Reporting the News

The Discourse in Two Newscasts on a Fire in Rhode Island Night Club

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Acknowledgements

Writing is a very solitary business, but there are always other people who can help in the times of mental dehydration. As far as this paper is concerned, first and foremost, I owe thanks to my instructor Dr Michal Anne Moskow, who guided me through the loads of material as well as providing inspiration and support. Her patience and unique sense of humour, not to mention the unforgettable popcorn sessions, have made writing this paper fun and interesting.

I would also like to thank my co-students for their valuable inputs and insights. I have enjoyed discussing our papers with Maria over a nice meal.

Thank you all!
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Abstract

News, as a source of information, is often regarded as objective and correct, but what one easily forgets is that all this information is collected and presented by mere humans, thus the represented truth is biased.

Using the methods of critical discourse analysis, this paper investigates how two news channels, CNN International and Fox News, report respectively on the particular news event. Media language is an extremely powerful tool in today’s society, which is why my analysis focuses on the use of different linguistic and visual devices in these two news presentations. I explore in this paper the ways in which the authority is distributed and how it affects all participants. The hierarchical relationship between constructed identities of anchor personalities, reporters and vox pops is also dealt with in this paper.

Key words:
Authority, bias, constructed identity, discourse analysis, knowledge, news language.
1. Introduction

Ever since a television picture was broadcast for the first time in 1925, television has been considered to be a major medium. It provides us not only with entertainment but with information in the form of news as well. People tend to accept the information given in news as true, correct, just because it is given on the news, but there is one very important factor we tend to forget and that is that all this information is collected and presented by mere humans. To be honest, we all have our prejudices and biases. But we must take into consideration the impact this behaviour has on the presentation of news as accurate. And we must ask ourselves to what extent does news reflect and enforce social and cultural views of the world and to what extent does it discursively create our world.

Media language is an extremely powerful tool in today’s society, one that must not be overlooked. Today we have 24-hour news channels where news reports are presented non-stop. It is easy to take the content of newscasts as the truth, but is it really the truth? In order to report an event, the reporters must rely on sources that might or might not be accurate. Furthermore, these sources have different views of the events in question, so the evaluation of the presented event might be transformed into something other than the original event. We also have to bear in mind that the information is likely to pass through a chain of people who all add something of their personal opinion to it (Fairclough, 2002, 37-8). Therefore, the represented truth is biased. But not only is the final product biased. Even the raw first footage from the scene of the event must be questioned because the cameraman films a particular event in a particular way and then this footage is quickly edited.

This paper analyses two news reports broadcast by CNN International and Fox News respectively on February 21, 2003. The newscasts cover a fire in a Rhode Island nightclub.

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called The Station, where the Great White, a heavy metal band, used pyrotechnics as a part of their show. The fire started when the pyrotechnics ignited the ceiling of the club and the flames and thick smoke raged through the club in a matter of minutes, causing panic and pandemonium among the patrons of the club. In the chaos that followed, the concertgoers hurled themselves toward the exits all at the same time, which resulted in a total of 97 deaths.

Although the two channels are reporting on the same story, the respective approaches vary. My analysis will focus on the use of different linguistic and visual devices in these two news presentations. We all know that language is very complex, seemingly devised in smaller sections from grammar to discourse, but these different sections of the language are intertwined in a tight net where one section cannot exist without the other. There are different influences we must consider when analysing language. Fairclough’s (2002) research emphasizes “shifts in cultural values and the constitution of social identities, ’detraditionalization’ and changes in power relations and authority relations” (2). This will serve as a general guide for this paper.

The first section of the findings (section 6.1.) will focus on the voices presented in the two newscasts, the identities and relations of the participants to the audience as well as the generic features of the language.

In the second section (6.2) the focus will be on the presupposed knowledge of the audience as well as the reporters. This section will also deal with some of the features of discourse that construct genres. Many genres meet and mix in news, which also means that different discourses are used.

2. Research Questions

Barbara Johnstone (2000) states: “The starting point for sociolinguistic research (as for research in any area) is what classical rhetoricians called ‘invention’, the development of a
topic” (25). She also claims that every researcher must have “a clear question in her [his] mind and a clear plan for approaching it” (28). In other words, to start an analysis of any sort we must first have a clear thesis. And in order to develop it, we must ask questions. Keeping this in mind I have selected a few questions to focus on in my work. Since I am unable to do an in-depth analysis of many newscasts due to time constraints and diversity of news-channels, I will focus my work on two services, CNN and Fox News, and a particular story. This will be more fully described in the section on methods. In this paper I will follow certain guidelines, questions actually, which are, as mentioned above, the focus of this research.

1. What is the structure of the news as reflected in the newscasts analyzed here?
2. How is the world presented in the news?
3. How do the news personnel construct their identities and relations towards one another and towards the audience? Is there only one voice or is there a multitude of voices represented in these two reports?
4. Are there different levels of presupposition concerning the knowledge of the audience? Is there a presupposition about the knowledge of the news personnel?
5. How are discourses and genres used in the media?

3. Literature Review

Barbara Johnstone (2000) offers methodology designed for conducting qualitative research on language and society in Qualitative Research in Sociolinguistics. In this paper I will mainly focus on chapters 3, 5, 8 and 9, which deal with methodology, evidence, discourse analysis and writing. I have also used Deborah Cameron’s (2001) guidelines on how to transcribe the spoken language and how to do an analysis of spoken discourse in general.

The theories of Norman Fairclough in Media Discourse (2002) serve as the basis for this research paper. As he states in chapter 1 of this book, his first objective “is to set out a
framework for analysing media language” (2). According to Fairclough, the power of media in shaping public opinion in today’s society is very extensive. He provides us with general theories as well as specific examples for the analysis of media language especially useful in analysing television news. In chapter 4 he introduces “the framework for analysis of media discourse”, in chapter 5 the focus is on discourse practice and intertextuality and in chapter 6 he introduces the notion of presupposition. Mesthrie et al. (2001) have applied some of these theories to the language of the superpowerful. Mesthrie et al. claim: “Related to the theme of shaping of ideology via language is the degree of control and persuasion implicit in media language representing governments, especially the superpowers of today” (329). These are some of the theories I will apply to this paper.

Sara Mills states in chapter 1 of Discourse (1997) that the term ‘discourse’ has a wide range of possible significations. She discusses the ways the term, developed by Michel Foucault, is appropriated to language analysis. I apply her methods of discourse analysis, together with those of Fairclough, to media discourse and especially to the discourse of television news.

John Fiske (1989) establishes the connection between the informative and entertaining aspects of news. He claims that the news not only delivers information but is also pleasurable entertainment (149). Fiske draws on the theories of Foucault and Gramsci in presenting the need to make news relevant to the viewer in order to keep his/her interest. These approaches are used in this paper.

Michael J. Toolan (1992) discusses narrative discourse and especially “the linguistic apparatus of political emphasis” (223-245). Geoffrey Raymond (2000) talks about the authoritative discourse in news reporting (354-377), as does Margaret Morse (1986) in defining ‘The Television News Personality and Credibility’ (55-79). This is applied to the analysis of the two presentations.
In “Power and Language” (in *Language and Masculinity*, 1997) Scott Fabius Kiesling talks about “discursive strategies used by individual men in order to create and demonstrate power, showing how each man adopts a unique and personal approach when doing so” (65). Following on this, Jennifer Coates discusses “the construction of a conversational floor” (108-9) in “One-at-a-Time: The Organization of Men’s Talk”. In this research I will pay particular attention to her analysis of monologues and “playing the expert” (120-3).

