sleeved checked shirt I was wearing in that photo. I can still feel the rush of humiliation I felt when I realized that the superstar must have looked at me for the first time and immediately thought to himself: *writer*. He lumped me in. And he wasn't wrong to do so.

It's hard to be successful if you're lumped in. If you're one of the many. You can get along, for sure. Bureaucrats get along. But dressing—style—is about standing out; it's about making a subtle statement, and that statement is simply: "I'm different." You can't be so outlandish that the statement is read as either "I'm better" or "I'm an asshole." There's a fine line. Nick Sullivan, Esquire's fashion director, has a phrase he uses to describe what it is we're talking about: the Extra 10 Percent.

There's some guidance on these pages, advice on navigating the journey toward a personal style. But the secret to dressing a little better is simply this: You have to want to. If you don't,

it's just not going to be part of your life. And that's not a terrible thing. Style is a gentle act of will. I remember when I started to care. I bought a few things—things I could afford. A couple of dark suits, some nice shirts—mostly white at first, then some stripes. Some basic ties—a black knit, a gray-and-dark-gray repp. But nothing mattered until the morning I stood in front of my closet and *thought* about what I was going to wear.

On that morning, or one soon after, I remember looking at my humble wardrobe and wanting to try something I had never tried before. I don't remember what the combination was, but it was an important moment. It opened up possibilities. I no longer had *outfits*. I had *options*. For a while I tried dressing in threes: two patterns and a texture. I discovered that the simplest way to make people think you look sharp is to dress in black and white, especially a black suit, white-white shirt with French cuffs, and white-white pocket square. For various six-month periods, I've entirely eschewed the tie, only to adopt it anew when the season changes. There are millions of rules. (Always wear white near the face. The turtleneck is the most flattering thing a man can wear.) And those rules need to be accepted and then, on a case-by-case basis, modified or rejected.

I failed a lot and I still fail. Sometimes I get to the office, after dressing in the near dark of early morning, and I think, *This is what I'm wearing?* But what the stink? It's a day in the life. Tomorrow, I'll spend my ninety seconds in contemplation and move on.

Fig. 5.64 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007; p. 118.

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DRESSING FOR THE OCCASION: *POTUS Edition*

FROM THE SHARP TO THE SHAMEFUL, A BIPARTISAN COMMISSION ON PRESIDENTIAL STYLE

APPROPRIATE — INAPPROPRIATE

Kennedy, J.F. Roosevelt, F.D. Reagan, R. Nixon, R. Carter, J. Truman, H. Coolidge, C. Bush, G.W.

Fig. 5.65 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007; p. 119.

Your lapel speaks volumes. A small, high notch right on the collarbone is the mark of a killer suit, a minor detail that makes your off-the-peg suit look closer to classic bespoke.

Two-button wool suit ($1,595) by Dunhill; shirt ($395) by Valentino; tie ($120) by Hickey Freeman.

Fig. 5.66 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007; p. 119.

The Rules: *Influence*

Rule No. 176: A decent bottle of wine is a fine gift for the host. A nice bottle of port is even better. Rule No. 202: Tipping the bartender unusually well on the first round may get you a faster pour or a free round, but it won't make you George Clooney. Rule No. 255: When calling to make a reservation, start by announcing your name, first and last. For some reason, this makes the person on the other end think he should know who you are. Rule No. 333: If you have a dollar, give it to the men's-room attendant. If you don't, don't sweat it. You didn't ask him to be in there.

Fig. 5.67 Source: *Esquire,* June 2007; p. 124.

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Despite the variety of signing authors – editorial writers, experts, or celebrities – the cover thread should be addressed as one entity that has undergone several layers of proof-reading and editorial revision. Lexical choices in writing (including the use of slang) are part of style, and styles are idiosyncratic to the author, who makes a personal selection among the formal and expressive tools available in language. However, idiosyncrasy and author-specific features cannot be used as analytical criteria in mass media such as magazines, where the editorial style (serving the editorial goals) determines or at least influences the one of individual writers, interviewees and experts. For this reason, the five stories constituting this portion of the cover thread can be addressed as a whole entity.

As a first step, let us notice that the header surmounting the five stories, both in the summary and on the first page of each story, announces "The skills every man should have". Therefore, the editors are implying that success in those five abilities is the ultimate evidence for manhood. By considering the semantic areas covered by slang, one can find that the main domains to which it refers (also metaphorically and metonymically) are as follows:

- **body parts**: giant-ass; cheap-ass; badass; (to) half-ass; (to) VERB one's ass off; crazy-ass; kick-ass; asshole; head butt; ballsy;[86]

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[86] On a lexicographical note, all the compounds except for *kick-ass* show that *ass* is undergoing the same loss of semantic value of *shit* in slang vocabulary. Lighter (1994: 44-45) describes *–ass* as a "derogatory intensive suffix used to form nouns" and dates it back to 1903. I would add that the derogatory connotation should be reconsidered, given the positive meaning of words such as *giant-ass*, used to describe an impressively big and sturdy car.

- **violence**: overkill; (to) beat rap; (to) get kicks; killer; kick-ass; buzz killer;
- **filth**: go apeshit; shitbox; scumbag; shit; NOUN the stink; like shit; (to) sweat.

This slang vocabulary is characterized by a noticeable degree of symbolic violence, in terms of both metaphorical references to battery and metonymical reference to tabooed body parts and bodily functions. In the latter case, violence lies more in the instinctual (yet partly cultural) repulsion caused by such functions than in physical abuse *per se*. The communicative power of slang when it conveys symbolic violence is clear; however, evaluative slang vocabulary that does not hint at violence is also employed successfully:

- **approval**: cool; awesome; hot; deal sealer; big-time; sharp; fat cat;
- **disapproval**: bad news; dope; schlub; dorky.

The four stories that have the same structure and layout, i.e. all except for the one on cars, seem to have one feature in common: the main article of each story is constantly addressing the reader as an impatient and somewhat arrogant person. This tendency is proved by the analysis of some claims made by the writers. Unlike the cover thread analyzed in the previous section, where the 'waking call' from laziness was merely rhetorical and meant indeed to flatter men, here criticism seems to be really committed to causing the reader to feel somewhat inadequate. Addresses to the audience such as "To be a good father, you have to give up the expectations of a payoff" (Fig. 5.62), "You have to

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give more" and "But the secret to dressing a little better is simply this: You have to want to" (Fig. 5.64) do not reinforce manliness; even the section of tips "The fistfight: A primer" is not overtly apologetic of virility. The intention of the text producer is closer to the one that underlies the stories analyzed in Sections 5.1 and 5.2: the reader is purposely shaped as an imperfect being that has problems with self control. In the first two stories the limits were lacking as to consuming and multitasking; here the reader is represented as unable to control physical strength and pride. Hence the need to provide advice that leads back to the path of sobriety and style.

So now it is clearer why the slang used here has such a powerful effect: the symbolic violence diffused all over the five stories contributes to reinforce the stereotype that men have to make an extra effort to become gentlemen and tone down the *ballsy* attitude of which they are 'naturally' endowed. *Esquire* then shows to help this process of refinement by means of editorial advertisement (on clothing, cars and so on) and by offering the first-hand experience of the best known voices to which the magazine relies: the top-rate writer Tom Chiarella (on fatherhood, influence and fighting) and David Granger, the editor-in-chief himself (on dressing).

5.5 "CREDIT CARD SCAMS" (*Popular Mechanics*, January 2007)

By looking at the cover headline (Fig. 5.68) one could think that this cover story is similar to the one displayed by Figure 5.24. However, "DIY" does not function as a story frame but as a section frame: *Popular Mechanics* has a fixed monthly feature section entitled 'DIY' (acronym for 'Do It Yourself') that includes very heterogeneous stories on

home/car repairing, technology, and every topic that loosely concerns manual hobbies. Therefore, the slang noun included in the headline "Credit card *scams*" leads towards a specific cover story, not the whole cover thread: in other words, here the use of slang is not aimed at drawing the attention of the reader to all the stories listed under the 'DYI' umbrella, such as is done in "GQ Eats", but only to the single story on credit cards.

This cover story is one of three cover stories from 2007 *Popular Mechanics* issues that draw the attention of the reader by exploiting the same slang lexeme, i.e. *scam* – the others being "Avoid home *scams*" (August) and "Avoid car repair *scams*" (September). Unlike the cover stories analyzed so far, the number of slang lexemes found here is low. However, the ideological weight of the word *scam* is powerful and worth investigating; moreover, it well epitomizes the general editorial use of slang made by *Popular Mechanics.*

The reason why this story has been selected for analysis lies in the ideological use of the word *scam*. A magazine like *Popular Mechanics* is purchased by adults (predominantly men) who need extra advice on activities and hobbies they already perform or cultivate on their own, such as car/home maintenance, minor carpentry projects, and so forth. In other words, the readers of *Popular Mechanics* share a common taste for avoiding the help of specialized professionals (painters, mechanics, plumbers etc.) whenever they are able to fix the situation independently – or they are taught how to. Therefore, the text producer of any story in this magazine draws on a basic assumption, i.e. readers don't like being helped by specialized professionals, and then hypothesizes about what the reader's MRs related to professionals might be. She might start off by acknowledging that almost everybody

who owns a house or a means of transportation has had at least one negative experience with such workers, either because the final result of their job was not satisfactory, because the bill was too expensive, or even because they fixed something that was perfectly working only because the client was not familiar with the functioning of a particular appliance or machinery. Drawing from these MRs, i.e. from emotions and memories that cannot be proved objectively but that are nevertheless assumed (more or less consciously) whenever a text is devised, the text producer finds it convenient to exploit this diffidence – real or construed – and to reinforce the stereotype according to which foul play is always behind the corner, promising to help potential clients to smell unfair behavior before it is too late. The choice of a word like *scam* is effective because it derives from gangster slang[87] and therefore is connotated by a mix of impotence, sense of abuse and revenge that connects the reader quickly to the feeling that may be felt after being tricked by a specialized worker.

Apart from the cover, slang is found in the summary, both in the repetition of the cover headline (Fig. 5.69) and in the description of the story ('*scammers* can scan your new RFID-enhanced credit card', Fig. 5.70). The story, entitled "Tech Clinic", consists of a list of four unsigned letters to a signing author, plus one signed descriptive section, i.e. "Hard-drive capacity" and one signed section of editorial advertisement, i.e. "Your own digital DJ" (these sections are signed by two different writers).

Slang is used in the answer to the first letter ('some *twerp* with a *souped-up* scanner', Fig. 5.71), in the header added to the second

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[87]   Danzell and Victor (2006: 1673) record the first use of this word in 1963, meaning "a scheme to defraud someone", and precise that its origin is to be found in U.S. English.

letter ('Drive switch*eroo*', Fig. 5.72) and in the section "Hard-drive capacity" ('the *geek*erati', Fig. 5.73). It is worth noticing that all the slang words used here somehow belong to what has been defined in Chapter Two as 'passive' slang by Lighter (1994), i.e. outdated vocabulary. The suffix *–eroo* is an old-fashioned slang way to create a joking or endearing variant of a noun;[88] *souped-up* has belonged to car slang from as early as the 1940s (Wentworth & Flexner, 1960: 504) and *twerp* was already labeled in 1960 as "Wide teenage and student use c1930-c1945. Still some use, now mostly adult use" (Wentworth & Flexner, 1960: 558). *Geekerati*, then, is a quite original slang blend consisting of *geek* and *literati* (calqued after the more popular blend *glitterati*, i.e. fashion authorities).

Fig. 5.68 Source: *Popular Mechanics*, January 2007; cover.

Figg. 5.69, 5.70 Source: *Popular Mechanics*, January 2007; summary

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88   Probably originated either from the Spanish *–ero* or from foreign words such as *kangaroo* via folk etymology (cf. Mattiello, 2008: 101-102; Marchand, 1969: 211).

Card Tricks

I just received a new credit card that has an RFID chip in it, but I've heard reports that thieves might be able to steal my account information from it. Should I be worried?

