University of Pennsylvania
ScholarlyCommons

GSE Publications

Graduate School of Education

12-1-1994

The Cast of the News

Michael A. Locher

Stanton Wortham
University of Pennsylvania, stanton.wortham@bc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.upenn.edu/gse_pubs

Recommended Citation

The Cast of the News

Abstract

In this paper, we analyze a newscast for the narrative perspectives within it, using the work of Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin on voicing. A Bakhtinian analysis of a newscast offers a richness rarely found in studies of media bias, for reasons we discuss in the body of the paper. Our question is not, "How do we eliminate perspectival news reporting?" (which is impossible), but "How do we analyze perspectives in the news?" and "Why does news reporting nevertheless seem objective?"

THE CAST OF THE NEWS[1]

Michael A. Locher
Stanton E.F. Wortham

1. Introduction

In this paper we analyze a newscast for the narrative perspectives within it, using the work of the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin on voicing. A Bakhtinian analysis of a newscast offers a richness rarely found in studies of media bias, for reasons we discuss in the body of the paper.

Our question is not, "How do we eliminate perspectival news reporting?" (which is impossible), but, "How do we analyze perspectives in the news?" and "Why does news reporting nevertheless seem objective?"

2. Modalities of text

We must distinguish several modalities of *text*, understood as temporally inscribed structures of linguistic forms (what follows is given a detailed treatment in Silverstein 1993). A *discursive interaction*, the primary datum an analyst must explain (or a speaker-participant must interpret), is any real-time social event centrally involving language. (A conversation, the reading of a book, and the watching of a television newscast are all discursive interactions.) A *denotational text* is a discursive interaction understood to cohere as a structure of reference and predication. It describes states-of-affairs in the world, and answers the question, "What was said in this discursive interaction?" By contrast, an *interactional text* is a discursive interaction understood to cohere as a structure of indexical presupposition and entailment. An interactional text is bound to its context of production, and answers the question, "What was done through this discursive interaction?" Denotational and interactional texts, while analytically separable, are interrelated in discursive practice: What is said constrains what is done, and vice versa.

As an illustration of the differences between these modalities, consider utterances in any of the European languages that have two second-person singular personal deictics (see Brown and Gilman 1972). Any verbal exchange containing these

---

[1] Special thanks for comments and suggestions to Michael Silverstein, Adam Rose, Douglas J. Glick, and Meredith Feltus.

personal deictics is a discursive interaction. The denotational content of the utterances constitutes the denotational text, and remains the same no matter which personal deictics are used (both second-person personal deictics denote the same thing, namely, the interlocutor of the speaker). However, the interactional text differs depending on the usage patterns of the personal deictics, because they index (more specifically, create or entail) particular social relationships between the interlocutors. While symmetric exchange of one form indexes interactional equivalence (either as intimates or high-status equals), an asymmetric pattern indexes social difference. (The utterances qua interactional text may do other things as well.)

Auditors of a discursive interaction (as in audience reception of a newscast) must *entextualize* (construe as at least one modality of text) it. A single discursive interaction may yield many entextualizations, both denotational and interactional. (In the example above, an interlocutor may entextualize a particular utterance solely for its information-content, solely for its social indexicality, or for both together, depending on circumstances and personal predilections.) From an entextualized discursive interaction we can produce a *text-artifact*, which is a physical representation of a text. The transcript presented below is a text-artifact, as is this paper. Although this terminology may seem cumbersome, it greatly facilitates the analysis of language-in-use.

Our object of analysis (one segment of a newscast lasting two minutes, forty-five seconds) is complex. Using the terminology introduced above, political speeches (discursive interactions) are entextualized (interpreted, we might say) by reporters, who represent the original discursive interactions in their news reports. These reports are themselves discursive interactions that are entextualized by an audience. Our interest is in the second discursive interaction, the audience reception of a newscast, particularly as it can be entextualized as an intentionally perspectival representation of the original discursive interaction.

3. Voicing and perspective

The work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986; Vološinov[2] 1973) has generated an extraordinary amount of scholarship, most focussing on his concept of "voice[3]." Part of the appeal of this concept seems to be its Rorschach-like quality: Scholars see very different things in his suggestive but unfortunately unsystematic writings.

Bakhtin's concept of voice derives from his musical master-metaphor: In a musical score with more than one melodic line, a voice is a single one of those lines. Various instruments may pick up the line and drop it, but the line perdures. Voice, in a novel or newscast as well as in a piece of music, is fundamentally a property of the composition, one of several relationally-constituted lines that runs through the work.

---

[2]   Following Clark and Holquist (1984: 146-170), we take Vološinov's (1973) work to have been written (at least in substantial part) by Bakhtin.

[3] Bakhtin used other terms to refer to the same phenomenon: "accent," "perspective," etc.