Michael Stubbs discusses the grammaticality of discourse and speech acts in *Discourse Analysis* (1998). But Edward Finegan (1999) takes this further in chapter 9 called ‘Speech Acts and Conversation’. He distinguishes speech acts as six different types:

1. *Representatives* represent a state of affairs: assertion, statement, claims, hypotheses, descriptions and suggestions. They can be true or false.

2. *Commissives* commit a speaker to a course of action: promises, pledges, threats and vows.

3. *Directives* are intended to get the addressee to carry out an action: commands, requests, challenges, invitations, entreaties and dares.

4. *Declarations* bring about the state of affairs they name: blessings, firings, baptisms, arrests, marryings, declaring mistrials.

5. *Expressives* indicate the speaker’s psychological state or attitude: greetings, apologies, congratulations, condolences and thanks-givings.

6. *Verdictives* make assessments or judgements: ranking, assessing, appraising, condoning. These speech acts are sometimes called *representational declarations* (298).

This is considered in the sections on Voices and on Language and Generic Features.

Allan Bell (1983) deals with speech communities and broadcast styles. This will be looked upon together with Fairclough’s configuration of genres and discourses.
Arthur A. Berger (1999), on the other hand, deals with signs and the message they carry within them to the audience, in this case the newscast watchers. According to him, “among the most important kinds of signs are words” (1). But these signs “have a double valence and can mislead or ‘lie’ in addition to being truthful”. If we apply this to the newscasts, then it not only gives them great power, but also “makes them rather complicated phenomena with which to deal” (4). Berger also deals with metonymy (33-5) and visual aspects of signs. I will consider this briefly in the two newscasts.

Angela Goddard (2001) claims that some paralinguistic aspects of communicative language, like body posture, facial expressions and eye contact, exist alongside verbal language (124) and these played an important role in the kind of analysis I am conducting.

According to Wood and Kroger (2000) “talk does not simply reflect what is assumed to be already there” (4). We must bear in mind the various aspects of paralanguage in order to support Wood & Kroger’s statement that “talk doesn’t count” (5).

Brown & Yule (1983) discuss differences between spoken and written texts (9-19), which is relevant to this paper since it is an analysis of both the transcripts and the spoken discourse. In contrast to the original spoken form of words, in transcripts temporal and rhythmic features of speech are ignored. Even more, “we have no standard conventions for representing the paralinguistic features of the utterance which are summarised as ‘voice quality’”(10).

4. Methods, Delimitations and Limitations
As I have already stated in the Literature Review this paper is mainly based on the theories on critical discourse analysis developed by Norman Fairclough. The news broadcasts used here are video-recordings from the respective channels. The material concerns a follow-up to a deadly fire in a nightclub in Rhode Island on February 21, 2003. The channels in question are CNN and Fox News. These two reports have been transcribed and analysed according to the
theories of critical discourse analysis.

This research is qualitative and restricted (the same story reported on two channels), confined not only by time limitations but by specific news stations as well, namely CNN and Fox. Therefore, the results presented in section 7 of this paper are applicable only to these two newscasts. However, methods used in this research can be applied to analyses of other newscasts in order to arrive at a fuller picture. Furthermore, we must bear in mind that other news stations have different approaches and target different audience groups, and therefore the analysis of these other news channels is likely to be different. The reports I have chosen to analyse are approximately 5-10 minutes long, so for further and more extensive analysis, one might extend the scope of the analysis by looking at other news channels and longer reports.

5. Definitions

The following terms come from several different sources. Some are not used exactly as they are in the original texts, but the terms indicate the definitions relevant to this paper.

**Action news**- a news broadcast angled toward the sensational and entertaining, with a correspondent reporting from a hazardous locality (Fiske, 1994, 191).

**Communicative event**- involves “‘the context of situation’ and a wider social and cultural context”; a discourse that “involves major temporal and spatial disjunctions” (Fairclough, 2002, 50, 36).

**Context**- the bigger scope in which a particular event takes place (Finegan, 1999,588).

**Deixis/deictic**- words which point in various directions, both within a text and beyond it – for example, ‘over here’, ‘down there’, ‘this’, ‘that’, ‘all you people out there’ – and which serve to locate a speaker or writer in relation to what is said (Goddard, 2001, 123).

**Discourse**- “spoken or written language used in a particular social situation; discourse is a broader term than *text* in that it includes context and the intended and actual interpretations”
Discourse analysis- an attempt to show systematic links between texts, discourse practices and sociocultural practices (Fairclough, 2002, 16-7).

Discourse practice- the ways in which texts are produced, received and socially distributed (Fairclough, 2002, 16).

Discourse type- “the configurations of genres and discourses which actually occur, and which may become more or less stable and conventionalized within orders of discourse (Fairclough, 2002, 76).

External/internal narrative- “External narrative tells the story from the point of view of a narrator external to the events themselves who is able to take an overview” (Fairclough, 2002, 156). For internal narrative see testimony.

Intertextual analysis- “a bridge between the ‘text’ and ‘discourse practice’ dimensions in the critical discourse analysis framework (Fairclough, 2002, 75).

Genre- “a way of using language which corresponds to the nature of the social practice that is being engaged in” (Fairclough, 2002, 76), for example news reports, interviews, documentary and politics.

Lifeworld discourse- discourse of ordinary life and ordinary experience (Fairclough, 2002, 164).

Metonymy- using general associations when communicating a message; one entity stands for another; “transfer[ing] information we have about one thing to something else or we use one thing to refer to something that is associated or related to it” (Berger, 1999, 33-4).

Modality- “A grammatical category of verbs marking speaker’s attitudes toward the status of their assertions as factual (indicative), hypothetical (subjunctive), and so on; also called mood” (Finegan, 1999, 592).

Order of discourse- the discursive practices used in a certain social domain; networks of the discursive practices of a community (Fairclough, 2002, 55).

Public discourse- discourse used in official and public domain, e.g. political events (Fairclough, 2002, 37).

Presupposition- “a scale of presence, running from ‘absent’ to ‘foregrounded’ : absent – presupposed – backgrounded – foregrounded. If something is presupposed, it is in a sense present in the text, but as a part of its implicit meaning” (Fairclough, 2002, 106).

Quantifiers- words that denote degree, for example some people, very long, etc. ” (Celce-Murcia, 1999, 330)

Sociocultural practice- constitutes parts of the context of discourse practice, specifically “the institutional framework(s) that the discourse occurs within, and the wider societal matrix of the discourse” (Fairclough, 2002, 16).

Testimony- “the story from the point of view of one of those involved, indirectly involved…as a witness of a part of the events” (Fairclough, 2002, 156-7).

Text- here used to denote a stretch of language bigger than the utterance.

Voice- “are the identities of particular individual or collective agents” (Fairclough, 2002, 77).

According to Fairclough voices may be visual as well as audible and other voices can be embedded within the speech (2002, 84-5).

6. Findings

This section of the paper presents the analysis of the language in its use, that is its use by the news crew, starting with the anchors, followed by the reporters and finally by the people interviewed, vox pop. Fairclough (2002) argues that there are 4 very general questions about any media text², which we, as students, must be able to answer (202), and I agree with him.