It depends on whom you ask. The new RFID-enabled credit cards and key fobs do have unique security risks—foremost being the chance that some twerp with a souped-up scanner will read your card information from afar. But I wouldn't go so far as to say that they are less secure, on the balance, than magnetic-stripe credit cards.

Drive Switcheroo

I've run out of capacity on my laptop's 30GB hard drive and would like to install a new, larger one. I'm not sure how to get my operating system and data onto the new drive before I install it. Is there an easy way to do this?

Figg. 5.71, 5.72 Source: *Popular Mechanics,* January 2007; pp. 110-111.

Hard-Drive Capacity

DO THE MATH

Your hard drive is advertised as having a 60GB capacity, but your computer shows only 55.8GB. What gives? The discrepancy is the result of having two methods of measuring memory. Computers are binary, or "base two," mathematical systems, and in a binary world a kilobyte is 1024 bytes (2 to the 10th power). When computers were new, the geekerati referred to this as a "kilo." Noncomputer folks, however, understood kilo to mean thousand, and thought that 1000 bytes should equal a kilobyte.

So, two different measurements of hard drive space were born. In 1998, the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) weighed in, defining 1 "gigabyte" as 1 billion bytes. Hard disk manufacturers agree, marketing their products using the rounder decimal value instead of the binary system. So, your drive is labeled as decimal ("giga") and your PC reads binary (IEC's term, "gibi"). Either way, you're getting the same bunch of bytes.
— Carolyn Wilsey

Fig. 5.73 Source: *Popular Mechanics,* January 2007; p. 111.

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The number of slang words used here is very low, yet a common trait can be drawn. Slang is neither used as a 'motivational' warm-up for the reader (cf. Sections 5.3 and 5.4), nor as a reminder of one's cherished childhood/teenage in-group talk (as will be seen in Section 5.6), nor as an occult binding of the reader to her irrational emotions (cf. Sections 5.1 and 5.2). The slang used here is used with adult awareness, with a sort of detachment that is absent in the other stories analyzed in this chapter. The text producer seems to use slang self-consciously, with the same patronizing and awkward attitude with which a father would say 'Was the party *neat-o*, Son?' to his child in the attempt to mock teenage talk. These outdated lexical choices contribute to the construction of the ideal writer's attitude as an adult who is not nostalgic of the past and does not need slang to connect with the reader, but who nevertheless is able to drop a few amusing expressions, at times. Let us not forget that the average reader of *Popular Mechanics* is almost ten years older than the ones of the other magazines of the corpus (45 years old, as stated in Chapter One) and that it would not be effective for its writers to speak in a way that makes them sound too much younger than the reader – an element that might hinder the trust bond required by operational discourse, which is based on the authoritativeness of she who provides tips and instructions.

5.6 "TRANSFORMERS: 25 YEARS OF BUTT-KICKING 'BOTS!" (*Wired*, July 2007)

The cover thread opens with a headline on the lower right-handed side of the cover. The subhead features two slang lexemes, namely *butt-kicking* and *'bot* (Fig. 5.74). The giant robot which occupies the whole

cover visually signals that this cover story is also the lead story of the month.[89] The summary does not contain any slang items, and announces a thread with a different headline, i.e. "Iron Giants". Inside the magazine, on page 136, the thread opens with a frame page entitled "Iron Giants", which introduces the topic without mentioning the two-fold structure of the section. The standfirst below the thread headline contains three slang words, i.e. 'They *morphed'*, '*hipster* cubicle mascots', and 'a generation of *geeks'* (Fig. 5.75). The thread consists of two story-units, i.e. two single-signed articles entitled "The rebirth of Optimus Prime" and "Toy-wonder". Their weight is equally balanced on the visual level, since their respective headlines have identical font and size, whereas the first one is markedly longer (five pages) than the second one (two pages). The two articles are separated by a showcase of page-size toy robots created in 1984 and in 2007.

Fig. 5.74 Source: *Wired*, July 2007; cover.

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89   I call it story because the cover does not provide any clue as to whether it might be a thread.

Fig. 5.75 Source: *Wired*, July 2007; p.136.

5.6.1 "THE REBIRTH OF OPTIMUS PRIME"

The standfirst of the first article contains two slang modifiers, i.e. '*ass-kicking* robots' and '[fans] are so *freaked out*' (Fig. 5.76). The body copy of this article contains a high number of slang lexemes and expressions: 'we were *hooked*', 'these doughty *bots*', 'in the toy *biz*', and 'Papa *Bot*' (Fig. 5.77); 'don't let Michael Bay *screw* this *up*', 'Debate *rocked* the virtual halls of *nerd* Thunderdome', 'make cars look *cool* (direct quote)', '*ass-kicking* robots' (Fig. 5.78); 'a certain sect of *geekdom*', 'the *latchkey kids* of the mid-'80s' (Fig. 5.79); '*ham-fisted* directors', 'He's more *jock* than *geek*' (Fig. 5.80); 'a car chase so *smashtacular*', '*muscled up* Camaro', 'standard Bay *hottie*' (Fig. 5.81); 'Prime *morphs*', 'dazzling spray of CG *shnapel*' (Fig. 5.82); 'measured not in *megs* and *gigs*, but in *assloads*', 'partnership with *Chevy*', '*bitchin'* Camaro' (Fig. 5.83); 'most-steroidal *rides*', '[Bay] *took* it *up his ass* (direct quote)', 'box-office *bomb*', 'Cadillac featured *big*', 'got little *guff* for it', '*kid-vid* kiln' (Fig. 5.84); '*pimping* our childhood *ride*', '*pimping* our dad', 'Almighty *Rig*' (Fig. 5.85). Slang is used also in one of the captions which refer to the images of the first article: the expression 'Bay (below) *calls the shots* on set' describes a picture of director Michael Bay making hand signs at his staff (Fig. 5.86).
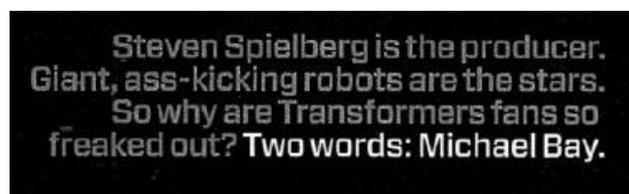
Fig. 5.76 Source: *Wired*, July 2007; p.139.
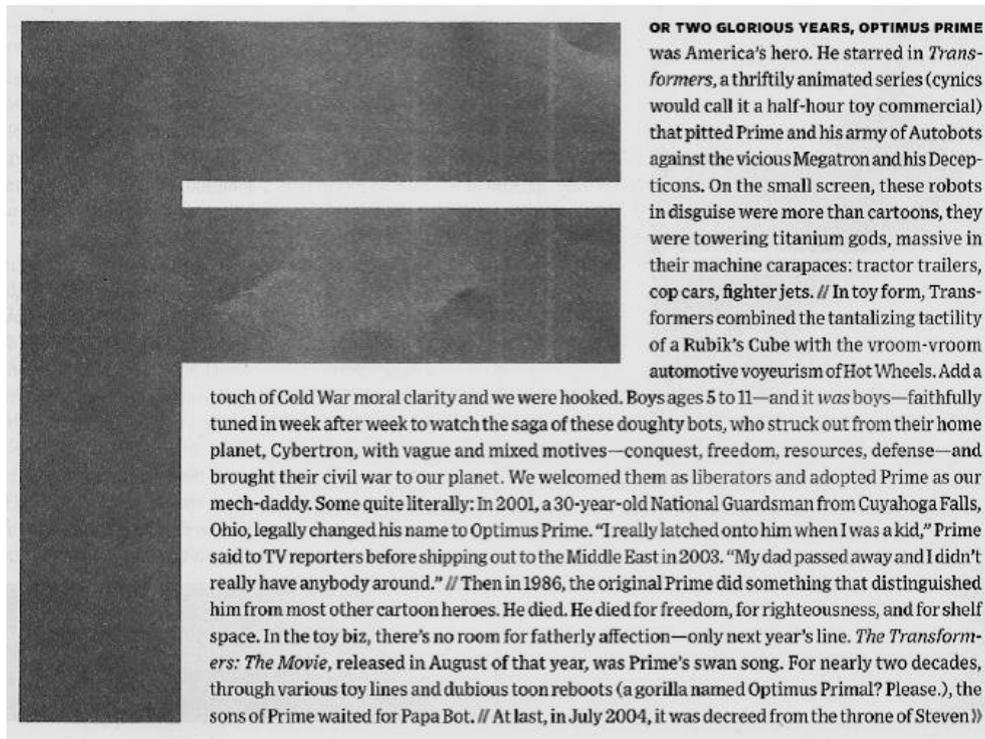
OR TWO GLORIOUS YEARS, OPTIMUS PRIME was America's hero. He starred in *Transformers*, a thriftily animated series (cynics would call it a half-hour toy commercial) that pitted Prime and his army of Autobots against the vicious Megatron and his Decepticons. On the small screen, these robots in disguise were more than cartoons, they were towering titanium gods, massive in their machine carapaces: tractor trailers, cop cars, fighter jets. // In toy form, Transformers combined the tantalizing tactility of a Rubik's Cube with the vroom-vroom automotive voyeurism of Hot Wheels. Add a touch of Cold War moral clarity and we were hooked. Boys ages 5 to 11—and it *was* boys—faithfully tuned in week after week to watch the saga of these doughty bots, who struck out from their home planet, Cybertron, with vague and mixed motives—conquest, freedom, resources, defense—and brought their civil war to our planet. We welcomed them as liberators and adopted Prime as our mech-daddy. Some quite literally: In 2001, a 30-year-old National Guardsman from Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, legally changed his name to Optimus Prime. "I really latched onto him when I was a kid," Prime said to TV reporters before shipping out to the Middle East in 2003. "My dad passed away and I didn't really have anybody around." // Then in 1986, the original Prime did something that distinguished him from most other cartoon heroes. He died. He died for freedom, for righteousness, and for shelf space. In the toy biz, there's no room for fatherly affection—only next year's line. *The Transformers: The Movie*, released in August of that year, was Prime's swan song. For nearly two decades, through various toy lines and dubious toon reboots (a gorilla named Optimus Primal? Please.), the sons of Prime waited for Papa Bot. // At last, in July 2004, it was decreed from the throne of Steven ⟩⟩

Fig. 5.77 Source: *Wired*, July 2007; p.139.

A prayer went up across the Internet: *Please, God, don't let Michael Bay screw this up.* Debate rocked the virtual halls of nerd Thunderdome, aka Ain't It Cool News, where *Transformers* (out July 4) racked up more traffic than any other upcoming film—no mean feat in the Spidey-infested, franchise-fueled summer of '07. "It was as if you told them Michael Bay was directing *Star Wars*," says Harry Knowles, editor of Ain't It Cool News. "I don't get it, because the things that Bay does best are make cars look cool, make things blow up. He's the best exploder in the business."

So why all the grief over a Bay-battered *Transformers*? It's a toy. A cartoon. What's next? *Please don't let Brett Ratner desecrate the Care Bears*? And aren't ass-kicking robots exactly what you'd expect from the high priest of high-octane puerility?

But among a certain sect of geekdom, there's more at stake. Prime practically step-parented the latchkey kids of the mid-'80s. He was our Allfather at a time when flesh-and-blood role models were increasingly few and far between: Stallone had begun his long sag. Arnold was already more credible as machine than man. So when Prime declared, "One shall stand, one shall fall!" in that seismic, tear-down-this-wall timbre of his (or, more accurately, voice actor Peter Cullen), you believed him. Thus began the cyber-outsourcing of masculine heroism, a process that would eventually, inextricably, link Y chromosome to Xbox.

Figg. 5.78, 5.79 Source: *Wired*, July 2007; p.140.