As Bakhtin describes the phenomenon for novelistic discourse, voicing is the perspectival social positioning of characters in a narrative (the represented world) by a narrator (the representing world). Narrators are necessarily in particular social positions and have particular interests with respect to characters. (If a narrator describes a particular character as "haughty," this judgment is spoken from a particular social position, and shows acceptance of a particular behavioral standard.) A voice is an inhabitable perspective on a represented world, which results from a mapping across a representing world and a represented world (see Silverstein n.d.). Importantly, Bakhtin's insights about narratives apply to texts in general. In many texts, we can learn as much about the narrators as about the represented worlds.

There is at least one perspective in every interactional text. Perspectives derive from narrators' interested social positions. A voice is the perspectivally projectible spatiotemporal and socially evaluative landscape of a narrator. It is the way the world-to-be-represented looks from a particular, interested, point of view. Voice and emplotted speaking character are not coterminous: A number of characters may inhabit the same voice, and the same character may inhabit different voices (in keeping with Bakhtin's musical metaphor).

One of Bakhtin's (see 1981: 324-331, 1984: 190-199, 1986: 108-110) most important contributions to literary theory is the concept of double-voicing. Double-voicing is "an orientation toward someone else's discourse" (Bakhtin 1984: 199) immanent in a speaker's reproduction of that discourse. In such cases, two perspectives are in play at the same time: That of a speaker, and that of a narrator who reproduces the speech of that original speaker. The voices corresponding to these perspectives coexist in the reproduced discourse. Bakhtin (1984: 195) writes:

> Someone else's words introduced into our own speech inevitably assume a new (our own) interpretation and become subject to our evaluation of them: That is, they become double-voiced.

Another's words are made to serve a narrator's purposes, without, however, wholly losing their original perspective. Bakhtin was at pains to point out that not all representations of another's words are double-voiced. If a narrator's perspective is congruent with a represented speaker's, so that no perspectival difference arises, the discourse may be single-voiced. (In such cases both the represented and representing speakers inhabit the same social position.)

4. Objectivity and objective voicing

Real objectivity, the unattainable ideal of pure expository discursive practice, would require "perspectivelessness," whereby the narrator would exist completely outside the narrated world (and consequently project no voice). Although realization of perspectivelessness is impossible, its trope exists. We must distinguish real objectivity (unattainable in practice) and objectively-voiced text (see Silverstein 1988). Objectively-voiced discourse depends upon an entextualization of a discursive interaction as an

instance of purely referential-and-predicational language use (in other words, solely as a denotational text). Via this trope, an audience understands words to perfectly (precisely and exhaustively) describe states-of-affairs in the world.

What commentators often hail as objectivity in news reporting is really more akin to even-handedness, as when reporters attempt to balance salient ideological perspectives (say, Democratic and Republican in the politics of the United States) in their presentations. However, this does not constitute true objectivity in reporting, for even so apparently innocuous a criterion of discursive selection as "newsworthiness" is as interested and perspectival as any other. The news is inherently perspectival, and the very terms that reporters use to describe political events, more even than which events they choose to describe, betray their interested perspectives.

The impossibility of truly objective discourse is a function of textual coherence. Without an evaluative perspective anchoring it (see Labov and Waletzky 1967: 33-39), discourse becomes an unintelligible collection of disconnected statements. Both language and culture further constrain the realization of objectivity. Every linguistic act of reference is simultaneously an act of predication, and only with difficulty can we escape the ready-made categories of our languages. Also, culturally-accepted norms of discursive practice lead speakers to patterns of exposition and discussion that are inherently evaluative. What passes for objectivity (usually as objectively-voiced discourse) is fraught with perspectival evaluation.

5. The cast of characters

Newscasts have a general structure that must be explicated in order to provide an account of any particular broadcast. Newscasts are artfully orchestrated productions involving many people. (For this analysis, we will discuss only those who appear and/or speak on the television screen, although a complete study would consider producers, directors, writers, etc.) Three main classes of people appear on newscasts: Anchors, correspondents, and interviewees. As a rule, anchors (as the term suggests) are central to the newscast. The anchor is in a hierarchically superior position relative to correspondents and interviewees, introducing news stories and (often) coordinating the speaking turns of others. Correspondents are reporters who present news stories, including interviews with newsworthy people, within the framework provided by the anchor. However, the correspondents themselves frame most of the interviewees. The interviewees are in the most subordinate position of the newscast, because they are never in a position to directly frame another's speaking turn (to offer commentary on a correspondent's framing remarks, for example). Interviewees typically include people-on-the-street, politicians, and experts of various sorts, who may speak directly with either an anchor or subordinate correspondents.

The three classes of people (anchors, correspondents, and interviewees) can contract two major kinds of relationship: Congruence of perspective and non-congruence of perspective. In any segment of the newscast, an anchor is in a position to align him/herself with either a correspondent, or an interviewee, or both, or neither.

This is accomplished through the unavoidably evaluative framing statements that the anchor makes. The correspondents similarly contract relationships with their framed interviewees. The interviewees, who frame nobody, are not in a position to so evaluate others through their framing discourse (although they can contract these relationships in other ways). The anchor frames all other participants in the newscast, while the correspondent frames only interviewees.