² For a definition of text see Definitions.
However, I will not be looking at all of them. The ones I consider in this section together with my research questions are:

1. How is the text designed?

2. How are texts of this sort to be likely interpreted and used?

3. What does the text indicate about the media order of discourse (202-4)?

In this part of the paper I will look closely at and present the results of the analysis of the language in these two newscasts. The findings will be introduced in two subsections, first the results of an analysis of voices, in which identities and relations are included, and then an analysis of discursive and generic features of presupposed knowledge.

6.1. Voices

This block of the paper has two main focuses, namely voices presented and the identities and relation of the participants to the audience. The newscasts have been analyzed in separate subsections. Fairclough (2002) tells us that reports rarely present all the various voices; instead some of them get a more prominent role and others are marginalized. He claims, “the web of voices is an often subtle ordering and hierarchization of voices” (81). In order to show this diversity of voices and give a clearer picture of the participants, I will first give a brief summary of how the newscasts are structured. As will be shown, the two newscasts considered here are modelled similarly with some minor differences, which is evident in the transcripts (see appendices). Both reports are complex and multitudes of voices are represented. The newcast, on both CNN and Fox, is the second in a sequence of newscasts, the first covering an exploded gasoline barge in Staten Island and the third, and final, covering a follow-up on a failed heart transplant.
6.1.a. Formats of the CNN and Fox Reports

I begin by applying Fairclough’s (2002) analytical framework to show how television contributes to a particular construction of the relationship between the public and the private voice. In both these newscasts the anchors represent the public voice, but we must ask ourselves if their private voices shine through. The reports are constructed both as a conversation and as a kind of monologue, where the anchor news-presenters in the studio present news and the correspondents in the field or their interviewees provide relevant feedback. Both of them were broadcast on February 21, 2003 by CNN and Fox News and cover a follow-up on a fire in a Rhode Island nightclub called The Station. The newscasts have been announced in the beginning and therefore do not have an opening sequence but come up among other reports. Bearing in mind that these are 24-hour news-channels, we are given news in intervals with commercial adverts in-between.

**CNN Report**

Although there is a multitude of voices presented in this report, the most represented ones are those of the male anchor, Renay San Miguel (here referred to as Anchor 1), and female anchor, Holly Firfer (Anchor 2). In addition there are voices of vox pops: local reporter Brian Butler, Rhode Island Governor Donald Carcieri and singer Jack Russell and the voices, whose speech is represented, like an unspecified voice of the officials, the police chief (line 69), the owners of the club (differentiated into ‘club’, line 70) an unidentified stage technician (line 81), the investigators (line 108) and an unidentified source (line 111).

The following is the format of the interaction between the anchors and correspondents or vox pop.
Speaker identification:

Anchor 1 = Renay San Miguel,
Anchor 2 = Holly Firfer,
Vox pop 1 = Local reporter, Brian Butler
Vox pop 2 = Rhode Island Governor, Donald Carcieri
Vox pop 3 = lead singer Jack Russell

Anchor 1: Brief introduction of the topic (lines 3-19).

Vox pop 1: Account of the events (lines 20-65).

Anchor 2: Follow-up on the history of the band and introduction of an official figure (lines 66-73).

Vox pop 2: Brief statement from the Rhode Island Governor (lines 74-80).

Anchor 2: Indirect quote of the lead singer (lines 81-87).

Vox pop 3: Short segment with the lead singer (lines 88-95).

Anchor 2: Statement of the intent to follow the coverage of the story (lines 96-8).

Anchor 1: Introduces another topic and compares the two, asks watchers to write their opinions which they will reply to later on (lines 99-131).

The report ends rather abruptly. There are no thanks to the correspondents or to the vox pop. The pictures of the anchors and the vox pop are always on-camera, as if in face-to-face contact with the viewer, thus creating the first order of social reality, the face-to-face situation (Morse, 1986, 60).

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3 According to Margaret Morse (1986), “The term “anchor” came out of the 1953 presidential conventions, where it was borrowed from the name of the strongest runner of a relay team, the anchorman, who runs the final leg of the race” (57).
If we take a look at the newscast as a whole story, it is clear that this is not a conversation between equal co-workers but a report orchestrated by the anchors. It is a sort of monologue where any feedback comes after the newsreader is finished. This one-at-a-time construction of conversation, according to Carole Edelsky whom Coates cited in “One-at-a-Time: The Organization of Men’s Talk” (in Language and Masculinity, 1997), is the type of a “single (singly developed) [conversational] floor” (109). Furthermore, the anchors, the figures of authority, determine the length and the context of the conversations and “display an orientation to the reporter’s authority to describe the events that comprise the news story…Because of her [his] superior knowledge of those affairs the reporter has a prima facie claim to the right to describe the scene, people and events that constitute the story” (Raymond, 2000, 356).

In both these newscasts the reporter is actually the participant in the event, which, according to Fairclough (2002) is ”an instance of what we might call the ‘expert interview’, in which the interviewee is constructed as having expert knowledge which the interviewer is eliciting on behalf of the audience” (161). As Coates (in Language and Masculinity, 1997) calls these monologues “playing the expert”, where the participants take turns in holding the floor and talking about the subject which they are an expert on (120). This is fully visible in the interviews with vox pops Brian Butler and Jack Russell; since they have first-hand experience of the event in question, therefore they are the experts on the subject.

**On-site interview with local reporter Brian Butler:**

20 It was that fast. as soon as the 
21 pyrotechnics stopped. the flames had 
22 started on the egg crate backing behind 
23 the stage. an’ it just went up the ceiling 
24 and people stood and watched it an’ 
25 …
27 trying to leave and others were just 
28 sitting there going ‘yeah that’s great!’ 
29 …
33 people still just stood there in the other 
34 rooms the smoke hadn’t gotten to them 
35 an’ wasn’t that bad they didn’t think 
36 anything of it. well I guess. once we
37 all started to turn toward the door an’
38 we got bottlenecked into the front door .
39 people just kept pushing an’ eventually
40 everyone popped out of the door
41 including myself . that’s when I turned
…
47 the front again an’ that’s when you saw
48 people stacked on top of each other
49 trying to get out of the front door and
50 by then the black smoke was pouring
51 out over their heads I noticed that when
52 the pyros stopped . the flame it kept
53 going on both sides an’ then on one side
54 I noticed had come over the top an’
…
58 and people just stood there there was a
59 table in the way at the door an’ I pulled
…
63 just . it was so fast it had to be two
64 minutes tops before the whole place
65 was black smoke. (CNN transcript, interview with local reporter, Brian Butler)

On-site comment by lead singer Jack Russell:

88 It was terrible I I mean an’ I was I was
89 even like e: a a I would I would rather
90 be . you know . in there myself than
91 have these people dead . I mean these
92 are my fans an’ we love ‘em I just I just
93 there’s no words to describe what I’m
94 feeling right now I’m in a total shock .
95 in total shock. (CNN transcript, interview with lead singer Jack Russell)

However, throughout these different interviews we can see that although this appears to be
an informal conversation whose main purpose is to get the information, it is not really the
case. The anchors are directing the report by giving background on what happened and then
passing on the floor to the experts. The content of the answers is, however, more or less fully
anticipated. For example, at the beginning of the interview with Jack Russell, his answer
reformulates and elaborates on the introduction made by Holly Firfer, the female anchor:

Back to anchor Holly Fifer in studio:

81 The stage technician says he didn’t
82 know the band was planning to use the
On-site comment by lead singer Jack Russell:

88 It was terrible I I mean an’ I was I was
89 even like e: a a I would I would rather
90 be . you know . in there myself than
91 have these people dead . I mean these
92 are my fans an’ we love ‘em I just I just
93 there’s no words to describe what I’m
94 feeling right now I’m in a total shock .
95 in total shock. (CNN transcript, interview with lead singer Jack Russell)
As for the report from Fox News, it appears to be of a slightly more informal setting than the one from CNN. It has almost the same format as the one from CNN; the only difference is in the unconventional setting in the studio, where the anchors are sitting in front of the desk facing each other like two friends drinking coffee and chatting (see CNN transcript in the Appendices). But it is this setting that gives the viewer a sense of participation in the conversation between the anchors. The voices most represented are those of the anchors, Rick Folbaum (Anchor 1) and Patti Ann Browne (Anchor 2). In addition there are also voices of the interviewees: local reporter Brian Butler (Vox pop 1), an unidentified woman in the hospital and a voice-over of the correspondent interviewing her (Vox pop 2), and a voice-over of Dominic Santana (Voice-over). There are also voices of those whose speech is represented and they are: the Great White (differentiated into ‘band members’, ‘road manager’, lines 12, 38, 148), ‘business owners’ (differentiated into ‘the owners of The Station’, lines 184, 136, 53), personnel working in the clubs (differentiated into ‘soundman’, ‘stage manager’, lines 32, 164) and Dominic Santana (differentiated into ‘the owner of a New Jersey club’, ‘owner of the Stone Pony’, lines 19-20, 31-2). The only real conversation in this newscast is the phone interview with Mr Santana. There is, however, one thing this report has in common with the CNN report; and that is the interview with Brian Butler, the local reporter, and several shots of the inflamed club with cars in the front and people walking around in shock (see transcripts). The interview is the same in both reports. It is only edited differently.

The following is the format of the Fox News newscast (for transcript see Appendix 2).

*Speaker identification:*

Anchor 1 = Rick Folbaum,
Anchor 2 = Patti Anne Browne,
Vox pop 1 = local reporter Brian Butler,
Vox pop 2 = an unidentified woman in the hospital bed.

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4 I do not deal with gender issues in this paper but it is, perhaps, an interesting observation that I have put the male anchors as Anchor 1 and the female anchors as Anchor 2 in structuring these reports.
Anchor 1: Introduces his co-anchor (lines 1-2)

Anchor 2: In-depth introduction of the topic (lines 3-68)

Vox pop 1: Account from the site of the events (lines 69-96)

Anchor 1: Simplified repetition of Brian Butler’s statement (lines 97-104)

Vox pop 2: Account from the hospital (lines 105-22)

Voice-over: Encouraging sounds from the reporter (line 123)

Vox pop 2: Continued accounts of the events (lines 124-6)

Voice-over: Encouraging sounds from the reporter (line 127)

Anchor 1: Introduction of a new topic and a question about that event (lines 129-40)

Voice-over: Dominic Santana’s reply on the phone, speculative and lengthy (lines 141-87)

Anchor 1: Asks about stopping the band’s show (lines 188-203)

Voice-over: Reply, uncertain and evasive (lines 204-19)

Anchor 1: Question about sprinklers (lines 220-22)

Voice-over: Answers very firmly (line 223)

Anchor 1: Follow-up on the question about sprinklers (line 224)

Voice-over: Reply, strong (line 225)

Anchor 1: Repetition of the introduction of Dominic Santana and new introduction of Anchor 2 (lines 226-31)

In this report, like in the one from CNN, the ending is left open in a way. That is probably because they will return to it over and over again as they continue to report the same news. They would want to convey a feeling of an on-going event; that there are new facts to be introduced about the event and perhaps there could be new information to come as the investigation goes on, but for the moment there are no new facts, just repetition of the old ones. What I find interesting in both reports is that the interview with Brian Butler is actually
a testimony, because the focus of the report is partly upon the personality of the witness, in this case Brian Butler, and his response and evaluation of the event (Fairclough, 2002, 156).

As said above these reports only appear to be a conversation, but in reality they are single floor conversations\(^5\) directed by the anchors. The networks have just used different approaches in accomplishing this. The only real collaborative conversation in the Fox report is between the anchor Rick Folbaum and Dominic Santana, but even that is strictly constrained by the anchor’s questions and edition of interviewee’s answers.

RF:
139 Dominic what happened when this 140 band came and played the Stone Pony?

DS:
141 Well e: we were looking forward to 142 a great show e: and we went 143 through all our advanced procedures . 144 gone through their riders and their 145 contracts, crossing the t’s and dotting …

186 liquor laws an’ everything that safety 187 comes first. (cut off)

RF:
188 Mr Santana, let me ask you a 189 question . because ah . ah . the owner … 200 would...did...did...he give any thought 201 to that was there any consideration 202 given to stopping the show once they 203 broke your club’s rules?

DS:
204 Yeah uhw uhww at at that point the 205 stage manager ran . to their manager … 218 throwing so we decided at that point 219 ‘allright, just walk away from it’.

RF:
220 Domenic can I ask you real quickly do 221 you have ah: sprinkler system at your

RF: 224 How long have you had it?

DS: 225 For twenty-nine years. (cut). *(Fox News report)*

The structure of the interview, as well as the story, is made up of stages, which all occur in a fixed order. It consists of Headline + Lead + Satellites + Wrap-up (Fairclough, 2002). The order of these 4 stages is fixed, which is shown in the interview, as a part of the report, but also in the report as whole. Headline and Lead introduce and summarize the whole story, while Satellites elaborate various aspects of the story. Fairclough (2002) states about Satellites: “they lead back to the Lead, but they are relatively independent of one another” (85). And the Wrap-up offers a summery of the reported news.

RF: 226 Dominic Santana the owner of The Stone Pony the famous nightclub in Asbury Park New Jersey where Great White played just a couple of weeks ago and did the same thing with their pyrotechnics display. Patti Ann? *(Fox News report, lines 226-31)*

6.1.b. Identities and Relations in the CNN and Fox Reports

According to Kiesling (in Johnson and Meinhof, 1997),

“In theory, the men are free to create any identity they want, but in practice, they are pushed (and they push themselves) towards identities which do not challenge the perceived values of…dominant US society. Each man also has different discursive resources (e.g. storytelling ability, joking ability, a powerful structural role, a loud voice etc.) in order to draw upon disparate types of power.” (66).

This, I believe, is true not only in these reports but in general too. The anchors, as will be shown in this section, have a powerful structural role, while the vox pop have storytelling ability and the ‘quality of voice’ on their side.
As I have stated earlier, both newscasts appear to be constructed as a conversation between the anchors and various vox pop, indicating that they are talking in turns. I start my analysis by looking at these turns and their contents. The support in this section is provided after each example; I have put the line numbers from the transcripts in the brackets.

**CNN Report**

I have applied Finegan’s (1989) types of the speech acts to the voices represented in both these newscasts. Since anchors are considered to be the representatives of the networks, it is natural to assume that the type of discourse they use is formal, institutional and public. In this news broadcast the anchors have the role of the announcers of the news.