Trust is in short supply for good reason: We're tired of seeing our childhood titans (Daredevil, Ghost Rider, Catwoman) humbled by heedless, ham-fisted directors. "At best, it will be a fun summer movie with explosions," one 35-year-old Transformers devotee conjectured at a recent WonderCon. "But it seems like guys in Hollywood ... Unless they're really reined in, they have to pee all over something to make it theirs, like big cats."
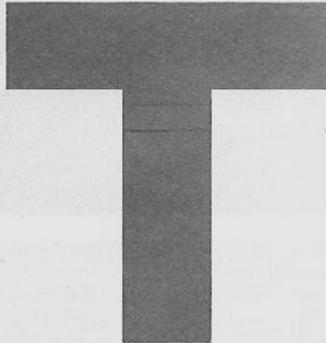
THE MARK OF BAY ON HOLLYWOOD FILMMAKING is acrid and highly identifiable. He's more jock than geek, a two-for-flinching type who, at 42, is really too old to have any actual Transformers nostalgia of his own. What he

"Michael Bay" means, among other things, car chases. So, as you might expect from a Michael Bay movie about robots that turn into vehicles, *Transformers* contains a car chase guaranteed to hit fans in their crumple zone. A car chase so smashtacular, he may never do another one.

Watching the scene from Bay's monitors (with Bay helpfully replaying the sequences he doesn't think you've fully appreciated), one can't help but believe him: Down a crowded freeway streaks benevolent Bumblebee, now a yellow Camaro (muscled up from his origins as a VW Beetle). He's carrying our human heroes, teenagers Sam (Shia LaBeouf, breakout star of *Disturbia* and the newly announced *Indiana Jones* sequel) and Mikaela (Megan Fox, in the role of standard Bay hottie) in the backseat. Behind them chugs Prime, in roaring-semi mode, fending off a massive minesweeper called Bonecrusher, an evil Decepticon.

Figg. 5.80, 5.81 Source: *Wired*, July 2007; p. 141.

At 90 miles per hour—and here's where the brain begins to record-scratch a bit—Bonecrusher transforms into a bipedal robot the size of a small building. He then rollerblades (there's no other way to describe it) through the traffic, effortlessly sweeping unlucky commuters out of his path. Prime morphs, too, going from hog-nosed Peterbilt to hulking robot in a headlong flinging of struts and panels, digging his big blue clodhoppers into the asphalt and reversing course.

Prime and Bonecrusher collide with molar-rattling impact, then tumble vertiginously over the concrete lip of the overpass to the roadway below, where Prime slams a boxcar-sized fist into Bonecrusher's jaw. Bonecrusher's face erupts in a skittering, dazzling spray of CG shrapnel. Oh, the lack of humanity!

Fig. 5.82 Source: *Wired*, July 2007; p. 141.

HOW DOES THIS KIND OF CATASTROPHE HAPPEN? With hard work, strict storyboarding, and a computing capacity that is measured not in megs or gigs, but in assloads. In scenes with multiple robots, rendering a single frame of film can take up to 38 hours. "Dealing with the moment where the trade-off from semi wheels to robot feet happens was the most challenging part of the transformation," recalls Industrial Light & Magic's Scott Farrar, who served as visual effects supervisor. "It was important to Michael that they transform in a believable way." (Believability isn't cheap: Production on

the movie cost $150 million. Still, that's about half as much as every other blockbuster out this summer.)

Then there's the matter of matter. Bay says that weight-mass orthodoxy informed the decision to make Prime a hog-nosed semi instead of the flat-front model from the cartoon, which, he says, would have yielded only 23 feet of robot height. (He wanted Prime to stand at least 30 feet tall.) He also insists that it was these practicalities—and not his movie's partnership with Chevy—behind his heretical decision to convert cuddly Bumblebee into a bitchin' Camaro. Physics also informed the decision to make Megatron, originally a pistol, into a jet; and Frenzy, the beloved Decepticon cassette tape, is now a shiny boom box. But other alterations were simply Bay's prerogative. Optimus Prime now boasts bright orange cholo flames and—much to fans' horror—lips. "I'm the director. I make my own decisions. I like to paint

Fig. 5.83 Source: *Wired*, July 2007; p. 142.

A lot of good product placement, too. In addition to Detroit's most-steroidal rides, you'll see a transformational cell phone and videogame console. Bay notes that he "took it up the ass" for product placement on his last movie, the box-office bomb *The Island*. (In its bold vision of the future, Aquafina, Michelob, and Cadillac featured big—though it should be noted that Spielberg, Bay's *Transformers* producer-collaborator, pulled the same trick with *Minority Report* and got little guff for it.) But let's be honest with ourselves, purists: Are we really going to quibble about endorsements when the urtext itself was fired in the kid-vid kiln of product placement? "What do you want, speeches at the UN?" co-screenwriter Roberto Orci asks. "It's *Transformers*."

True. But pimping our childhood ride is one thing; pimping our dad is another. With bated breath and shaken faith we await the return of our Almighty Rig. Because without Prime, we're stuck with whiney Spider-Boys, metrosexual pirates, and koan-spouting kung-fu Christs in designer sunglasses and unisex clubwear. Because he died protecting us in '86, and nothing's ever been the same since. Because these days, the only real men left are giant robots. It's moot, of course: With or without the sons of Prime, *Transformers* will do zero-to-bank in four seconds. Still, we wonder: When Papa comes truckin' home, will we recognize him? ▥

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SCOTT BROWN (scott4wired@yahoo .com) *wrote about* The Office *in issue 15.04.*

Figg. 5.84, 5.85 Source: *Wired*, July 2007; p. 143.

Fig. 5.86 Source: *Wired*, July 2007; p. 143.

The slang included in the article is characterized once again by symbolic violence in relation to specific topics:

- **Transformers**: ass-kicking; muscled up; butt-kicking; assload; smashtacular; bomb;
- **directors**: ham-fisted; (to) screw up; (to) call the shots.

In this story, however, the amount of lexical choices that enhance strength and fighting skills is not motivated by the same need of the stories seen in Sections 5.3 and 5.4. Instead of construing an ideal writer or reader who stands out on account of features such as power, assertiveness and nerve, words such as *ass-kicking* or *assload* are used here as the vocabulary of cartoon fights (e.g. *smashtacular*), thus assigning the writer a voice that is altogether in tune with the surreal chatter of children describing action figures fighting on the screen. So even here slang is chosen for a specific purpose, i.e. taking the reader back to childhood and resuming those conversations and those passions of which she is so fond, but that nowadays lead people to define her as a *geek*[90] or a *nerd*.[91] In the last few years these slang

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[90]   *Geek*, attested in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (online) as originally *geck* (a fool), is defined by Lighter as "*Spec. Stu.* An unsociable or overdiligent student, 1967". Lighter does not record its new slang meaning ("a computer expert") because the Internet and IT era boomed at the end of the 1990s, after the compilation of his dictionary.

[91]   *Nerd* derives almost certainly from the name of a character in the 1950 book "If I ran the zoo" by Dr. Seuss, a famous U.S. children's author. Lighter (1997: 647) defines it as "*Stu.* A dull, obnoxious, or unattractive person".

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words, traditionally considered as offensive in the school environment, have been culturally counter-appropriated by adults whose habits and physical features may resemble the ones of students identified with those terms.

Let us focus on a kind of slang words used in the text that deserves attention, considering what has just been said:

- **Transformers fan**: nerd; geek; hipster; latchkey kid.

Here, he text producer establishes a creative relation of synonymy among nouns that all refer to people who like Transformers. This choice must be functional to a specific purpose, because only *nerd* and *geek* can be considered to a certain extent as synonyms in other discourses. Moreover, these words reveal that the text producer travels between two points in time when referring to Transformers fans: the children of the 1980s on the one hand, and the current generation of thirty-somethings on the other. Slang allows assigning a socio-cultural characterization to both of them. *Latchkey kid* is an expression coined in the 1980s to describe a mass phenomenon in the West, i.e. the first generation of children that were not technically dependent from caretakers while their parents were at work because technology (microwave ovens, television, VCR recorders and so on) allowed them to eat and keep themselves entertained inside the house until dinner time. Needless to say, this reference to *latchkey kids* – made possible by means of a single expression – opens a door on collective memories of the social transformation encapsulated in the phenomenon of 'independent' children. Conversely, *nerd* and *geek* keeps an eye on the present time and on those latchkey kids turned adults.

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Now, if personal deixis is taken into account, the strategy of the writer becomes even clearer: inclusive 'we' is used 17 times in the story, and always in points of the text hinting at the past, as in the clauses "we were *hooked*", "we welcomed them", "Prime was our mech-daddy", "we are tired of seeing our childhood titans humbled". This choice has a very powerful interpersonal effect, which is functional both to the credibility of the article itself and to the general reliability of the magazine-reader bond. Indeed, the writer's and the readers' subject positions are construed as persons who have lived in the same time span, and this is possible thanks to the use of personal deixis. The goal is to reinforce the reader's subject position as a thirty-something computer expert who was a child in the Eighties. The writer's voice is construed as the one of an ideal peer which has the same age of the reader and shares the same cultural background. There is no point in verifying whether the signing author was really a child in the Eighties, as much as it is useless to verify whether the average reader is about the same age. The point is that a magazine such as *Wired* stretches its own roots in the 1980s, the decade where technology (videogames, special effects, home entertainment) boomed and invaded the houses of the United States, thus initiating a cultural turn that has increasingly brought the attention of the audience to magazines such as *Wired*. In this sense, strengthening a common ground of memories and experiences – especially through the use of slang, due to its emotional potential – goes beyond the limits of this story and encourages trust in a non-authoritative way.

5.6.2   "TOY-WONDER"

The second article contains slang only in the body of the text.

The lead paragraph opens with an instance of political slang, 'The *Gipper'* (nickname for Ronald Reagan), and 'that would have been *cool'*; '*must-have* accoutrements', 'the *hip and happening* 13-year-old at the dawn of the modern *Nerd* Era', 'a *cubicle farm'*, 'among the *straights'*, '*must-have* collectibles', 'aimed not just at *nerds* but at everyone', 'if you are deeply *psyched'*, 'a sci-fi *dweeb'* (Fig. 5.87); 'kids (and *nerds*) are fanatic completists', 'the more I get, the cooler I am (quote)', 'To make every toy a *must-have'* (Fig. 5.88).
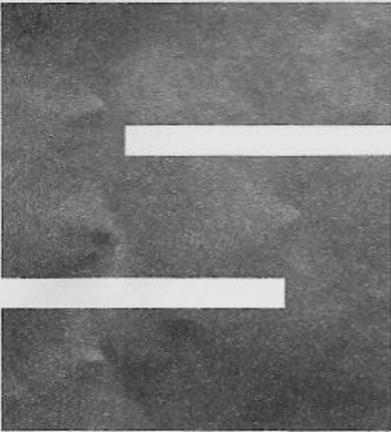
SO MANY THINGS WE CHERISHED IN THE 1980S sprang from dazzling collaborations between two giants. Apple: Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak. Physical fitness: Jane Fonda and Olivia Newton-John. Wham!: George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley. And for the beloved toys called Transformers, you can thank Ronald Reagan and George Lucas. Not literally, of course. The Gipper and the father of *Star Wars* never actually sat down in a room together, downing Mountain Dew and brainstorming until Optimus Prime burst from their skulls like Athena. Although that would have been cool.

No, what happened was more subtle, but it explains why fanboys this summer are alternately slobbering over and scoffing at *Transformers*, the first blockbuster film to be based on a line of toys.

It wouldn't have happened without Uncle George's deft licensing of the rights to make *Star Wars* dolls or Ronnie's deregulation of television advertising to children. And we wouldn't have the movie had toymaker Hasbro not become a purveyor of must-have accoutrements for the hip and happening 13-year-old at the dawn of the modern Nerd Era.

Next time you're in a cubicle farm, take a look around. You'll see your Nerf guns and your lightsabers, your Spider-Men and your Vulcan ideological iconography. But that's mostly over in IT. Among the straights—the non-Jedi crowd—you'll see Transformers. A Constructicon here, a Dinobot there. And everyone can sing the theme song.