The anchor introduces various news stories, about which correspondents typically report in depth, and provides some degree of continuity between stories in the newscast. Anchors use regular formulae to introduce the correspondents, who are addressed by name as they receive the floor from the anchor, which fosters the illusion of a live conversation, even though some of this verbal exchange is on tape. Sometimes, in a live piece, the anchor breaks in at the end and asks (apparently unscripted) questions, but usually the correspondent's piece is aired as a self-contained segment[4], whereupon the floor reverts to the anchor. Rather than doing live interviews, correspondents often tape interviews (or use library footage), then edit them (it) for representation in their reports. In both cases, the anchor with the correspondents and the correspondents with the interviewees, the latter's words are appropriated by the former. (Such occasions show a strong potential for double-voicing.) The interviewees, however, *seem to speak only for themselves* (in at least one entextualization of the discursive interaction). This is, in fact, precisely the trope that the news depends upon: Assumed canons of objectivity imply that the news correspondents *react to* the speeches they hear, which by their self-evident importance shape the report and the newscast. In fact, the correspondents cannot avoid perspectivally characterizing and organizing (thus *acting on*) the utterances they represent.

The appropriation of interviewees' words is one of the most important sites for the realization of perspective in newscasts. A reporter can cut and paste sound bites taped from a variety of sources at a variety of times and represent them in a smooth narrative that unavoidably represents the interviewees from particular perspectives.

6. The newscast

Consider this transcript of the ABC News from 8 October 1992[5]:

Peter Jennings: [Jennings talking in a park in California.] Good evening. We're going

---

[4] These reports by correspondents usually have their own semi-autonomous structure. They are only semi-autonomous because they are themselves the building blocks of the larger broadcast orchestrated by the anchor.

[5] The indentations represent the nesting of participants in the newscast (as discussed above). The bracketed comments describe the pictures on the television screen while the words were being spoken. The *italicized* terms are metapragmatic descriptors. Metapragmatic descriptors (centrally, verbs of speaking) denote language-in-use (see Silverstein 1976: 48-51).

to begin tonight with what voters everywhere *have told* us they believed would happen in the final weeks of the Presidential campaign: That it would get a lot nastier. Well, it has, and there's a California connection. [Video of Dornan making a speech in an empty House of Representatives.] In the last couple of weeks a California Republican congressman named Bob Dornan has been standing up in the House of Representatives *making allegations* that [Video close-up of Dornan's head.] in January 1970 when Bill Clinton, then a student opposed to the Vietnam War was visiting Moscow, he was really there licking the boots of the KGB. [Jennings in park.] Dornan has offered absolutely no evidence, and when The Washington Post *asked* if it was responsible *to make such things up*, the paper *says* he nodded vigorously and *said* that he *was getting rave reviews* from the Bush campaign. Which is where the President comes in. Here's ABC's Chris Bury:

> Chris Bury: [Video of Bush on "Larry King Live."] It was near the end of the President's appearance on "Larry King Live," *responding* to a *question* he *said* Clinton was wrong to demonstrate against the Vietnam War while in England. Bush also *suggested* Clinton *had failed to tell the truth* about who he met during a trip to Moscow in 1969, though the President *said* he did not have the facts.
>
>> George Bush: I'm just *saying level* with the American people on the draft, on whether he went to Moscow, how many demonstrations he led against his own country from a foreign soil.
>
> Chris Bury: [Video of Clinton on a landing strip talking to reporters.] The Governor's *reaction* was subdued as he left Little Rock to prepare for Sunday's *debate*.
>
>> Bill Clinton: I felt really sad for Mr. Bush yesterday. I mean here we are on our way to a *debate* about the great issues facing this country and its future and he *descended to that level*.
>
> Chris Bury: [Footage of 1969 anti-Vietnam War march (in London?).] Clinton *has acknowledged* taking part in a 1969 anti-War march on the American Embassy in London, and organizing a teach-in. [Video of Clinton on landing strip, talking to reporters.] As for his visit to Moscow, Clinton *said* he met with other students and tourists there during his European trip.
>
>> Bill Clinton: It was an eventful and interesting week for me, doing the things that you would expect someone to do that had never been to Russia before.
>
> Chris Bury: [Video of Clinton ascending steps to airplane.] Clinton's running mate *launched a sharp counterattack*, [Video of Gore on landing strip talking to reporters.] *accusing* the President of planting suspicions the way Senator Joe

McCarthy did against alleged Communist sympathizers.

> Al Gore: He is panicking politically, and so now he *is trying to smear* Governor Clinton.

Chris Bury: [Video of Matalin on (apparently different) landing strip, talking to reporters.] The Bush campaign refused to back down, *saying* Clinton *has given conflicting accounts* of how involved he was in anti-War activities.

> Mary Matalin: It is a pathological pattern of deception. He is an obsessive politician. When he *has been asked* about his anti-War activities in the past, he *has hedged, bobbed and weaved*.

Chris Bury: [Bury on street in Kansas City.] The Clinton campaign of course *insists* the Governor's *answers* have been consistent. They *claim* the latest Republican *assault* is the last gasp of a loser. They believe it will backfire. Chris Bury, ABC News, Kansas City.