The report begins in a declarative mood, where the anchor, Renay San Miguel, introduces the topic in an assertive way. This is indicated in the vocabulary he uses, although words like ‘officials’ (in “a news conference from officials there is”, line 6), ‘killed’ (in “were killed and more than 150 injured”, line 9) and ‘death toll’ (in “Station . officials fear that the death toll”, line 12) may indicate political/military discourse. The terms, however, have not been specified here. The tone in his delivery is slightly eager and persuasive. And he also uses modality in order to persuade the audience that what he is saying is the truth:

70 the club had not applied for a required (line 70); (modality is expressed in the tone of the delivery)

…

85 club Russell says there’s obviously
86 some sort of miscommunication and he (lines 85-6);

…

96 CNN Headline News will be following (line 96);

…

123 probably been in that before if you’re (line 123).
In the next sequence of the report the authority is passed on to the first vox pop, Brian Butler. Although he too is a reporter, he wants to be seen as an ordinary person. According to Fiske (1989) the reporter represents both “an individual and an institutional voice…[his/her] function is to be in touch with “raw reality” and to mediate between it and the final knowledge of truth” (154). But in this case the reporter is also a witness, which is why his turn is quite colloquial and badly rehearsed. The tone is very exciting and confused and he is clearly foregrounding a non-institutional personality. But in doing this he loses all credibility other than that he is on the spot (Morse, 1986, 70). On the other hand, he is engaging in entertainment, claiming co-membership with the audience (Fiske, 1989, 174-5) and he also assumes a role of the ‘expert’ at the site of the event (Fairclough, 2002, 161).

In the third turn we are given the background about the band by the second anchor, Holly Firfer who also quotes the police chief and the Governor of Rhode Island:

69 Longley is missing the police chief says  
70 the club had not applied for a required  
71 permit for the pyrotechnics display the  
72 Governor of Rhode Island says:  
73 “Someone made a very bad decision.” (CNN transcript, lines 69-73).

The vocabulary is formal, but simple and the tone is very assertive. According to Finegan (1989) the type of speech used here is a representative, since assertion is a part of it. He also states that they can be true or false (298), which is evident in Firfer’s statement that “the police chief says the club had not applied for a required permit for the pyrotechnics display” (lines 69-70). Depending on whether or not the audience believes what the police claims, these lines could be interpreted as true or as false.

The next turn has Governor of the Rhode Island Donald Carcieri. Considering that he is an official person and a politician, one could assume that he would use a very formal vocabulary and public discourse, but it is quite the opposite. He uses here features of the lifeworld discourse (see excerpt below, lines 75, 79-80). The tone of his statement is judgmental and
compassionate, which is an interesting contrast and the type of the speech act used is a verdictive (Finegan, 298).

**On-site statement made by Rhode Island Governor Donald Carcieri:**

74 ...it didn’t need to happen absolutely
75 sure on it th th this this the people were
76 here to dance an’ enjoy themselves .
77 somebody made a decision to to pull off
78 this pyrotechnic displays and it started a
79 fire … OK . didn’t need to happened
80 shouldn’t a’ happened. (*CNN transcript, lines 74-80*)

The fifth turn is relatively short. The anchor Holly Firfer continues to lead the report by giving the background of the event, but this time from the band’s perspective, quoting the stage technician and the lead singer Jack Russell.

**Back to anchor Holly Firfer in studio:**

81 The stage technician says he didn’t
82 know the band was planning to use the
83 fireworks but lead singer Jack Russell
84 says he had permission from the cal
85 club Russell says there’s obviously
86 some sort of mishap and he
87 also says he is stunned by the tragedy… (*CNN transcript, lines 81-7*)

By using indirect quotes the anchor appears to be giving the correct information without any input from her personal identity, but this is misleading since “the symbolic position from which the anchor speaks influences our cultural values” (Morse, 58). She seems to suggest the possibility that the band did not break any rules by using the pyrotechnics, but that there might have been a miscommunication between the band and the club (*lines 86-7*).

The type of the speech act she uses here is a directive and the tone is firm. Her vocabulary is relatively simple but also institutional. She introduces the next turn.

The sixth turn is a comment by vox pop, Jack Russell. The vocabulary here is very colloquial and the tone is confused and pleading, but there is no admission of any sort. He uses the expressive type of the speech:
On-site comment by lead singer Jack Russell:

88 It was terrible I I mean an’ I was I was
89 even like e: a a I would I would rather
90 be . you know . in there myself than
...
92 are my fans an’ we love ‘em I just I just
93 there’s no words to describe what I’m ... (*CNN transcript, lines 88-90,92-3*).

The seventh turn is short indicating the end, but there is no summing up of the story. The anchor Holly Firfer still has her institutional personality. She still leads the direction of the conversation. And the way this is done is through assertion that CNN news-channel will bring the updates as soon as they get them:

96 CNN Headline News will be following
97 the story closely today and bring you
98 updates as we get them. (*CNN transcript, lines 96-8*).

The eighth, and last, turn is somewhat a surprise, because the other anchor, Renay San Miguel, is taking the lead and introduces a new topic. He gives the background to two different incidents and compares them to one another. But then he makes a turn and invites the audience to participate in the programme by answering a question. This turn is marked with the discourse marker “so” (in “so our question for”, line 115), indicating a conclusion, which is misleading in this case. As stated in the turn 1, San Miguel has had the role of the enunciator and now he returns to his institutional personality. Although the vocabulary used in this turn is still very simple, the uses of quantifiers like “not much” in

13 could rise as you can see there is not
14 much left of the building ironically (*lines 13-4*),

“very” in

124 been in a very a a nightclub that’s got (*line 124*)

and “a lot of” in

125 a lot of people in there and you’re (*line 125*)
contribute to the impression of a colloquial conversation. The tone, however, is very interested and eager to hear the responses to his question.

*Fox News Report*

Considering the setting in this newscast, which is very informal and differs from the one-way conversational structure of the CNN newscast, I will discuss the turns as they are made. I will start with the anchor newscasters, followed by the segments with the vox pops 1 and 2 and finish with the voice-over of Dominic Santana.

The report begins with the short introduction of Patti Ann Browne by Rick Folbaum (in the transcript referred to as RF). The tone is welcoming and friendly and the vocabulary is simple. The anchor, however, assumes a role of an ordinary person. In fact, he claims co-membership with the audience by using “we say hello” (line 1) when announcing Browne and later on “joins us now” (line 137). This implied relation with the audience is, however, constructed and false. Morse (1986) shows this in her discussion on the existence of the real barrier of the television screen and “the fourth wall or imaginary line of demarcation within the represented space on the screen” (65-7). Rick Folbaum and Patti Ann Browne do not really engage in ‘real’ conversation with the audience.

The introduction of the topic is then delivered in a declarative mood by Browne and is more detailed account of the event than the one given in the CNN report. The focus is on whether or not the band has had the permission to use the fireworks. By using evidentials such as ‘covering’ and ‘hearing’ (in “but a: obviously we’re also covering this tragic night club fire”, lines 5-6; in “latest news we’re hearing now is”, line 52) in her description of the event “the anchor organizes his [her] reportage in terms of a witness’s or outsider’s perspective” (Pomerantz in Raymond, 2000, 366). This is evident from the ‘editorial’ comment, which summarizes what the news team has gathered so far:
Patti Ann Browne in the studio:

3 Yeah. certainly c: tragic news day
4 certainly that doesn’t help that story
5 but a: obviously we’re also
6 covering this tragic night club fire
7 in Rhode Island. the death toll now
...
15 granted that permission and. now
16 we’re hearing the club saying that
...
52 latest news we’re hearing now is (Fox News transcript, lines 3-7, 15-6, 52).

But in addition to being the enunciator of news, the anchor here is also a teller of an external narrative\(^\ast\). According to Toolan (1992),

> “narratives are interpretable, can stand on their own, without reference to the background assumptions and values of the community out of which they arise” (226).