That's not by accident. *Transformers* is a movie in 2007 because of the toy-media industrial complex invented in the 1980s. That's when sprawling lines of figures started to be marketed as characters in a ready-mixed narrative, making them must-have collectibles. This new way to play would be supported by ads, yes, but also by entire TV series. And the toys would be aimed not just at nerds but at everyone. If you are deeply psyched to see a live-action Optimus Prime beat up a live-action Megatron, you are not necessarily a sci-fi dweeb. It simply means that everything went exactly according to plan.

NEW TOYS DON'T COME ALONG VERY OFTEN. New ways to play—what people in the business call play patterns—are even rarer. In 1959, Barbie introduced a new play pattern for American girls: a doll that was a glamorous woman to be emulated instead of an infant or child to be mothered. The 1964 introduction of G.I. Joe by Hasbro was another. As toy historian Gary Cross puts it: "Between 1900 and World War II, boys played with machines, girls played with

Fig. 5.87 Source: *Wired*, July 2007; p. 146.

G.I. Joe in **1982**. The new figures—dozens of characters—were highly poseable, stood 3.75 inches tall, and had gear Darpa would shoot a puppy for. And there were bad guys—a vast terrorist conspiracy called Cobra. "Kids were looking to buy more than one figure," Bozigian says. "They wanted the vehicles and play sets that encompassed this whole world."

Hasbro had figured out what worked: lots of characters with an easy-to-follow backstory. For the introduction of Transformers in 1984, Hasbro used the same approach. It bought brand rights from several Japanese companies that made relatively generic toys with one real novelty: They unfolded from familiar vehicles into robot action figures.

The company knew that kids (and nerds) are fanatic completists. It's the baseball card model—or maybe, retrospectively, the Pokémon effect. "You gotta have the whole series," Bozigian says. "We were appealing to the kids' acquisitiveness—the more I get, the cooler I am. You know, he who dies with the most toys wins. That was our marketing philosophy for boys' action." To make every toy a must-have, Hasbro organized the robots into a narrative: Autobot heroes fighting Decepticon villains. Each box came with a description of the character—this isn't just a robot who is also a Walther P38. This is Megatron, villainous mastermind of the evil Decepticons. As it had with G.I. Joe, Hasbro was selling a far-reaching, intricate (if clichéd) epic.

More than that, though, Transformers let boys play with dolls and machines at the same time. Transformable toys were new to

Fig. 5.88 Source: *Wired*, July 2007; p. 147.

The second story, that completes the cover thread, builds on the first one both linguistically and textually. The kind of slang used is very similar to the previous story, although symbolic violence is absent and there seems to be a preference for more 'adult' slang. This may be due to the topic of the story, which is devoted to outlining the economical and media-driven rise of action figures in the realm of toys from the late 1970s to the present day. The theme itself does not need to create an 'emotional' connection with the reader in order to be carried across, but may rather benefit from a more 'cerebral' or intellectual reading approach. This might motivate the use of more sophisticated references, such as the one to the *Gipper* and the self-ironical insistence on *nerds*, considering that the magazine itself is proud of its *nerdiness*. Irony is at play at all times because people who identify or are identified

with 'nerds and geeks' are stereotypically witty and attracted by quotes and culture-specific or in-group references. So being able to accept irony and perform self-irony is a comforting and rewarding act for the reader.

The coherence of the text relies on almost the same assumptions underlying the first: it is assumed that readers are adults but were children in the 1980s, that they used to be followers of the cartoon, and that they are males (the focus is on 'boys'). A new element is taken for granted in the construction of the story: it is assumed that readers either have an office job or at least are very familiar with this environment. The analysis of deixis substantiates this claim because that the focus is on the reader when office life is mentioned. As seen in Figure 5.87, the paragraph starting with "Next time you're in a cubicle farm" is anchored to the office as a physical space by means of all the tools that deixis can provide: personal (*you*, *your*), spatial ('take a look *around*', *see*, *here*, *there*) and temporal anchors (next time, you'*ll* see). The strategy behind the construction of this paragraph is even clearer after realizing that personal deixis is all concentrated in the first subsection of the article. The effect of the text – as it is devised – on the reader is a refreshing sense of community.[92] It seems to be aimed at reinforcing the identification of the reader with all the other readers who become imaginary colleagues: the range of 'office types' mentioned in the paragraph (the IT guys, the *straights* etc.) is also likely to be the range of readers that have been attracted by images and words towards a cover thread on *Transformers*.

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[92]   For a study on the role of action figures in the socialization of Western males, cf. Pecora (1992).

Chapter Six

THE FUNCTION OF SLANG IN COVER STORIES: OVERALL ANALYSIS

Audiences and readers simply do refuse to listen, refuse to care, refuse to process, and just generally reject the message.

Scott (1994: 477)

In this chapter, the analysis moves from isolated case studies to a more general view of the use of slang in the cover stories contained in the corpus. Before starting, I have inserted the above description of audience response offered by Linda Scott, an expert of advertisement writing for professionals in the field of consumer research, to counterbalance at any time the risk of seeing and representing readers as empty vessels into which editors pour magazine covers, unfailingly attracting their attention. In fact, access to a specific story can be gained through many paths, for instance:

- from the cover, to the summary, to the first page of the story (ideal path);
- from the cover to the story, browsing the magazine without checking the page on the summary;
- by opening the magazine randomly and stopping when a verbal or visual element captures the reader's attention;
- by opening a magazine knowing the usual internal organization of the sections, if the reader is familiar with the publication.

Moreover, stories are not necessarily read in all their parts. A reader could, for instance:

- read the article completely from the first to the last page, starting from the body copy and moving on to the off-body sections (ideal path);
- read off-body sections (e.g. flash info or tips) and leave the body copy out, or vice versa;
- read the cover headline or the story headline, stop, and never resume the reading.

These are only a few examples to show that any analysis of the communicative strategies devised in consumer magazines has to consider that editors are concerned not only with the 'ideal' reading path – the one that discourse analysis would follow – but also and perhaps more with all the alternative paths mentioned above. In fact, the 'alternative' (i.e. less frequent or less followed) path is what has been dubbed as 'ideal' in the above lists, because magazines are seldom read systematically and sequentially. Criteria for the distribution of advertisement are a case in point: in consumer magazines, advertising pages are concentrated in the first half of the issue because tests show that free browsing is more likely to start by sticking the thumb in at about that point (cf. McKay, 2000).

Discourse Analysis, and linguistic analyses in general, do not usually consider the reality of reading. The focus is on how texts are constructed, not on how they are accessed. This is a limitation, of course, because editors do keep reading paths and attention spans in

mind when devising the structure of a magazine. Evidence for this can be found in the increasing choice of bulleted lists and framed one-line tips, which aim at attracting the reader's eye and interrupting her aimless browsing.

The kind of analysis provided in Chapter Five and here follows a traditional approach towards the text because it considers a cover story as an organic entity with internal cohesion and specific intertextual features. As a matter of fact, editors do care about free browsing when it involves the position of advertisement pages, but they generally create stories following the ideal reading path (cover → summary → story); if this were not the case, summaries would disappear from consumer magazines because readers hardly ever check page numbers. For this reason, mentioning the exact position of slang items in parts of the text that are visually marked (framed sections, bulleted/numbered lists, headlines, standfirsts etc.) has been considered here as a way to pay sufficient attention to the use of slang as an eye-catching element. This is also the reason why only stories that feature slang on the cover have been selected. In the process of magazine design, the use of slang as an eye-catching tool on the very cover reveals that editors have made an extra effort to make that story more appealing. However, the analysis conducted so far has shown that cover headlines are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the communicative strategies that may involve slang.

Chapter Five has foregrounded how slang is exploited to set readers in specific emotional states which allow them to acquire underlying messages more easily. The feelings that emerged as the most recurrent and effective are arousal, nostalgia, insecurity, and group identification. As the analysis suggests, these emotions can be in

accordance with the overt message provided by the story – let us think of a story on women's underwear that enhances the *hotness* of the *chicks* who wear it – but they may also be utterly in contrast with it. In the case study excerpted from *Glamour* (Section 5.2), for instance, the surface message was a medical warning from finding quick solutions to fight tiredness and the promotion of a healthier lifestyle; in the meanwhile, however, all slang vocabulary worked as one in order to keep the reader emotionally focused on her addictive and helpless nature. The mechanism of this strategy was evidenced by the cover announcement itself ("More energy on less sleep") and by the display of editorial advertisement showcasing anti-fatigue food and pills available on the market, which strongly contradicts the surface blame on *quick fixes*.

It should be pointed out that the goal of this analysis is not in the least to denounce that magazines devise texts to justify advertisement: the practice is so obvious that Steinem (1994: 131) proposes to rename that kind of stories as "supportive editorial atmosphere" for publicity.[93] Our purpose is to understand that slang is heavily exploited in the process: its emotional content, i.e. the 'technological aspect' (in Fairclough's words) which triggers the reader's MRs so effectively makes the audience be more receptive vis-à-vis the real message of the story. In other words, the use of slang aims at what Consterdine (1997: 40, as quoted in McKay 2000: 198) defines as "an aperture or opening to the reader's mind and heart". And aren't memories of in-group talk

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[93] Gloria Steinem is a feminist editor, not a linguist, who has committed to using her experience in the magazine industry to foreground some of the practices used in magazine design and creation. For this reason, when she points at the subduing of stories to advertising, she does not only provides a critical view but she also unveils what actually lies in the mind of real editors when media products are conceived.

among peers the perfect tool – or technology – to pierce one's way into the reader's emotions?

For example, insisting on a car's *hotness* ("*Hot* car porn action! Starts on page 298", *GQ*, March 2007) is likely to put readers unconsciously on tilt, making them more attentive to the appearance or the details of the automobile described in the story. The cars displayed in the story are prototypes and luxury goods that are beyond affordability for the target audience (costs range from 175,000 USD to higher). Therefore, this story does not intend to direct the audience towards the items described *per se*: it simply trains readers to connect those beautiful automobiles to the label *hot car*, so that they will be more likely to trust the magazine's tastes when more affordable automobiles will be described in the future as *hot*.

To give another example, a cover headline such as "Things he thinks about during the *deed* that you really, really need to know" (*Cosmopolitan*, March 2007) uses locker-room slang, more common among males than females, to enhance the expectation that the story provides a genuine male perspective on sex, thus increasing the emotional worry that female readers feel as they learn from the cover that their partners hold back secret (perhaps malicious) comments concerning their sexual performances. Slang has a chief role in building up such emotions because it draws on the readers' memories of male-to-male conversations, say, in school, when metaphors and euphemisms indicating sexual acts were a cospicuous part of in-group speech (cf. Cameron, 1992). Even in this case, creating a story that shakes the readers' certainties on their own sexuality by construing a fictional male voice provides the right "editorial atmosphere" to insert a mention of the books written by the experts who are asked to explain the

thoughts of men, i.e. those of the fictional and nameless male voice construed by the text producer, as if speaking for the whole male community.

The correlation between slang, adversitement and voice characterization will be addressed here by dividing cover stories according to the 'promise' they make on the cover, i.e. the announced topic of the story, following the categorization outlined in Section 4.3. Promise and reality should be kept separated because they do not always match: for instance, the story "London '007: Get your *arse* to the *coolest* city on the planet" (*GQ*, November 2007) is presented on the cover as a cultural coverage of the U.K. capitol, but is in fact a collage of editorial advertisement on restaurants and stores, with not even a body copy article to glue the story together.

Several cover headlines (marked with a *) are listed in more than one Table because they fall into more than one category; nevertheless, the slang item(s) included in them work(s) for the representation of only one element or participant (the product, the reader, the magazine, the guest star, the world).[94]

6.1 "ADVICE FOR READERS" COVER HEADLINES

The cover headlines promising some kind of advice are the largest group and have the same structure in common: a solution is offered for a situation which is presented as a problem. Two types of solutions are implied on the cover:

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[94]   In Tables 4.1-4-6, these cover stories have been counted only once, under the content category to which slang actively contributes.

a) enhancing or bettering the current situation, e.g. "Get ahead faster: 12 brilliant (and slightly *badass*) ways to do it (*Cosmopolitan*, December 2007);

b) avoiding new problems, e.g. "Avoid home *scams*" (*Popular Mechanics*, August 2007).