Peter Jennings: [Jennings in park.] Ross Perot, who *has accused* Bush and Clinton of taking their eye off the main issue with *this sort of campaigning*, has had *no comment* on this subject today.

The structure of this segment of the newscast is central to what it accomplishes as an interactional text. In addition to fitting into the genre of "television news report," Chris Bury's report exemplifies another type of discursive interaction. It is the conventional structure of entextualization used to represent discursive interactions as arguments: first one party speaks, then a second party answers, and so on. In discursive practice, representation of "arguments" almost always has this structure, in spite of the fact that the discursive interactions represented seldom show such neatness of form: interlocutors talk at the same time, interrupt each other to dispute or embellish points, reply to charges long abandoned by the other party, attempt to change the immediate subject of discussion, etc. In most representations, this is "cleaned up" and organized into a structure that makes aesthetic and logical sense to the members of the speech community.

Bury's report exemplifies this structure, practically constituting it as an argument without our even needing to hear the words. Bury's framing commentary contributes to this entextualization, stressing the clash and combativeness of the two political parties. Four[6] politicians (George Bush [Republican candidate for President], Bill Clinton [Democratic candidate for President], Al Gore [Democratic candidate for Vice-President], and Mary Matalin [Republican Deputy Campaign Manager]) are

---

[6] Bob Dornan is only represented by Peter Jennings, and thus isn't an interviewee.

interviewees in this dialogic structure: one makes a point and another answers[7]. This entextualization highlights and dramatizes the contentiousness of the two political parties. A Republican accusation (by Bush) is answered by the Democrats (by Clinton), who launch a counteraccusation (by Gore), which is met by another Republican accusation (by Matalin), thus giving this segment of the newscast a classic ABBA poetic structure. It has the feel of a boxing match, with two heavyweights standing toe-to-toe trading blows. This perspectival projection of the upshot of Bush's accusation was broadcast as an authoritative report about "what happened on the campaign trail today." Importantly, it is no more nor less a distortion than any other equally coherent entextualization of the day's discursive interactions[8].

This report is dense with metapragmatic discourse. Practically the entire segment is speech about speech. It is not unusual for a report on politics to focus on speech, as opposed to other kinds of social action. Most of what is deemed newsworthy in political campaigns is in the form of speeches and remarks to reporters, which correspondents and anchors choose[9] and condense into succinct statements. This representation of the candidates' utterances is a privileged site for voicing, as reporters perspectivally and evaluatively discuss the candidates. Listeners will be left with impressions about the candidates due more to the textuality of the newscasts than to any direct exposure to the candidates.

7. Analysis of the newscast

Peter Jennings' opening remarks are the first words in the newscast, immediately following the theme music of ABC News. After his standard greeting ("Good evening."), he immediately cites public opinion to the effect that the Presidential campaign will get increasingly nasty. Importantly, Jennings casts this in indirect discourse, which implies that the word "nastier" (a perspectival and strongly evaluative adjective) originated with the "voters everywhere." It becomes clear that Jennings' perspective is congruent with that of these nameless voters, because he immediately ratifies this evaluation (that the campaign is getting "nastier") with his following comment ("Well, it has."). This perspectival introduction to the day's events not only prepares the audience to see

---

[7]   In effect, reporters can create dialogues that never actually transpired. A face-to-face argument was not the context of these utterances. The sound bites clearly show the interviewees in different parts of the United States at different times of the day (in fact, the tape of Bush is from the previous night). The correspondent (who was ABC News' special correspondent to the Clinton campaign) spliced these sound bites into the structure of argumentation.

[8]   The intention here is not to pillory reporters for foisting their perspectives on an unsuspecting audience, but simply to show that such perspectival representations are unavoidable.

[9]   The choice of which utterances to represent and which to ignore is highly perspectival. Where a sociolinguist may focus on greeting formulae at press conferences, reporters may be interested in policy statements.

something "nasty," but in addition aligns Jennings with the public-at-large, for he presents himself as sharing their cynicism about political campaigns.

Jennings then speaks of Representative Bob Dornan of California (showing videotape of him speaking to an *empty* chamber of the House of Representatives!). Jennings comments that Dornan "has been ... making allegations." Jennings undermines Dornan's credibility with this particular metapragmatic descriptor: An allegation is an unsupported (and perhaps unsupportable) assertion. The following double-voiced charge, that Clinton was in Moscow "licking the boots of the KGB" (words represented as originating from Dornan), further undermines the congressman's credibility: Jennings represents it in indirect quotation, so that what was probably a mere rhetorical flourish in Dornan's original speech becomes a sign of the quality of his opinions. Jennings goes on to note that "Dornan has offered absolutely no evidence" to support his allegations, casting further doubt on his words. Then Jennings quotes *The Washington Post* to the effect that Dornan acknowledges lying for political gain (his own and/or Bush's). Finally, Dornan's "rave reviews" suggest him "ranting and raving" to an empty House of Representatives.