I believe Brown shows this in her introduction. In this turn, there is also reported speech of the band members and the club owners, which adds credibility to the network being unbiased. The vocabulary is somewhat colloquial and simple and the tone is assertive.

The third turn belongs to Brian Butler, whose role is the same as in the CNN report, namely that of an ‘expert witness’. He gives his testimony in a very excited tone and using colloquial language. This interview is almost identical to the one shown in the CNN newscast. The only difference is in the length and cut of the interview.

In the next turn the anchor Rick Folbaum assumes the role of the official manager of the news. He gives a summary of Brian Butler’s statement in a declarative mood. But this repetition of Butler’s words indicates that we, the audience, need explanations in order to understand what was said. One could say that he is assuming yet another role, this time a role of a parent. He also starts his turn with a discourse marker “well” (line 97) indicating a degree of uncertainty, but it is a false indication since the next turn is yet another testimony, this time

\(\phantom{\text{For a definition of external narrative see p. 9.}}\)

\(^\ast\) For a definition of external narrative see p. 9.
of an unidentified woman in the hospital. Folbaum uses simple vocabulary and very calm, but a bit patronizing tone.

As mentioned above, the fifth turn belongs to the unidentified woman in the hospital. The delivery is very emotional and confused. And her vocabulary is simple and very colloquial. Her report is clearly angled toward the sensational (Fiske, 1989,171). Nevertheless, just like Brian Butler, she too is considered to be ‘expert’ but her statement is also a testimony. According to Fairclough (2002), testimony belongs to public genre in the sense that it links personal experience and public accountability (157-8). I agree with him, because this is the case in both these testimonies.

In the sixth turn Folbaum takes back the role of the manager of the news and returns to formal institutional personality. The tone of the anchor is still concerned and interrogative. He repeats Browne’s introductory background of another similar event and asks a follow-up question to the owner of that club. This is where the format of the report changes from one-way conversation to a real conversation. Folbaum starts by asking Dominic Santana a question.

**RF:**
139 Dominic what happened when this
140 band came and played the Stone Pony? *(Fox News transcript, lines 139-40)*

The use of the first name gives an impression that the conversation is more intimate, almost like a chat between two friends.

Turn 7 belongs to a voice-over of Dominic Santana. The rest of the report is structured as a telephone conversation between the anchor Rick Folbaum and Dominic Santana. In this turn Santana provides a lengthy response to Folbaum’s inquiry. The turn starts with the discourse marker “well”:

**DS:**
141 Well e: we were looking forward to… *(Fox News transcript, line 141)*,

---

7 For a definition of genre see p. 9.
indicating, in this case, that an honest and thorough account will be presented to us. His vocabulary is very simple and the tone is full of modality:

143 through all our advanced procedures
...
149 makes all the details all the
...
155 lightening guys an’all that good stuff
...
157 any pyrotechnics for we have a house (Fox News transcript, lines 143, 149, 155, 157).

Santana’s use of “you know” in

150 arrangements . if they want e: you
151 know how many towels the stage
...
171 decided you know ok let’s not let’s
...
176 could have been us it’s just you know
177 it’s pretty shocking . to find out that
178 you know that bands come in . an’ (Fox News transcript, lines 150-1, 171, 176-8)

underlines this intimate status of the conversation and it ties it back to the anchor’s question. All of this adds to the impression of a colloquial conversation.

Turn 8 is a follow-up question about the band’s permission to use the pyrotechnics. This time Folbaum’s tone is very eager and interrogative and he switches to lifeworld discourse. But there is a big contrast here. For a difference from the previous time where the newscaster uses first name when speaking to Dominic Santana, in this turn he uses the last name. This indicates that the anchor is using a more formal approach. But later on, he abandons the formal personality and takes on a personality of an ordinary person. He shows this in the delivery, which appears very insecure and unrehearsed:

RF:
188 Mr Santana, let me ask you a
189 question . because ah . ah . the owner
...
194 advance word that pyrotechnics e:
195 were part of the show at all . e: it
...
200 would...did...did...he give any thought (Fox News transcript, lines 188-9, 194-5, 200).
In the answer Santana continues to use colloquial vocabulary and an evasive tone. He is clearly foregrounding a non-institutional personality. He does not really answer the question but makes excuses like “all right there’s no more pyros let the show go on” (Fox News transcript, lines 210-1).

In this turn Folbaum is once again back to the first name basis. This turn is just a short follow-up question about the sprinkler system.

RF:
220 Dominic can I ask you real quickly do (Fox News transcript, line 220)
The tone here is very assertive and interrogative.

The response from Santana is very short and this time the tone is very assertive.

DS:
223 Absolutely.

Turn 12 is yet another question from the anchor, Rick Folbaum. The tone is interrogative and he is back to his formal institutional personality. There is neither stuttering nor any other type of insecurity.

Turn 13 is very short. Santana answers the question in a firm tone.

DS:
225 For twenty-nine years. (cut). (Fox News transcript, line 225)

The anchor, Rick Folbaum, has the final turn of course. He gives a summery of the conversation with Santana. He is still foregrounding a formal personality. His tone is, however, less eager, indicating the end, which is also clear when he passes on the word to Patti Anne Browne. The vocabulary is more formal than in the beginning of the interview.

RF:
226 Dominic Santana the owner of The Stone Pony the famous nightclub in Asbury Park New Jersey where Great White played just a couple of weeks ago and did the same thing with their pyrotechnics display. Patti Ann?
The role of the anchor in these broadcasts is to begin as an enunciatior of news and then to engage in exposition. But then the vox pop comes into the picture and the anchor becomes a manager of the report that follows. The anchor’s turns are relatively short but they still direct the flow of information. During the course of the newscasts, the anchors switch back and forth between different personalities, ranging from official to private personality. This also means that they switch between different genres and discourses. Further, the anchors and the audience are not involved in a real communication, since the audience does not have any impact on what is being presented in news.

The vox pops are clearly presented as ordinary people. This is displayed in the way they speak and the tone they use. Their turns are usually very colloquial, emotional and appear not to be rehearsed. They are also foregrounded as non-institutional personalities who engage in exposition and entertainment, at the same time as they claim co-membership with the audience. They are also given a role of an expert due to their personal experience of the events.

According to Browne and Yule (1993) the speaker “can always override the effect of the words he [she] speaks” by using paralinguistic features like facial expressions, postural and gestural systems as well as the full range of ‘voice quality’ effects (4). Goddard (1998) as well as Wood and Kroger (2000) claim the same and I must agree with them. In both these reports we have been introduced to a certain type of persons. The anchor newscasters are presented to us in formal clothes, all in the effort to appear credible to the audience. Their facial expressions and body language also play an important role together with the tone of their delivery. For instance, during the interview with Dominic Santana in the Fox News report, the anchor Rick Folbaum is almost all the time on the screen (see Fox News transcript). Through his body language he indicates several different things. By leaning slightly forward when asking Santana a question, he implies eagerness to hear his response. But in the follow-up
question Rick distances himself from the content of Santana’s response by looking through
the papers on the desk and nodding but not looking at the camera.