Moreover, two types of problems are implied:

a) an issue for which the reader is already concerned ("*Losing it*? How to save your hair", *GQ*, January 2007);

b) an issue of which the reader is still unaware, e.g. "What even experienced *chicks* forget to do in bed" (*Cosmopolitan*, July 2007).

Table 6.1: Cover stories presented as "Advice for readers" on the cover; the content of editorial advertisement or editorial mention is specified.

MAG	COVER HEADLINE	EDITORIAL AD/M?
c	A shocking thing 68% of **chicks** do in bed: p. 124. You naughty, naughty girls	-
c	Feel sex more intensely: A guide to your body during the **deed**	-
c	Get ahead faster: 12 brilliant (and slightly **badass**) ways to do it	-
c	Why you should be a jealous **bitch**! And 6 other relationship secrets	-
c	75 sex tricks. Warning: They're so **hot**, this magazine may burst into flames	book
c	9 times you won't burn in hell for being **bitchy**	book
c	Blow his mind! The **awesome** new sex prop - and guess what? It's probably in your purse	book
c	**Hot** new sex trick: This mind-blowing, box-spring breaking technique will intensify everything he feels	book
c	PLUS: Tricks that curb your urge for **junk food**	book
c	The **hottest** thing to do to a man with your hands	book
c	What even experienced **chicks** forget to do in bed	book
c	Beauty tricks that save you **buck**$	hair care products and tools

MAG	COVER HEADLINE	EDITORIAL AD/M?
c	Hey, sexy! **Hot** new summer hairstyles	hair care products
gl	50 shortcuts to a sexier body. Sneaky tricks for **butt**, belly, thighs - every inch of you!	book
gl	Get more energy on less sleep: Exhausted? **Fried**? Read this	energizing food and pills
gl	Exactly what to do to lose weight: The natural way to your **hottest**, healthiest body	book; food; weight-loss pills
gl	* It's the home issue! 99 ways to make over your home: Plus some seriously shocking pictures of how **celebs** really live	furniture
gq	**Losing it**? How to save your hair	book
gq	Your career to-do list: ◊ Be proactive! ?◊ Think outside the box! ◊ Stop using **lame** office lingo!	-
gq	London '007: Get your **arse** to the **coolest** city on the planet	restaurants; clubs; clothes; stores
gq	* GQ Eats: ◊ A man's guide to mastering his kitchen ◊ The **coolest** restaurant neighborhood in America ◊ ...and the **hottest** dish on TV (Find her on page 122)	kitchenware; restaurants
pm	Avoid car repair **scams**	-
pm	Avoid home **scams**	-
pm	**What's shaking**? Solving auto mysteries	-
pm	Avoid credit card **scams**	software
w	* Martha **geeks out**! How to: ◊ **Land** a fat raise ◊ **Rule** the blogosphere ◊ Take **killer** digipics ◊ Outsmart a mechanic ◊ **Snag** a cell phone deal ◊ Weasel free drinks ◊ Keep batteries charged ◊ Email like a pro ◊ Get fired properly ◊ Bake a Wii cake	books

The function of slang in these cover stories is to represent readers as imperfect and not independent people, so that it will be easier for the ideal writer to structure her position hierarchically, i.e. as the reader's advisor or helper, as seen in the case studies analyzed in Chapter Five.

For instance, Table 6.1. shows that *Cosmopolitan* represents its readers as *chicks* and *bitches*.[95] What is considered offensive in most contexts is presented here as a model to be pursued by women who wish to solve their problems in the workplace and in human relationships in general. In particular, the insistence of the magazine on the sexist slur *chick* raises undeniable social implications. Choosing to

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[95] I analyzed gender-specific slang in magazines also in Belladelli (2008b).

portray the ideal woman, successful and confident (as *Cosmopolitan* wants her to be), as a 'chick' – which is a sexist term, albeit playful on the surface, seems a nonsense, because the word usually typecasts young women as attractive, unclever, and wishy-washy human beings.[96] As a matter of fact, by calling ideal readers *chick* the writer superficially flatters them, because that is the way in which men often refer to women as sexual objects. This strategy is very effective in the "advice for readers" stories because it contributes to keep the reader subordinated for the whole story: once readers are reminded of their potential – yet not fully reached – sexiness on the one hand, and of their emotional immaturity on the other (chicks are baby hens), they are more likely to accept advice from a writer or an expert whose voice is shaped to sound older or more experienced. However, the positive connotation of the label *chick* on *Cosmopolitan* covers is not found inside the stories. There, the ideal reader's opponents – competitive co-workers, women who try to steal the reader's boyfriend, annoying passers-by, and so on – are also called *chicks*: some examples are "So when, say, a *chick* flirts with their man, many women may decide just to grit their teeth", and then "Just keep the comments directed at the *chick's* behavior" ("Why you should be a jealous *bitch*! And 6 other relationship secrets", *Cosmopolitan*, November 2007); moreover, men's real-life confessions are rewritten so that the word *chick* refers

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[96]   Wentworth and Flexner (1960: 98-99) labelled it as *example of slang word used only by males*, and *associated with jazz, now common*; defined as "*n.* 1 prison food. *Underworld use* [...] 2 a girl or young woman, esp. if attractive, pert, and lively; a hip girl or woman". Lighter (1994: 393-394) labels it as *most common after ca1935, esp. in jazz & entertainment* and *in earlier S.E. used only in direct address as an endearment for children*; defined as "*n.* 1a a young woman; a woman or girl. [...] 1b a man; fellow; CHICKEN. [...] 2 *Mil. Av.* a friendly aircraft as part of a formation in flight"; also described as "*adj.* interesting and fully understandable only to women – used pronominally [examples since 1993]". Spears (2006: 65) defines it as "*n.* a girl or woman".

predominantly to unstable or bad women, such as in the stories listed as "Outsiders' perspective" (Section 6.2).

The word bitch undergoes the same phenomenon of ideological confusion. For example, all the slang items in the story entitled "9 times you won't burn in hell for being *bitchy*" (*Cosmopolitan*, May 2007) fall into two clear-cut categories:

- **reader's representation**: *bitchy*; *bitch*; *(to) kick butt*; *dead* (adv.); *(to) bring a beef*; *naggy*; *(to) screw up*; *pissy*; *wimpy*; 'smart *bitch'*.
- **representation of people who take advantage of the reader**: *bro*, '*flaky* friend *crashing* at your place', 'a *pal* with a *jerky* man', *buddy, beyotch,* 'bad *bitch'*.

The list shows that ideological creativity is at play to create confusion between the reader (the supposed positive character in the struggle against the problem) and her opponents, who are defined *bitches* as much as she is. Moreover, within the same text the reader is warned from her *flaky* friend, but at the same time is accused to be *wimpy*: both modifiers point at the same flaw, i.e. a lack of temper and maturity, since the former means 'unreliable' and the latter means 'weak'. The mixed use of these slurs (*chick* and *bitch*) proves that the ideological creativity of text producers does not aim at a fairer representation of women. *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour* have tried to impose their allegedly new attitude towards women by discouraging thinness (*Glamour*) and by counter-appropriating disparaging labels attributed to women (*Cosmopolitan*). However, textual and discoursal analysis of these covers proves that the counter-appropriation is not similar to the one

made by the gay community in the Seventies and Eighties with regard to the word *queer*, or the struggle fought in these last few years by African Americans to give a positive spin to the meaning of the slur *nigger*,[97] as explained in Chapter One. Despite the feminist crusades on the cover, the stories contained in these women's magazines remain conservative and, at worst, provide an ideologically unclear message that put readers in an even more subordinated and static position.

As Table 6.1 shows, most of the pieces of advice offered by these cover headlines lead to some form of editorial advertisement within the story, especially books. In all cases, their authors are the very 'experts' that are asked to offer advice or explain the causes of the issue presented as a problem. In other cases, solutions are said to be available on the market not only as knowledge (books) but also as purchasable goods (clothes, furniture, cars, tools).

6.2 "OUTSIDERS' PERSPECTIVE" COVER HEADLINES

The stories falling into this category offer a common promise on the cover, i.e. to open a window on habits, thoughts and secrets of ordinary people who do not belong to the ideal community created by the magazine. The preferred 'outsiders' are members of the opposite sex, as Table 6.2 shows.

The reader's curiosity about outsiders' points of view is activated in two ways. Some stories are created by devising a cover headline which implies the existence of a problem, e.g. sexual dissatisfaction in a male-female relationship, and provides the man's point of view with regard to its causes, responsibilities, and possible solutions. Others are created by presenting alternative behaviors as laughable or despicable.

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[97]   For a broad analysis of this word, cf. Kennedy (2002).

Table 6.2: Cover stories presented as "Outsiders' perspective" on the cover; the content of editorial advertisement or editorial mention is specified.

MAG	COVER HEADLINE	EDITORIAL AD/M?
c	4 things all guys keep private (The first one's a real **doozy**)	-
c	Caught **butt naked**! These horny couples couldn't control themselves. You'll laugh **your ass off**	-
c	**Chick** behavior that baffles the hell out of guys	-
c	Confessions Special! Guys **spill** their dirty, **dumb-ass** blunders. You'll die laughing	-
c	Erotic sex: 7 boundary-pushing moves all men secretly crave (and you'll **get off** on too)	-
c	Girlfriend traits guys find "**freakin' awesome**"	-
c	Guys' sex confessions: Surprising stuff they don't want from you in the **sack**	-
c	Guys **spill**: White lies they tell women all the time	-
c	"My boyfriend didn't change his boxers for 3 months!" **Hysterical** and cringe-worthy confessions	-
c	His #1 sex fantasy: No woman has had the nerve to try this on him... And he'll **go** totally **nuts** when you do	book
c	Sex shockers: Things he thinks about during the **deed** that you really, really need to know	book
c	Sex **smarts**: Secrets of male arousal: A surprising trigger to his deepest sex cravings	book
c	The sex position he craves: It gives him the **hottest** view...and hits all the right spots	book
c	You sex goddess! **Crazy-ass** moves he wants you to do to him there	book
gl	Your body: what turns him on (& what **freaks** him **out**)	-
gq	The 7 habits of highly successful **suck-ups**	-

The effectiveness of the first strategy lies in its ability to destabilize the reader's certainties and to lead her to seek advice and find a solution. Putting women in a deficit position has always been done by magazines. As Tuchman et al. (1978: 93) pointed out thirty years ago,

despite the large variation (…), all women's magazines ultimately project a similar image of women's feminine characteristics. Supportive of others and concerned with emotional well-being, woman supposedly strives to please. When she fails to cater to the concerns of others, she is politely damned.

The reality has not changed in the last thirty years, given that most of the headlines listed in Table 6.2 bring out issues for which the woman is construed as responsible, because she either fails or refuses to do what men want or what other women already do – in our times, *refusing* is creatively reinvented as *lacking the nerve*, instead of having moral constraints. This common psychological strategy is aided by slang, which appears to be used on covers to anchor the reader to the emotional state in which she is put. In turn, the analysis of the stories related to the cover headlines does not highlight a generalizable use of slang, which occurs almost exclusively in real-life confessions made by young men. The function of slang in that case seems that of shaping the interviewees' voice as young and lively as possible, since the texts included in the story have been rewritten by the editorial staff, as footnotes or baselines specify,[98] while the confessions must sound like they are genuinely coming from young men who use slang.