Having thoroughly dismissed Representative Dornan, Jennings then quotes *The Post*'s claim that Dornan implicated the Bush campaign in his recent speechifying. This gives the extended exposition on Dornan a point: Jennings can use it to cast George Bush in a parallel social role, that of a crackpot. At this point, correspondent Chris Bury takes the floor.

Before addressing Bury's comments, it is important to see how Jennings represented a number of different sources (voters, Bob Dornan, and *The Washington Post*[10]), adopting some viewpoints and distancing himself from others. Jennings' perspective emerges from the utterances he represents, and the ways he does it. By double-voicing certain utterances, Jennings casts George Bush into the social role of a crackpot, without, however, saying it in so many words.

The transcript, as a denotational text, is an organization of information (the organization of which ultimately relies on facts of indexicality). Within this text, at the level of grammatical clauses, things-in-the-universe are referred-to and predicated-of. At the level of discourse, the relationships between grammatical clauses contribute to topicalization[11], which gives listeners the feeling that something is being discussed.

Jennings' first topic is the Presidential campaign (marked in part by the anaphor

---

[10] The *Post* article had much more in it than Jennings represented. In the article, entitled "The Nightly Sorties of B-1 Bob: Rep. Dornan's Rhetorical Raids on Bill Clinton" and published in the *Style* section of the newspaper, Grove (1992) claims that Dornan had been delivering late-night anti-Clinton speeches in the House of Representatives for several months, and gave a rather uncomplimentary history of Dornan's confrontational career in Congress. However, of importance here is the fact that the "rave reviews" received from "officials in the Bush campaign" (Grove 1992: D3) were not necessarily tied to his accusations of Clinton's involvement with the KGB, but were rather general approval for his continued bashing of Clinton on various issues. Jennings implies the reverse.

[11] Topics are constituted through the interplay (chiefly co-referential) of clauses. Single clauses have grammatical subjects and predicates, but not topics. Topicalization is a function of discourse.

"it" in both the second and third sentences). Although this theme frames the entire piece, Jennings quickly drops it as the linguistic topic, and never returns to it. Jennings next topicalizes Bob Dornan (in his fourth and fifth sentences).

The shift of topic to George Bush begins with the penultimate clause in Jennings' introduction ("Which is where the President comes in."), and is consummated with Bury's opening remarks. The immediate juxtaposition of Dornan and Bush as topics of discourse expedites the interactional textual identification of the two carried through by denotational textual parallels.

Chris Bury's introduction frames comments made by George Bush (on CNN's "Larry King Live"). Bury uses indirect discourse to represent Bush criticizing Clinton for demonstrating against the Vietnam War while in England. Bury's second statement clearly aligns Bush with Jennings' representation of Dornan. The question of who Clinton spoke with in Moscow, and the sinister implications of Bush's utterance sound quite similar to, if less explicit than, Dornan's allegations. Where Jennings said that "Dornan has offered absolutely no evidence," Bury says that "the President said he did not have the facts." The denotational textual parallel tropically equates Bush and Dornan[12].

This portion of Bury's report was on videotape, so we can consider it a direct quotation by Jennings, with all of the possibilities for double-voicing that that entails. Jennings' introduction of Bury's report reflects his own (Jennings') perspective on the events. Bury makes no mention of Dornan, nor does he cast the President's words in strongly double-voiced indirect discourse. Jennings, as the anchor, imposes his own perspectival entextualization of the material by structuring the text itself to cast characters into particular social roles.

Bury's opening commentary also highlights the problematic relationship between such commentary and the sound bites it introduces. In his remarks, Bury claims, "Bush also suggested that Clinton had failed to tell the truth." Yet the subsequent sound bite of Bush speaking does nothing so direct. Set up by Bury's characterization of Bush's

---

[12] Plumbing this semiotic moment reveals most of the themes of this paper. Bearing in mind that a text is an organization of information that, as it is entextualized, becomes presupposable for later indexical semiosis, the trope's effectiveness in context owes everything to Jennings' characterization of Dornan. For most Americans (who are neither Dornan's constituents nor professionally interested in Congressional politics), "Bob Dornan" is little more than a name. Jennings predicates a single characteristic of the bearer of this name: His tendency to act like a crackpot. (The *Washington Post* article, by contrast, gives a brief history of Dornan, making him multidimensional, if still a crackpot.) The result is an interactional textual syllogism. From Jennings' account we know only that "X is a crackpot" (where we use "X" to highlight the impersonal quality of the name "Bob Dornan"). From Bury's report, we understand that "George Bush behaves like X" (because he speaks with the same voice). Ergo (the implicit conclusion), "George Bush is a crackpot." (The second premise could not be formulated using the newspaper article as a source of presupposable characterizability conditions of the name "Bob Dornan," because Bush doesn't behave like Dornan in all those respects.)