6.1.c. Language and Generic Features

I have already mentioned in the previous section some of the linguistic features used in the
discourse of these two reports. Fairclough (2002) tell us that there are always choices to be
made when it comes to representing events and actions in language and that these choices are
partly a matter of vocabulary and partly a matter of grammar (109). The vocabulary used here
is one most people are familiar with and by using it the anchors decide the placement of the
presented event. For instance, in both reports, the anchors refer to the violent deaths of the
people in the Chicago nightclub as “deadly stampede” as opposed to a more ordinary ‘killing’
or ‘dying’. Furthermore, they use more colloquial expressions and adjectives in their
presentations. We are told that it has been a “tragic news day” (Fox report, line 3) as well as a
“tragic nightclub fire” (Fox report, line 6).

The use of inclusive pronoun we in “we’re hearing” (Fox report, line 16), “we are
continuing” (CNN report, lines 1-2) and the colloquial use of you in “bring you updates”
(CNN report, lines 97-8), “as you just heard” (Fox report, line 97) as an indefinite pronoun in
these newscasts tell us nothing. But they are both ambiguous in the sense that they can mean
different things. We in the first above example can mean we, the news crew or all of us
watching the news, but we in the second example is restricted to the news personal alone.

According to Fairclough (2002) news personal must choose whether to present what is
happening as an action or an event (109-10). Since we are told that “an Action involves
both…Actor and Patient [where] the Actor does something to the Patient” (110), I believe,
these newscasts are presented as an action. It is the fire, which has killed people and is hence
an Actor, and the people who died as a reaction are the Patient.
Every language is a very complex and powerful tool in the hands of those who know how to use it, as the media certainly does. There are many nuances one can express just by choosing one word over the other, as we have seen above. In doing this deliberate selection, the newscasters are also alternating between several genres and discourses.

6.2. Presuppositions

This section of the paper deals with the shared background knowledge. It deals with presences and absences in texts, in this case in these two newscasts. According to Fairclough (2002) we can differentiate degrees of presence “running from ‘absent’ to ‘foregrounded’: absent-presupposed-backgrounded-foregrounded” (106). I have already mentioned some of these degrees in section 6.1.b. but will discuss them more thoroughly in this one. Presupposition in text is important “in the way in which it positions its…viewers or listeners” (107).

In these newscasts, presuppositions help establish represented realities as convincing. For instance, the opening parts of these news broadcasts need to establish for the audience a reality, a world-view, which carries conviction as authentic. As the extracts analysed here were recorded some time after the actual event took place, I must assume that the networks may have, and probably did have, given more information about the situation in the previous broadcasts. In establishing this ‘reality’, however, both the anchors and the addressees switch back and forth between different styles and genres.

6.2.a. CNN

Already in the introduction of the report there is an assumption made by Renay San Miguel about the actual existence of the nightclub in question as well as the knowledge that the audience has about the fire in that club:
The other big story today we are continuing to follow that deadly fire at a West Warwick Rhode Island nightclub. (CNN transcript, lines 3-5).

Part of the authenticity in this case is achieved through film and sound effects and, naturally, through the voices of the anchors, but it is also a matter of positioning of the viewer through presupposition as someone who is already familiar with the event depicted. San Miguel does this through the use of deixis*. The effect of the definite article in “that deadly fire” (line 4) is to presuppose the existence of this fire, that is, to take it as given knowledge for the audience.

Further, there is a common-sense assumption, or the world-view, about “officials”:

6 a news conference from officials there is ...
12 Station officials fear that the death toll ...
69 Longley is missing the police chief says ...
108 investigators say surveillance camera (CNN transcript, lines 6, 12, 69, 108).

This assumption holds a presupposition that the audience knows exactly which government, in this case the American, these officials belong to. Throughout the newscast ‘officials’ are mentioned as a source of information, but there is no information given about their identity. In stead terms like ‘officials’, ‘police chief’ and ‘investigators’ are used metonymically* to refer to all participants of the government (Berger, 1999, 33-5). By using terms like these, the anchors make a choice about what genres to draw upon and what discourses to use. These choices help establish represented realities as convincing. Thus, both genres and discourses, in addition to carrying explicit meanings, carry within certain implicit meanings as well. These implicit meanings are left unsaid but are regarded as given, presupposed.

According to Fairclough (2002) “genres can be described in terms of their organizational properties” (56) and in that case the most generic genre used in both these reports is the

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* For a definition of deixis see p.8.
* For a definition of metonymy see p.11.
interview genre. But genres also occur in particular combinations with discourses, that is –
particular genres are predictably articulated with particular discourses (66), which all carry
certain implicit meanings within. Considering that I am looking at these reports as particular
communicative events, it is evident that both involve configurations of genres rather than a
single genre. This means that the implication of presupposed knowledge varies from genre to
genre and therefore from discourse to discourse as well. According to Fairclough (2002):
“Discourses are relatively independent of genres” (76), in the sense that they involve a
number of genres, which discourses in these reports confirm. For example, the military
discourse shows up in interviews, news items and testimonies in both newscasts, implying
discipline and strict structure. I will not, however, discuss this in detail due to constraints of
this paper.

6.2.b. Fox News

Just as in the CNN report, the anchors make here certain presuppositions about the knowledge
of the audience already in the beginning. They start with the use of deictic this in
“this tragic nightclub fire” (line 6) to indicate the knowledge audience has about this
particular fire. The same is valid for the definite article that, which anchors use in “that
permission” (line 15) to presuppose that the permit as such exists in reality. In “that club”:
25 the owner of that club says that the
... 136 Dominic Santana is the owner of that
137 club The Stone Pony joins us now. on (Fox News transcript, lines 25,137),
they assume that the audience is well familiar with the knowledge of what club exactly they
are talking about.

This report, however, differs from the CNN report in that there is no common-sense
assumption; there is no common word-view. In
7 in Rhode Island, the death toll now 8 up to sixty-five, in that case and. (Fox News transcript, lines 7-8)

we are not told where the information originates in “the death toll up to sixty-five” (lines 7-8) and there is no mentioning of the government at all.

Furthermore, in his research on broadcast standards, Bell (1983) argues “a wide variety of speech communities regard broadcast speech – and particularly news – as a prestige standard” (31). I believe this to be accurate since this standard holds a few presuppositions of its own. For example, swearing and slang are taboo in broadcast speech, but we are not told that; that is something the audience is assumed to know. Bell also claims that it is “wrong to speak of a single news style” (34), which is evident from these news presentations. Fairclough (2002) takes this further in seeing texts as sets of options, where each option contains different given knowledge (18). For me, this is evident in the conversation between Rick Folbaum and Dominic Santana, because both the anchor and the interviewee modify their language to win the audience’s approval. By doing this modification they establish a common ground for themselves and their audience. For example, Folbaum starts his interview by addressing Santana with his first name:

RF:
139 Dominic what happened when this
140 band came and played the Stone Pony? (Fox News transcript, lines 139-40)

Folbaum’s choice to address the club owner using an informal first name basis is then reflected in Santana’s response, which is very colloquial and insecure:

DS:
141 Well e: we were looking forward to
142 a great show e: and we went
143 through all our advanced procedures. (Fox News transcript, lines 141-3)

…”

For a definition of communicative event see p.8.
But then the club owner makes a choice to change the style of his language and starts to speak in a less colloquial manner and more firmly. In this turn the given knowledge assumed by Santana is that the audience is familiar with the liquor laws.