Conversely, as other cover stories evidence, a goal for which slang plays a key role is to represent outsiders as imperfect or unattractive. This strategy consists in offering the reader a view of other lifestyles, which can be either in open opposition or simply alternative to the one usually encouraged by the magazine. In so doing, the reader's

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[98]   The most common formulation is "as told to __", also used for expert's comments. Cf. Section 5.3.

voyeurism is satisfied, but at the same time the story is devised in such a way that the dominance of the social group to which readers belong is always reconfirmed. Caldas-Coulthard (1996: 255) suggests that first-person narratives usually "provide for the reader vicarious and transgressive pleasures linked to the prohibited and the utopian". At the same time, she reminds that "The ambiguous message, based on the contradictory nature of the narratives, is either 'don't do it' or 'if you do it you will feel guilty afterwards'. The transgressive pleasure leads to social punishment" (Caldas-Coulthard, 1996: 268).

Slang has the power to punish because it encapsulates black-or-white, 'unsanitized' evaluations, and because, if heard or read by adults, it recalls the dynamics of group inclusion or exclusion which are typical of teenagers. In the stories that have this structure, slang has the role to keep the reader in an emotional state that makes her feel better or more stable than the outsider, i.e. by stressing and overwording the element of blame that is needed to represent the outsider as a laughable or despicable person. Behaviors deviating from the mainstream are described on covers as *hysterical*, *dumb-ass*, and worth laughing '*your ass off*'; on the other hand, co-workers who climb the career ladder by adulating the boss are defined as *suck-ups* (*GQ*, July 2007).

For example, the cover story entitled "Caught *butt naked*! These horny couples couldn't control themselves. You'll laugh *your ass off*" (*Cosmopolitan*, July 2007) offers the real-life confessions of young couples who had sexual intercourse in a public place. Although these acts are performed by a male and a female, all the anecdotes are told by women, and they are reformulated so as to represent narrators under a pejorative light by making them more masculine. As Kipfer (2007: xii) claims:

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Women use taboo and vulgar slang quite often now, something formerly thought of as a male preserve. Sociologically, this shows the determination of women to enter the power structure and shed the restrictions of being female. Psychologically, the implications are less clear, but it may be that women are determined to be aggressive and strong, once identified as a part of profound maleness.

Therefore, slang proves to be an effective tool in this kind of stories.

6.3 "CELEBRITY/SPECIAL GUEST" COVER HEADLINES

Guest stars are already an eye catcher on a magazine cover. Celebrities are usually chosen as cover guests because they embody the badge values of the magazine on which they appear. In these cases, it has been observed that slang only serves to enhance the special guest's feature that best suits the image of the magazine.

Table 6.3: Cover stories presented as "Celebrity/special guest coverage" on the cover; the content of editorial advertisement or editorial mention is specified.

MAG	COVER HEADLINE	EDITORIAL AD/M?
c	Julia Stiles: The least **bitchy** girl in Hollywood!	movie
c	Plus: Yummy guy **eye candy** inside	movies
e	J. Jacobs becomes a **hot** available woman	-
e	That insane **chick** from *Wedding crashers*	-
e	**Burned-out**, beat down, but not forever: Robert Downey Jr.'s triumphal return begins, um, tomorrow	designer clothes
gl	America Ferrera: Ugly Betty is **hot**!	designer clothes; clothes
gl	**Hot** at every age! Claire Danes, 28, Queen Latifah, 37, and Mariska Hargitay, 43	clothes; accessories
gl	* It's the home issue! 99 ways to make over your home: Plus some seriously shocking pictures of how **celebs** really live	home accessories; furniture

MAG	COVER HEADLINE	EDITORIAL AD/M?
gq	Barack Obama **rules**: On the road with the great contender	-
gq	John McCain. Scenes from a **meltdown**	-
gq	**Superbad**: Is Chad Johnson the best show in the NFL?	-
gq	Who's your **daddy**, America? Stephen Colbert for president	-
gq	You throw like Tom Cruise: The 10 **lamest** sports-movie performances of all time	movie
gq	GQ Eats: ◊ A man's guide to mastering his kitchen ◊ The **coolest** restaurant neighborhood in America ◊ ...and the **hottest** dish on TV (Find her on page 122)	kitchenware; restaurants; tv show
w	***** What we don't know about... ◊ The universe ◊ Life & death ◊ Sleep ◊ The brain ◊ Time ◊ Language ◊ Gravity ◊ Earth's core ◊ Black holes ◊ Belly button lint ◊ & other mysteries ◊ With guest **smarty-pants** John Hodgman, *The Daily Show*'s resident expert	-
w	***** Martha **geeks out**! How to: ◊ **Land** a fat raise ◊ **Rule** the blogosphere ◊ Take **killer** digipics ◊ Outsmart a mechanic ◊ **Snag** a cell phone deal ◊ Weasel free drinks ◊ Keep batteries charged ◊ Email like a pro ◊ Get fired properly ◊ Bake a Wii cake	books

For example, the ideal male promoted by *Esquire* – manly, stylish yet fairly dangerous – is well represented by actor Robert Downey Jr., who has been in and out of rehab several times for drug and alcohol abuse, but who can wear designer suits with elegant nonchalance. By describing him as *burned-out*, a slang synonym for *intoxicated,* the text producer instantly clarifies that the attitude held by the magazine is not judgmental with regard to Downey's lifestyle. As Eble (1996: 127) points out,

> The attitude towards drinking excessively conveyed by the user of slang is at least nonjudgmental, if not admiring, and allies the speaker with the person who has committed the social impropriety. However, this attitude towards excessive

drinking seems motivated more by a desire not to offend a
peer than by a desire to rebel against authority.

The hypocrisy suggested by this claim is a key element for mainstream magazines: slang allows to express solidarity to whoever is blamed by society for improper behavior, but at the same time it does not entail a direct criticism towards the powers that have set such behavioral standards, by praising sobriety, healthy habits, and refrain from illegal substances. In this sense, *Esquire* draws the reader's attention by triggering fascination and curiosity for the life of an unconventional man without stepping out of the social boundaries that grant the magazine a place in the mainstream.

Another example is offered by the cover story "America Ferrera: Ugly Betty is *hot*!" (*Glamour*, October 2007). Here, an actress who has built her own career on her unattractiveness is showcased as an object of sexual desire, in spite of her not complying with the beauty canon shared by most of her colleagues. Ferrera's appearance on the cover was the final act of a year-long campaign promoted by *Glamour* against the hegemony of excessively thin role models in women's magazines. Defining the actress as *hot* is an attempt to make a strong statement and redefine the beauty canon. However, if the whole story is considered, this façade marketing move is unmasked. The story consists of one interview with the actress and a large section of editorial advertisement on clothes and accessories for plus-size women. Slang is focused on two tasks: a) overwording the idea of sexiness (*hot*, *hotter*, *bombshell*, *A-list* style) and b) providing a negative representation of women who are thin and show their body too blatantly: wearing hot pants and thongs is *TMI* (acronym for *Too Much Information*), whereas skinny celebrities

who don't wear any underwear are dubbed as vulgar for *going commando* (a slang definition for that practice). So, slang triggers positive emotions in the reader who feels uncomfortable with her weight by describing plus-size women with the same vocabulary that is usually saved for thinner ones; simultaneously, it triggers a sense of solidarity among those readers by recalling the language of gossip which is common in female-only conversations that have other women as topic. As a result, unleashing such feelings makes the reader less critical of her own body and more willing to accept the purchasing suggestions displayed in the editorial advertisement sections. This strategy is so effective that the magazine applies it also to the cover story "*Hot* at every age!" (*Glamour*, September 2007), which is supposed to give voice to a struggle against ageism: the same slang lexeme is found on the cover, the story has the same structure (interviews plus editorial advertisement), and a lexical analysis of the texts show that slang reinforces the representation of strong and temperamental women (*gutsy*, *butt-kicking*, *cool*, *cool-ass chick*) who are not scared of aging.

It is sometimes the case that guest stars appear on covers to break a tradition or destabilize the habitual reader's expectations. Slang seems to work to provide a firmer motivation for their presence in the magazine, and to specify under which light a given celebrity will be presented. For instance, Martha Stewart is a very powerful white anchorwoman who is best known as America's housewife: she runs TV shows about cooking and housekeeping and she has launched several top-selling magazines, such as *Martha Stewart Living*. Her appearance as a guest in a magazine such as *Wired* is plausible because it is supported by a clear display of self-irony: on the cover, she is portrayed

as she puts icing on a cake that has the shape of a Nintendo Wii™ console, while the cover headline reads "Martha *geeks out*!". The contrast between the traditional representation of Stewart surrounded by kitchen tools and the reference to her passion for technology is effective as an eye-catcher for prospective purchasers at the newsstand; at the same time, it is reassuring for subscribers, who see the witty and ironical attitude of their magazine of choice reconfirmed once again. As a matter of fact, Stewart's *geekiness* is real: a one-page interview in the story confirms that she loves computers and is obsessed with new-generation technological items such as Blackberries, thus providing the guest star with a characterization that is unconventional if her public persona is considered, but also understandable, given that she has created a media empire comparable only to the one controlled by her African American counterpart in show business, Oprah Winfrey.

6.4 "WORLD FACTS/NEWS" COVER HEADLINES

Table 6.4: Cover stories presented as "World facts/news" on the cover; the content of editorial advertisement or editorial mention is specified.

MAG	COVER HEADLINE	EDITORIAL AD/M?
gq	Forget George Bush: The **slam-dunk** case for impeaching Dick Cheney	-
w	How to **scam** Digg	-
w	How Yahoo **screwed up**	-
w	What went wrong in Iraq (Hint: Blame the **geeks**)	-
w	Transformers: 25 years of **butt-kicking 'bots**	-
w	* What we don't know about… ◊ The universe ◊ Life & death ◊ Sleep ◊ The brain ◊ Time ◊ Language ◊ Gravity ◊ Earth's core ◊ Black holes ◊ Belly button lint ◊ & other mysteries ◊ With guest **smarty-pants** John Hodgman, *The Daily Show*'s resident expert	-

In these cover headlines slang seems to be used to make the topic of the story more appealing and worth reading, by conveying levity to a piece of news and/or by enhancing the trustworthiness of the point of view from which it is reported.

For example, "Forget George Bush: The *slam-dunk* case for impeaching Dick Cheney" (*GQ*, March 2007) does not contain slang except for the cover; indeed, it is a highly critical signed article with explicit charges to former U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney. The modifier *slam-dunk* derives from basketball slang, indicating a kind of throw that forces the ball into the basket from above thanks to a high jump (Spears, 2006: 321); at the same time, *to slam* someone means to criticize her harshly. Symbolic violence and cultural appropriation are involved in this metaphor, since the audience's MRs concerning slam dunks are very likely to contain the idea of an object (a basketball) smashed onto the floor on one hand, and black NBA athletes performing that kind of throw on the other. The physicality of both the agent and the act is thus appropriated by the magazine, and used to characterize the writer's voice and argumentation. In this case, however, the appropriation does not cause a clear damage to the ethnic group from which basketball culture is borrowed: unlike articles and stories that use the slang of minority groups to enrich the representation of white élites (cf. Section 5.3), the goal of this story is to let the audience know about the political responsibilities of Cheney and to make sure that as many readers as possible get to read the report.