That Jennings said, "Bob Dornan," instead of, "Somebody," or some other functionally equivalent nominal phrase is an example of the trope of objectivity. Using specific names gives the report a realism that is central to the inhabitance of an objective voice. This objective voice, however, remains interested and perspectival.

speech, it is likely that viewers would hear this message, although Bush's comments are slightly different. Bush challenges Clinton to "level with the American people." This is a common political ploy: Bush doesn't directly accuse Clinton of lying, although the statement implies that he might have. One politician can challenge another to tell the truth about anything at all while still being able to say that s/he was only trying to get that information before the public. Demanding that someone tell the truth is not the same as claiming that someone lied. It is a subtle distinction, and Bury ignores it.

Bury then turns from Bush's veiled challenge to Clinton's truthfulness and patriotism (which is made more explicit by ABC) to Clinton's "reaction." This reaction, although represented as a direct and immediate response, in fact comes many hours later. Given the terms used to introduce this report (with strong intimations of nastiness), Clinton's "reaction" is hardly worthy of the term. He levels with the American people about his trip to Moscow, we might say, and offers a dismissal of Bush ("he descended to that level").

However, Bury finds fighting words in the mouth of Vice-Presidential candidate Al Gore, and he makes the most of it for this entextualization of the discursive interaction as an argument. Bury reports that Gore "launched a sharp counterattack," a loaded metapragmatic predication describing Gore's accusation that Bush is McCarthyite (hence a dangerous, because powerful, crackpot conspiracy theorist). The interactional textual identification of Dornan and Bush is further strengthened by Bury's use of the word "alleged," which echoes Jennings' use of "allegations."

Gore's actual comments, however, do not fully corroborate this message (in this sound bite Gore does not mention McCarthy, for example), but they do represent the Republicans as being in disarray ("panicking"), testifying to the success of earlier Democratic "attacks." Then, Gore's counteraccusation (of "smear" tactics) invokes a particularly loaded term in political discourse, allowing Bury to convincingly represent the two political parties as being in a pitched battle.

Bury then returns to the Republicans, and casts the only theme of their campaign (to this date) - Clinton's untrustworthiness - as a fresh response to Gore's words. Matalin's comments could have been taped anytime, anywhere, and certainly were not delivered in immediate face-to-face response to Gore (or Clinton). However, as a blanket dismissal of any attempt Clinton might make to explain himself, it is a particularly effective sound bite at this point in the report.

Matalin begins by claiming that Clinton shows a "pathological pattern of deception," and that "he is an obsessive politician." These constructions (suggesting that Clinton suffers from an obsessive-compulsive disorder) get the message across: Matalin claims that Clinton is a compulsive and pathological liar. Then she characterizes Clinton's past attempts to explain himself as hedges (which Clinton's earlier "subdued" response could indeed be read as, as could her own not-to-the-point "response" to Gore's accusation), in which he has "bobbed and weaved." As metapragmatic predication, bobbing and weaving suggest moves by a boxer to evade the knockout punches of an opponent. Matalin surely intends the terms to be derogatory, but she implicitly compares Clinton to a savvy boxer. This boxing terminology fits nicely with the entextualization of the day's political events, which is about confrontation and

combat.

Bury concludes his report by quoting the Democrats on the Republicans, and throwing in some combative metapragmatic descriptors just in case the audience still hasn't gotten the point ("assault," "last gasp," even "back*fire*").

This entextualization represents the Republicans as desperate enough to seize on the antics of borderline crackpots, while the Democrats appear to be in control. The metapragmatic descriptors that Bury uses to describe Clinton's answers to questions ("has acknowledged," "said") are so banal that Clinton seems calm and centered when compared to the fanatic Republicans. The "centeredness" of Clinton is text-structural, as well as behavioral. Clinton is the only interviewee who speaks twice, and the tenor of his comments is very different than that of anybody else. If we count Jennings' representation of Dornan, there are five politicians given six turns to speak. Of these six turns, Clinton has the third and fourth slots, and he is the only politician not to make any accusations (although his headshaking at Bush's tactics comes close). Not only is Clinton structurally central, but he is the only interviewee who seems to have any distance on these events, so he seems to stand above the fray. Clinton seems to resent the "nastiness" as much as the "voters everywhere" (and their proxy Jennings). The overall textual structure bears a very specific set of relationships: Jennings, Bury, Clinton, Perot (who criticized "this sort of campaigning," according to Jennings), and the public at large have congruent perspectives on the political developments of the day, most of which (by a three-to-one margin) is the fault of the Republicans, to judge from the news report.

Given this obviously perspectival entextualization of the political events of the day, it is striking that newscasts are still thought to be (at least ideally) objective. Central to all the semiotic mechanisms by which the trope of objectivity is created is the necessity that the reporter apparently efface his/her perspective in the report.

8. Embedded metapragmatics

One example of such a mechanism is a relatively common linguistic construction[13] usually showing this form:

(1) S_1 MP_1 [[to] H_1] [that[14]] S_2 MP_2 [[to] H_2][[that] U],

where the Ss are speakers, the Hs are hearers, the MPs are metapragmatic descriptors

---

[13]   Goodwin (1990: 190-225) contains examples of the construction, and demonstrates that speakers implicitly recognize its importance by their use of the metapragmatic descriptor "he-said-she-said" to describe a type of discursive interaction in which such constructions often figure prominently.