"What went wrong in Iraq (Hint: blame the *geeks*)" (*Wired*, December 2007) uses a different strategy to reach the same goal: instead of enhancing the magazine's or the writer's authoritativeness, the text producer attracts the audience's attention by constructing a

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headline letting readers infer that *geeks* are responsible for U.S. military failures in Iraq. Since *Wired*'s target reader consider herself as a *geek*, such a headline is an excellent tool to encourage such a demanding reading – a 15-column article on a grave topic – given that the article has to compete with lighter ones, such as a story on Matt Groening's cartoon *Futurama*, or one concerning "Gadgets and gear for the holidays". Even in this case, slang is almost absent in the article, except for *geek*, which is used three more times, and *buddy*, a term originated in the military world to define a fellow soldier.[99]

In turn, the announced topics of stories such as "How Yahoo *screwed up*" (*Wired*, February 2007), "How to *scam* Digg[100] (*Wired*, March 2007), and "Transformers: 25 years of *butt-kicking 'bots*!" (*Wired*, July 2007) are appealing enough to a predominantly male audience who is fond of computers and technology. For this reason, the role of slang in those texts has to be searched elsewhere. In these stories, slang is found to serve the reinforcement of the reader-writer bond in the name of a shared childhood (as seen in Section 5.5) and in the name of a common point of view with regard to a specific topic, namely Yahoo's bad business decisions and the phenomenon of Internet crowdhacking. By placing slang on the cover to describe these events, the text producer makes the magazine's voice sound up to date and familiar with those topics, therefore more reliable in the eyes of the target audience. Moreover, several slang items occur in these stories

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[99]   Wentworth and Flexner (1960: 67) list it as a suffixed variant of the noun *bud*, label it as *colloquial* and define it as "*n.* friend; fellow". Lighter (1994: 287-288) lists it as an independent lexeme, labels it as *now colloquial or S.E.*, and define it as "*n.* 1 Orig *Black E.* a friend or comrade; (in early use esp.) a comrade-in-arms. [...] 2 *Mining.* a miner's assistant. [...] 3 fellow; man – used in direct address, esp. to a stranger whose name is not known. [In 1990 quot., used in direct address to a woman]".
[100]   *Digg* is a website and a social network there Internet users can share links and informaton on a variety of topics.

(both by the writer and in quotes from interviews), unlike the ones in which slang only serves as a mask to make the article less reader-repellent due to its allegedly excessive seriousness.

Mitigating seriousness seems to be a priority also for the cover story entitled "What we don't know about (…) With guest *smarty-pants* John Hodgman, *The Daily Show*'s resident expert" (*Wired*, February 2007). Attributing more levity to the phenomena listed on the cover is obtained by giving a jokingly negative evaluation of the expert by calling him *smarty-pants*, a slang synonym for the colloquial term *Mr. Know-All*, a learned yet obnoxious person. In so doing, the accurate answers provided by serious experts in the story are backgrounded, whereas the silliness and irony of Hodgman's comments on the same topics are foregrounded, thus giving the reader the illusion that the inside story is more light-hearted than it actually is. This strategy is confirmed by the fact that all the slang words found within the story are concentrated in the texts signed by him.

6.5 "PRODUCTS SHOWCASE" COVER HEADLINES

The function of slang in these stories is clear: it serves to enhance the qualities of the products *per se*, or to promise that purchasers will acquire such qualities after possessing a given object.

Table 6.5: Cover stories presented as "Products showcase" on the cover; the content of editorial advertisement or editorial mention is specified.

MAG	COVER HEADLINE	EDITORIAL AD/M?
c	**Hottest** clothes for spring	clothes
gl	Fall bonus: 534 **A-list** fashion finds & **freebies**!	accessories; clothes
gl	**Hottest** freebies - the same loot the stars get	accessories; clothes
gl	Why pay more? Fashion **steals** for under $50	clothes
gq	**Hot** car-porn action! Starts on page 298	cars
gq	The **coolest** jeans you can buy (They're not blue)	clothes

MAG	COVER HEADLINE	EDITORIAL AD/M?
gq	From cameras to laptops (and even **air guitars**): Our annual guide to the best stuff of the year	tech items
gq	GQ Eats: ◊ A man's guide to mastering his kitchen ◊ The **coolest** restaurant neighborhood in America ◊ ...and the **hottest** dish on TV (Find her on page 122)	kitchenware; restaurants; TV show
pm	Car show report: **Hot** 2008 Nissan Coupé	cars
pm	Supercar showdown: Audi R8 vs. Porsche, **Vette** and Viper	cars

In some cases, the presence of slang is limited to the cover, whereas the rest of the story features little or no slang at all. On the one hand, we find "*Hottest* clothes for spring" (*Cosmopolitan*, February 2007), "Car show report. *Hot* 2008 Nissan Coupé", *Popular Mechanics*, February 2007) and "The *coolest* jeans you can buy" (*GQ*, April 2007), where the most frequent and versatile terms of approval, *hot* and *cool*, provide a positive evaluation of the items described in the story. In particular, *hot* proves more effective than *cool* – and it is therefore used more frequently on covers – because it contains a mix of newness and desirability thanks to the combination of the Standard English idiom *hot off [the press, the oven, the factory]*, which only means 'brand new, just issued', and the explicitly sexual connotation found in slang usage.

On the other hand, we find a headline such as "From cameras to laptops (and even *air guitars*)" (*GQ*, December 2007), where the slang lexeme on the cover jokingly refers to the now famous Nintendo Wii™ videogame named *Guitar Hero*, where gamers must pretend to be playing music by pressing buttons on a stringless toy guitar.

Other techniques involving the use of slang lexemes are found in cover headlines to show the magazine's familiarity with the topic of the related story. When a Corvette is called *Vette*, as shown in Table 6.5, the text producer construes the magazine's voice in such a way that a common ground of car knowledge is immediately established with the

reader; the same familiarity is maintained throughout the story, where a Chevrolet is referred to as *Chevy*. As far as evaluation is concerned, the slang modifiers which define the showcased cars are *hot* and *posh*, i.e. adjectives that usually pertain to the description of women, thus confirming the effectiveness of keeping the readers' senses open and aroused for a better reception of the physical beauty of the automobiles visually displayed and verbally described in the story. Moreover, a Corvette is said to 'take some muscle to *hustle'*: this phrase embodies a two-fold act of appropriation of African American culture, through the use of rhyming slang[101] on one hand, and through the verb *to hustle* on the other. *Hustling* has more than one meaning in slang vocabulary, namely a) to move rapidly, b) to scheme or engage in illegal activities, and c) to seduce someone (Spears, 2006: 185). The words *muscle* and *hustle* are likely to trigger an image in the reader's MRs, i.e. a scheming or seductive African American man: representing a luxury car as a physically endowed black male is a way to evoke exoticism and dangerousness, and then to attribute those qualities onto whomever happens to drive that automobile. This kind of cultural appropriation is similar to the one observed in Chapter Five, Section 5.3, where Brooklyn's exoticism and toughness are temporarily robbed from the real dwellers by the text producer in order to give readers the illusion of being manly and daring for just eating in that New York Borough for one day.

The same goal, i.e. representing cars as conveyers of virility, is pursued in the cover story "*Hot* car-porn action" (partly discussed earlier in this chapter) by condensing some of the strategies that have already been foregrounded in Chapter Five. In this case, slang

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[101]   On the centrality of rhyming slang in black culture in the United States, cf. Dienhart (1999).

contributes exclusively to the representation of the cars displayed in the story and to that of a range of stereotyped males that are juxtaposed to an ideal man with which both writer and reader are led to identify. As far as the former task is concerned, the passenger's seat is called *shotgun* (*GQ*, March 2007, p. 300), a term that has entered general slang in the last few years but that originated in gangsters' speech;[102] by the same token, the Mosler MT900S is said to have 'started *kicking major European butt*' when it began competing in races. As seen in Sections 5.3–5.5, symbolic violence can be effective to reinforce camaraderie because it draws both on memories of locker room speech, reproducing the predominance of heterosexuality, and on childhood memories of fictional fights occurring in cartoons, thus gathering readers around a collective past experience. Moreover, the text producer attempts to reinforce the bond with the reader. Slang is utterly responsible for this strategy because the remaining slang lexemes in this story, i.e. all but *shotgun* and *(to) kick butt*, are devoted to describing other kinds of car lovers that are represented as 'losers' by the writer, so that the reader will not feel guilty for not being able to afford such cars. The wealthy child who dreams of luxury cars and buys one as a grown up is described as *pimply-faced*; the amateurs who spend more time gathering information on new cars than the writer deems appropriate are dubbed as *car porn junkies*; finally, slang serves to make fun of the very few men who can afford such expensive cars: an ideal millionaire is jokingly described as saying 'I'm loaded *and* I'm nuts' (emphasis in the original). Therefore, here slang is all devoted to enhance the attractiveness of luxury cars and then justify why it is acceptable not to own one.

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[102]   Hit-and-run murders are performed by shooting from the right-hand side window of a car in motion.

Reassuring the reader that such cars are beyond affordability has a key long-term goal: to reconfirm the ideal class shared by the ideal writer and the ideal reader, i.e. middle or upper-middle class. As Chomsky (2005/1992: 93) points out, "the culture managers (editors, leading columnists, etc.) share class interests with state and business managers and other privileged sectors".

Other cover stories use the same strategy, i.e. employing slang to reinforce the writer's/reader's shared class. For instance, in "Why pay more? Fashion *steals* for under $50" (*Glamour*, November 2007) slang only describes the inexpensiveness of the showcased outfits and accessories. In "Fall bonus: 534 *A-list* fashion finds & *freebies*!" (*Glamour*, September 2007) it is used to enhance via overwording the expensive appearance (*hot*, *A-list*, *ritzy*) of items that can be obtained (*snagged*, *scored*) for free (*freebie, steal*): the ideological creativity employed by the text producer in establishing the synonymy relation between acquiring and stealing contains an element of class struggle, too, because it is made on the assumption that very expensive items (e.g. a $1,000 suitcase, p. 74) should not be left for those who can afford them – a message that could encourage middle-class readers to become critical of their own class position and to question social unbalance – but should still be pursued by those who cannot buy them through alternative paths, such as a magazine lottery or a way to obtain them at no cost. In this sense, representing the reader as a stealer (albeit with the mitigating and endearing help of slang) is by no means innocent on the ideological level, because it is built on and reproduces the stereotype according to which women's impulsiveness is uncontrollable and oblivious of limits in the purchasing process, just like that of a thief. The same strategy is used in another *Glamour* cover story, "*Hottest*

freebies – the same loot the stars get" (December 2007), where the same slang lexemes (*hot*, *freebie*, *to score*) occur, and where the showcased items are represented as 'loot', i.e. something that has been or deserves to be stolen.

6.6 MAGAZINE CHARACTERIZATION

Very few cover stories belong to this category, as Table 6.6 shows. The function of their headlines is to praise the exceptionality of the whole monthly issue and to provide a preview of its general content.

Table 6.6: Cover stories presented as "Magazine characterization" on the cover; the content of editorial advertisement or editorial mention is specified.

MAG	COVER HEADLINE	EDITORIAL AD/M?
c	The **hot** issue	the magazine itself; books.
e	The most useful issue ever: Essential skills for men who are neither **geeks** nor obsessives	everything advertised in the issue; the magazine itself.
gl	***** It's the home issue! 99 ways to make over your home: Plus some seriously shocking pictures of how **celebs** really live	furniture

The cover thread extracted from *Esquire* has been analyzed thoroughly in Chapter Five. The cover thread found in *Glamour* has a very similar structure, and slang is used in a similar way. In "The most useful issue ever", slang served to strengthen the reader-writer bond in the name of shared passions and a shared vocabulary. Here, the passion connecting the reader and the writer is the glamorous jet set world, displayed by the free use of slang words such as *glam*, *celeb*, *(to) dish dirt*, 'Madonna's a real estate *mogul*', or *(to) make it big*. Once a common ground is set, i.e. uncritical admiration for celebrities, the houses of famous actresses

and professionals are photographed, in order to show the furniture in their mansions. Finally, large sections of editorial advertisement let readers know that less expensive versions of those very pieces of furniture are available on the market. Slang contributes to this shift from celebrities' houses to readers' houses. Actress Rossum Fine declares that

> [My interior designer and I] found a way to mix in sophisticated elements – a low, *sleek* couch, silver frames and candlesticks – with more eclectic pieces, like the *funky* red chairs (*Glamour*, November 2007, p. 279)

On the very next page, a section of editorial advertisement takes advantage of the same slang adjectives to describe the advertised items: "These *sleek* pieces add lots of style at a little price (subhead)" and "*Funky* lamp, $40. Get it at target.com" (caption).