[14]   We use "that" in this formula as shorthand to indicate the syntactic possibility of indirect discourse. While indirect discourse often uses a metapragmatic verb followed by a dependent that-clause, it may also use wh-clauses (for interrogatives) and to-infinitive clauses (for imperatives).

(usually verbs), U is an utterance, and the bracketed elements are optional. The defining feature of embedded metapragmatic constructions is that S_2 and MP_2 must be part of an embedded matrix clause in either direct or indirect discourse. These three sentences contain embedded metapragmatics:

(2)   Joe [S_1] said [MP_1], "Jane [S_2] yelled [MP_2] at her dog."

(3)   Bob [S_1] hinted [MP_1] to me [H_1] that Tom [S_2] told a lie [MP_2].

(4)   Ann [S_1] said [MP_1] that Jake [S_2] said [MP_2], "She's [S_3] a liar [MP_3][U]."

The following is not an example of an embedded metapragmatic construction:

(5)   Phil [S_1] criticized [MP_1] Andy's [S_2] presentation [MP_2].

In embedded metapragmatic constructions, where one metapragmatic descriptor is subordinated to another, multiple perspectives coexist in the sentence. In 5 above, the only perspective is that of the narrator. Singly-embedded metapragmatic constructions with utterances show the possibility of *three* distinct perspectives: The narrator's, the speaker S_1's, and the speaker S_2's. A sentence could therefore be "triple-voiced." The utterance U would be from one perspective as it was produced by S_2, another as it was reproduced by S_1, and a third as it was again reproduced by the narrator. In practice, disentangling these different perspectives (that of S_1 and the narrator in particular) is extremely difficult because of the impossibility of reconstructing original utterances from indirect discourse. Explicit triple-voicing is very unusual in these constructions because of the infrequency of a represented utterance U in the sentence. However, double-voicing of the embedded clause represented in indirect discourse is common. Consider these sentences:

(6)   Rhonda pointed out that Jim exaggerated.

(7)   Rhonda complained that Jim exaggerated.

Here, the first metapragmatic descriptor in 6, "pointed out," shows a congruence between the perspective of the narrator and the perspective of Rhonda (both believing that Jim did in fact exaggerate), resulting in no double-voicing. This is not the case in 7. This sentence demonstrates the fact that with such embedded metapragmatic constructions, it is in many cases impossible to discover the narrator's perspective on the embedded clause (see Quine 1960 on opaque contexts). Note the difference between these two sentences:

(8)   George lied.

(9)   Joan said that George lied.

In the first sentence, the narrator's evaluative judgment of George's utterance is clear: the narrator casts George as speaking falsely. In the second sentence, however, it is not possible to know with certainty what the narrator believes about George's utterance. The metapragmatic descriptor "said" deflects any such perspectival reading of the sentence (unlike "pointed out"). All we know for certain is that the narrator and/or Joan felt that George lied. Reconstruction of Joan's actual utterance is impossible. Whether she explicitly stated, "George lied," or hinted that he might have, or produced an ironic accusation of lying in fact implying that he told the truth, is lost in the construction.

This is of interest because a high percentage of such embedded metapragmatic constructions found in the news coverage of the Presidential campaign involved accusations of lying. Calling somebody a liar, is, of course, a strong accusation in American society. Politicians often question their opponents' truthfulness, and reporters often put such accusations into the mouths of the candidates[15].

On newscasts, reporters often use embedded metapragmatic constructions to introduce sound bites. Such introductions are similar to the captions on pictures: they direct the viewer's attention in particular ways by offering a ready-made interpretation of the piece (which is already perspectival, of course). If a television viewer hears from a news correspondent that George Bush accused Bill Clinton of lying, it is likely that the viewer will hear that message in the subsequent sound bite. This supposedly "objective" description of the sound bite, however, is often a highly perspectival interactional entextualization of the actual utterances, serving more to represent the relationship between the candidates than to re-present their actual utterances (as we have seen).

This newscast has seven embedded metapragmatic constructions:

(10)   [W]hen *The Washington Post* asked if it was responsible to make such things up, the paper [S_1] says [MP_1] he [Representative Bob Dornan; S_2] nodded vigorously and said that [MP_2] he was getting rave reviews [MP_3] from   the Bush campaign [S_3].

(11)   Bush [S_1] also suggested [MP_1] Clinton [S_2] had failed to tell the truth [MP_2] about who he met during a trip to Moscow in 1969 ... .

(12)   Clinton's running mate [S_1] launched a sharp counterattack, accusing [MP_1] the President [S_2] of planting suspicions [MP_2] the way Senator Joe McCarthy did against alleged Communist sympathizers.