As far as the third cover thread, "The *hot* issue" (*Cosmopolitan*, August 2007), slang only plays a role as an eye-catching and emotion-catching labeler. Aside from the cover, the little picture of a solid red sphere – similar to a shiny pool ball – with the sign 'Hot' on it is placed beside several stories listed in the summary; then, the same label is repeated on the first page of each of those stories. As often highlighted in these chapters, *hot* is probably the most effective slang word in the hands of the media nowadays.

Chapter Seven

CALLING THINGS BY THEIR NAMES: FINAL REMARKS ON THE EXPLOITATION OF SLANG

> *To interpret the world convincingly is to change it.*
>
> Attridge (1987: 202)

This study has aimed at opening a new perspective in the study of American slang by putting aside lexicography and by acknowledging that its overuse in the mass media – after centuries of stigmatization – has now a priority in linguistic analysis. Slang does not merely provides levity, youthfulness and flavor to the language of magazines and advertising. Slang has become an effective tool in the hands of the media because of its emotional content: by triggering in-group memories and a sense of collective identity, slang manages to modify the readers' emotional state and make them more open and receptive to the overt and covert messages offered by the magazine. Textual and discoursal analysis conducted on a corpus of six monthly consumer magazines published in the United States of America in 2007 has evidenced that the function of slang is to draw on the readers' Member Resources (or mental models) in order to activate specific emotions. Regardless of the putative topic of the story, the role of slang seems to be that of suspending rationality and triggering the following emotional states: anxiety, when one's excess or lack of self-control is highlighted and exposed; nostalgia of childhood and teenage years, especially as far

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as in-group complicity and bonding are concerned; aggressiveness; sexual arousal.

Slang vocabulary is not simply 'borrowed' from ordinary users by the media. The notion of borrowing, which belongs to the field of linguistics, embodies the ideological representation of equally powerful languages or varieties that lend linguistic items to each other without damaging or disparaging the speakers of either language. Evidence from analysis has motivated the use of evaluating terms such as *exploitation* and *shoplifting*. As soon as new slang words are created, the mass media appropriate them and grant them access straight to public discourse, in such a way that nowadays (unlike in the past) new words or new meanings do not even have the time to express resistance to the system of values embodied by Standard vocabulary. This process can be considered as a form of theft because it only enriches the media: cultural authorities (writers, editors, celebrities, politicians etc.) instantly seem younger, closer to ordinary people, more likely to share their values. Conversely, once mainstream culture has emptied slang of its abrasiveness, users are left with a vocabulary which is no longer creative and alternative to the Standard. Ordinary speakers are not granted the analytical tools (in school, for example) to realize this process; therefore, they continue to use that very vocabulary, thus reproducing the values of the media instead of their own, and they are even stigmatized for using 'empty slangy vocabulary'.

This phenomenon is part of the 'false democratization of discourse' heralded by Critical Theory and by all critical approaches stemming from it. The unprecedented allowing of slang into mainstream writing such as monthly magazines does not signal a fairer distribution of cultural power between those who control the media

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and those who simply access them. This is an exploitative act, or an act of shoplifting, because it deprives and banalizes the people who create slang, and then uses such vocabulary to convey covert messages directed at them.

This study has been conducted holding the idea that allegedly innocent practices, such as the use of 'young vocabulary' in consumer magazines created for young adults, deserve to be studied critically, as any form of communication where participants have a different degree of agency and cultural power. Similar studies are much needed, especially in the field of non-Standard vocabularies and varieties. These codes are approached patronizingly, either as deviances to be justified, or as 'pure' and adamantine expressions of the Disempowered to be preserved and defended. What I have attempted to show is that language is never pure, and neither are the hands that try to wipe it clean.

APPENDIX

awesome
12-stepper
24/7
40 winks
ace, *v.*
air guitar
air quote
A-list
all the rage
along for the ride
amp up, *v.*
arse
artsy
ass
asshole
ass-kicking
ass-kisser
assload
assmosis
awesome
babe
bad
bad news
badass
bag
bag lady
baldy
ballsy
bar crawl
base
batshit
be like, *v.*
beer gut
belly up, *v.*
best bang for the
      buck
beyotch
BFF
big
big deal

big dog
big shot
big-time
birthday suit
bitch
bitchin'
bitchy
biz
blab
blah
blamestorm
blast
blazing-hot
bloody
blooper
blow, *v.*
blow [cash], *v.*
blow off, *v.*
blowjob
bod
bomb
bombshell
bong
bonkers
boob
boomer
booty
booty call
booty session
booze
boppy
bot
bottom line
bouncer
brain buster
brains
bring a beef, *v.*
bring home the
      bacon, *v.*
bro

BS
bubble-busted
buck
buck naked
bud
buddy
buggy
bullshit
bullshit artist
bum
bun
bundle
burned-out
bust, *v.*
bust out, *v.*
busted
butch
butchie
butt
butt in, *v.*
butt naked
butt-kicking
butt-kisser
butt-kissing
buttock
buzz
buzzing
buzzword
call sheet
call the shots, *v.*
celeb
cheapie
cheat sheet
cheese ball
cheesy
Chevy
chick
chill, *v.*
chill out, *v.*
chin job

clean freak
clusterfuck
C-note
cocky
combo
come clean, *v.*
come into town, *v.*
comfy
comp
con
con artist
cookie-cutter
cool
cool-ass
cowgirl
crack, *v.*
crack [a joke], *v.*
crack up, *v.*
cranky
crap
crappy
crap-talk
crash, *v.*
crazy-ass
crazy-good
creep
creepy
crew
cube farm
cube farmers
cubicle farm
cut it, *v.*
cut one's teeth, *v.*
daddy
dead, *adv.*
deal breaker
deceptionist
decruit
deed
dick
dig, *v.*
digit

dimwit
dingleberry
dirt
dis, *v.*
dish dirt, *v.*
ditch, *v.*
do drugs, *v.*
do dick, *v.*
do got game, *v.*
do time, *v.*
doc
doggie
doggie-style
doozy
dope
dork
dorked-out
douchebag
drama queen
drop, *v.*
drop a beat, *v.*
drug, *v.*
dude
duds
dumb-ass
dump, *v.*
dust bunny
dweeb
exactamundo
exec
eye candy
eyeball
faceplant
fall flat, *v.*
farm out, *v.*
fat cat
fat day
fave
fess up, *v.*
fishy
fizz
fizzle

flaky
flash, *v.*
flashy
flava
flick
flip out, *v.*
foodie
fool around, *v.*
footie
freak
freak out, *v.*
freaked out
freakin'
freaky
freebie
fried
friggin'
fuck oneself, *v.*
fuck up, *v.*
fucked
fucker
fuckin'
fucking
funky
FYI
gab session
gadget freak
gal
gangsta
geek
geek out, *v.*
geekdom
geekerati
geeky
geezer
genius
get a handle, *v.*
get big, *v.*
get buck wild, *v.*
get busted, *v.*
get clean, *v.*
get fucked, *v.*

get gaga, *v.*
get it on, *v.*
get off, *v.*
get off one's butt, *v.*
get pissed, *v.*
get ploughed, *v.*
get zzz's, *v.*
gig
gig (giga)
gimmick
ginned up
ginormous
Gipper
girlie
girl-on-top
give it up for, *v.*
glam
glitz
glitzy
go commando, *v.*
go down on, *v.*
go nutters, *v.*
go to town, *v.*
goalie
goddamn
goof around, *v.*
goofball
gorge
gossip-athon
go-to
grad
grease monkey
green
gross
gross out, *v.*
groupie
grungy
guff
gussied-up
gutsy
gypsy heaven
hack out, *v.*

ham-fisted
hand job
handful
hang, *v.*
hang around, *v.*
hang out, *v.*
hang-up
happening
happy trail
hardon
hard-time
have one's shit together, *v.*
head
head butt
hell-bent
here's the deal
higher-up
hip
hipster
hit, *v.*
hit it, *v.*
hook up, *v.*
hooked
hookup
hot
hotness
hottie
huge
hustle, *v.*
hustler
hustling
hysterical
hysterically
ick!
icky
in the buff
indie
insta-fix
intel
ixnay
jacked-up

jam
jammed
jammed up
jammies
jazz up
jazzed
jerk
jerk off, *v.*
jerky
jibe
jitters
jittery
jock
jockism
joint
juice
jump the shark, *v.*
junk
junk food
junkie
keeper
kick
kick, *v.*
kick ass, *v.*
kick butt, *v.*
kid-vid
kill, *v.*
killer
klutz
knock back
kool-aid-drinking
laid low
lame
lame-ass
lameness
land, *v.*
latchkey kid
lefty
legit
lemon
lick
lingo

loaded
long hour
loony bin
lose it, *v.*
lose one's shit, *v.*
lousy
mad
make it big, *v.*
make out, *v.*
make-out
meanderthal
meathead
med
meet iron
meg
meltdown
mess around, *v.*
mess up, *v.*
midnooky
mint
mishmash
mod, *v.*
mod up, *v.*
mogul
mojo
money shot
morph, *v.*
motherfuck
moxie
mr goodie
mr right
mr right now
muscled up
must-have
n00b
naggy
nancy-hip
neat freak
nebbishy
neg
nerd
nerdish

no-brainer
no-go
no-look pass
noncreep
noodle arm
nooky
nose job
nosh
NOUN-eroo
NOUN-y
nuts
nuttily
oddball
on a hot streak
on the fly
on the house
oppo
out there
outie
pad
peace out, *v.*
peevish
peppy
perky
pet peeve
phoniness
pickupdom
pig out, *v.*
pimp, *v.*
pimpy-faced
pinch [pennies], *v.*
ping
pink slip
piss away, *v.*
piss off, *v.*
pissed
pissed off
pissy
plastic
play it cool, *v.*
plugged-in
pol

politick
politico
poop out, *v.*
pork-belly market
posh
powder
pratfall
preppy
press stunt
prob
prop
psyched
psyched up
psycho
puss
puss-oozing
put away, *v.*
put the plug in the
        jug, *v.*
quick fix
quickie
rap
retard
reverse cowgirl
ride
ridiculous
ridiculously
rig
right-now
ringer
riot
ritzy
roadie
rock, *v.*
rookie
roughneck
rub out, *v.*
rubber
rule, *v.*
runs
sack
sack of shit

sack session
sad sack
savvy
scam
scam, *v.*
scammer
scarf
schlub
schlump
schmo-dependent
schmoozer
schwag
score
screw, *v.*
screw up, *v.*
scumbag
sexcapade
sexy
shag, *v.*
sharp
shell out, *v.*
shiner
shit
shit list
shitbag
shitfaced
short dog
shot
shotgun
shrapnel
shredder
shrug off, *v.*
sick
six sheets to the
    wind
sixpack
ski bunny
skunky
slam-dunk
sleazeball
sleek
slick

slimeball
slob
slut
smart-ass
smarts
smarty-pants
smashtacular
smoking-hot
snag
snap, *v.*
sneak, *v.*
snitch
snow
so
sock away, *v.*
souped-up
spiffy
spike, *v.*
spill, *v.*
splurge, *v.*
spoof
spunk
square
steal
stink, *v.*
stone-cold
straight
straight shooter
streak
strike it rich, *v.*
stuck-up
stupid
suck, *v.*
suck up, *v.*
sucker
sucker punch
suck-up
superbad
supergenius
superhot
sweat, *v.*
sweet

swingin'
swoll
take it up the ass,
    v.
tardy
tchotchkle
teetotal
tiger milk
tight
tizzy
TMI
toast
tomcat
top dog
tops
toss the stash in
    the trash, *v.*
toy biz
trippy
turnoff
turn-off
tush
tweak, *v.*
tween
twerp
uncool
upper
vampy
veg
veggie
VERB one's ass off
VERB the crap out
VERB the fuck
Vette
vibe
vibed
wad
wee hours
weirdo
whacked-out
wham-bam
what's shaking

whiz wonky zillion
wicked wow zonked
wimpy wuss zoom, *v.*
win-win wussy zzz's
wiseass zero in, *v.*

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