(13)   The Bush campaign [S_1] refused to back down, saying [MP_1] Clinton [S_2]

---

[15]   Many Americans simply assume that politicians are liars, especially during election campaigns: They make promises they have no intention of keeping, and generally play fast and loose with the truth (with the help of their "spin doctors"). Thus calling one's political opponent a "liar" is equivalent to saying that s/he is "just a politician," while the political game has come to be to appear to be a non-politician. In 1992, Bush and Clinton chiding each other about truthfulness (about the draft and Iran-Contra, respectively) shows this process in action. (Ross Perot, as a "non-politician," was assumed to be a "straight talker.")

has given conflicting accounts [MP₂] of how involved he was in anti-War activities.

(14) The Clinton campaign [S₁] of course insists [MP₁] the Governor's [S₂] answers [MP₂] have been consistent.

(15) They [The Clinton campaign; S₁] claim [MP₁] the latest Republican [S₂] assault[16] [MP₂] is the last gasp of a loser.

(16) Ross Perot [S₁], who has accused [MP₁] Bush and Clinton [S₂] of taking their eye off the main issue with this sort of campaigning [MP₂], has had no comment on this subject today.

These embedded metapragmatic constructions (except 16) are at the very heart of the newscast's representation of the day's campaign developments. (Note that 10 is a doubly-embedded metapragmatic construction.)

The opacity of the construction (for determining evaluative perspective) passes for real objectivity: Because the audience cannot *definitively* assign a perspective to the reporter, they assume that there is no perspective. This cannot be the case: The objectivity is a trope.

9. Conclusion

The voices of this newscast, shown by particular entextualizations of represented utterances, are integral to the text. They derive from interests in the text. "Voicelessness" in news reporting is impossible to achieve, although that is clearly the ideal toward which reporters strive. Instead, reporters must make due with an objective voice, a particular culturally contingent voice of maximal authority (see Silverstein 1988).

From their own interested perspectives, the reporters on this newscast (Jennings and Bury) produced an unavoidably non-objective text. The voices in this composition are various: The objective voice of the news, the voice of the public[17], and the voice of a crackpot (with which Bush seems to speak), to name three. All the voices flow along together, sometimes in mutual support, sometimes in counterpoint, always underlying the denotational text of the newscast and shaping its audience reception.

The approach we take in this paper differs in important ways from most work on the reporting of political events. Most studies focus on "bias," and measure it in various ways (two particularly gross methods are counting mentions of candidates' names in individual newscasts, and measuring minutes of reportage devoted to different

---

[16] This example differs from the embedded metapragmatic constructions described above: "assault" is a nominal metapragmatic descriptor modified by the adjective "Republican," which indicates the speaker.

[17] That Jennings aligns his objective voice with the public voice contributes to the effectiveness of the text: The audience feels that it really knows what is going on in politics.

candidates). To make bias a useful theoretical tool, we must tie it to analyses of narrative perspective. A *pattern* of perspectival reporting, so that some ideological positions are consistently favored over others, constitutes bias. While perspectival reporting is unavoidable in any single newscast, reporters can strive to vary their perspectives (within limits) over time.

References

Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich (1981) Discourse in the novel.In Michael Holquist (ed.), Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (trs.), *The dialogic imagination: Four essays.* (University of Texas Press Slavic Series, 1.) Austin: University of Texas Press, 259-422.

Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich (1984) In Caryl Emerson (ed.,tr.), *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics.* (Theory and History of Literature, 8.) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich (1986) The problem of the text in linguistics, philology, and the human sciences: An experiment in philosophical analysis. In Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (eds.), Vern W. McGee (tr.), *Speech genres and other late essays.* (University of Texas Press Slavic Series, 8.) Austin: University of Texas Press, 103-131.

Brown, R. and A. Gilman (1972) The pronouns of power and solidarity. In Pier Paolo Giglioli (ed.), *Language and social context: Selected readings.* Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd, 252-282.

Clark, Katerina and Michael Holquist (1984) *Mikhail Bakhtin.* Cambridge: Belknap Press.

Goodwin, Marjorie Harness (1990) *He-said-she-said: Talk as social organization among Black children.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Grove, Lloyd (1992) The nightly sorties of B-1 Bob: Rep. Dornan's rhetorical raids on Bill Clinton. *The Washington post* (3 October 1992):D1,D3.

Labov, William, and Joshua Waletzky (1967) Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. In June Helm (ed.), *Essays on the verbal and visual arts.* (Proceedings of the 1966 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society.) Seattle and London: American Ethnological Society, 12-44.

Quine, Willard van Orman (1960) *Word and object.* Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press.

Silverstein, Michael (1976) Shifters, linguistic categories, and cultural description. In Keith H. Basso and Henry A. Selby (eds.), *Meaning in anthropology.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 11-55.

Silverstein, Michael (1988) De-voice of authority. Paper read at 87th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Phoenix, Arizona.

Silverstein, Michael (1993) Metapragmatic discourse and metapragmatic function. In John A. Lucy (ed.), *Reflexive language: Reported speech and metapragmatics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 33-58.

Silverstein, Michael (n.d.) The secret life of texts. To appear in Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban (eds.), *Natural histories of text*.

Vološinov, Valentin Nikolaevic (1973) In Ladislev Matejka and I.R. Titunik (trs.), *Marxism and the philosophy of language*. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press.