182 exciting at all this is a very serious
183 business an’ we are responsible
184 business owners and we realise with
185 the liabilities nowadays an’ with the
186 liquor laws an’ everything that safety
187 comes first. (cut off) (Fox News transcript, lines 182-7)

This ending, in its turn, influences Folbaum into distancing himself from the club owner by using formal form and addressing him as Mr Santana. Only this formal beginning takes a turn towards the more colloquial wording in the rest of his inquiry. Folbaum makes here several presuppositions. He assumes that Santana knows what club he is talking about (line 190). And later on he assumes that Santana knows the thoughts of the manager of his club (lines 197-203).

RF:
188 Mr Santana, let me ask you a
189 question. because ah. ah. the owner
190 of this club where this tragic fire took
…
194 advance word that pyrotechnics e:
195 were part of the show at all. e: it
196 seems like if that were to have
197 happened that maybe your e manager
198 might have e stopped the show right
199 then an’ there, I mean
200 would...did...did...he give any thought
201 to that was there any consideration
202 given to stopping the show once they
203 broke your club’s rules? (Fox News transcript, lines 188-90, 194-203)

This colloquial style then triggers the same colloquial response from Santana:

DS:
204 Yeah uhw uhww at at that point the
205 stage manager ran. to their manager
206 was gonna stop at that point while they (Fox News transcript, lines 204-6)
…

But then Folbaum changes once again into informal style of first name basis.
RF:
220 Dominic can I ask you real quickly do (Fox News transcript, line 220)

This alternation between different styles continues throughout the interview, but also throughout the whole report. As I have mentioned earlier in the section on formats, we can see both as a schematic view of genre (see p.21).

Both of these presentations carry in them certain presupposed knowledge about the event in question. This is done in several different ways, but the goal is the same: to draw the viewer in, to make the audience a part of the reported news. The anchors as well as the vox pop alternate between styles and genres in order to appeal to the audience. Since all genres and discourses carry both explicit and implicit meanings, it is accurate to say that genres and discourses used in these newscasts present assumptions about given knowledge of the audience.

7. Discussion

The findings from this study suggest that the media language of these two newscasts is very complex and arranged to appeal to the audience in order to convince them that what is delivered to them is the truth. Bell (1983) claims that the “broadcast speech is the most readily available and the most commonly heard use of the standard language in most communities” (38). This may be true in general, but in these reports we have seen that the media uses more than one ‘standard’ language. The anchors, who are the figures of authority, and the vox pop, tend to alternate between several different styles in their delivery.

In the first part of the Findings-section I have discussed the web of voices and their hierarchization. As Morse has pointed out, the anchor personality “centers the discourse of the news…[and] is the link between the message or utterance and the enunciation of the news”
(57, 59). In order to claim credibility and sincerity, according to Morse who uses former CBS President Richard Wald’s definition of the anchorman as “all-wise, all-seeing mouth” (in Morse, 64), these anchor personalities must be the top of the hierarchical order. As I see it, this is the case in both of these newscasts. The anchors are orchestrating the flow of the story by giving authority and taking it back as they see it fit. The vox pop may have the role of the ‘expert’, but I believe this appearance of given power to be only an element of entertainment. According to Fiske, this element of entertainment is a necessity in order to gain attention from the audience. But I think this is accurate only to a certain point; otherwise the credibility of news might be questioned, as is the case in the interview with Brian Butler.  

In the construction of their identities, both the anchors and the vox pops use different methods like the ‘quality of voice’, the lifeworld or the public discourse and body language. The structures of these two newscasts are strictly hierarchical. The person with most authority is the anchor, so linguistically, s/he has control over all interaction that is carried out. Neither the fact that the anchors alternate between different personalities in their delivery nor the fact that they seek information as well as confirmation of the same through the various vox pops does, in any case, take away their superior position. This serves only as an entertaining mark.

The same superior position is accurate when considering generic features of language in the two reports analyzed here. Fairclough suggests that there are choices to be made when representing events in language and that these choices are partly a matter of vocabulary and partly a matter of grammar, which is certainly the case in these newscasts. The impact of the inclusive pronoun we on the audience is ambiguous, depending on whether it includes or excludes the audience. Also the use of you as an indefinite pronoun can mean you-the audience or you-the single watcher.

In the second part of the Findings-section I have dealt with shared background knowledge

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11 See p. 20
of the audience as well as the news-crew. According to Fairclough, presuppositions in texts are important in “in the way in which it positions its…viewers or listeners” (107). I do not think I have ever thought about this before I took this course, but now it makes perfect sense. We make assumptions about many things all the time in every-day life, so why not in the news broadcasts as well?

In establishing a convincing world-view or ‘reality’ for the audience, both the CNN and the Fox News broadcasts use a certain degree of presupposed knowledge. This is done through the use of deixis, but also through alternation between genres as well as discourses, as is shown in the interview with Dominic Santana. It is not only the addressees who alternate between the genres and discourses, but anchors too. Even if it is only in order to claim co-membership with the audience. According to Morse, that is what “face-to-face conversation”, as shown in the interview with Dominic Santana, does; “[it] need not match or resemble ‘reality’ – it is reality” (61).

8. Conclusion
This paper has been concerned with the critical discourse analysis of the presentations of the same story broadcast on two different channels, namely CNN and Fox News. Keeping in mind the findings of this paper we can discern a clear inequality in the structure of today’s news and hence a potential for false presentation of news. By saying false I mean that the news we watch may not be accurately delivered since what we are allowed to see as the final product has undergone a series of changes and cuts. We must also remember that the anchors, mere humans, hold the position of authority and although they might try not to show any of their personal biases, the same are likely to be a part of their appearances (performances).

The hierarchy of the presented voices as well as the authority to report has also been
discussed in this limited study. We have seen that in some instances reporters and/or vox pop have been seemingly placed in a position of power, but that power or authority is actually only on the surface. Beneath it, embedded, is the real authority, the anchor that controls the course of the report through various techniques. This appearance of authority also gives news certain entertainment value, which according to Fiske (1989) news ought to have.

I have also shown some of the assumptions made by the news channels. Just by using certain words and leaving others out, the anchors make an appeal to the audience by claiming co-membership. In their presentations both anchors and vox pop alternate between different genres and discourses, all of which have ambiguous meanings; one of which is the ‘unsaid’ presupposed knowledge.

As mentioned above I have cited, as background, the works of several prominent sociolinguists, especially those of Fairclough and Fiske. More specifically, the main model of critical discourse analysis involving texts, discursive practice and social practice were drawn from Fairclough (2002) and the informative and entertaining aspects of news from Fiske. Others, like Morse and Raymond, provided some relevant insights about news authorities and their credibility.

There is, however, one thing we have to keep in mind and that is that no set of methods is perfect or works perfectly in this type of research. There is a limitless potential in this area for further data collection and research. For example, using the methodology of the researchers cited here and mine, others can continue the work of analyzing newscasts as to how they cast authority. They could look more closely not only at the biases the newscasts present but go further and look at the realities they create.
9. Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Videotaped newscasts from CNN and Fox News on February 21, 2003 and transcripts thereof.

Secondary Sources:

Stubbs, Michael. Discourse Analysis. The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language.
Thornborrow, Joanna. “The construction of conflicting accounts in public participation TV.”

Web Sites:
10. Appendices

Notes on the transcripts:

. Centre dot denotes a short stop

… Three dots indicate a longer pause

[ ] Bracket denotes overlapping speech

*italics* Italics: increased volume relative to surrounding talk

Soundtrack:
Voice-over:
1 Death total climbs after flames rage
2 through a Rhode Island nightclub.

Renay San Miguel, anchor in studio:
3 The other big story today we are
4 continuing to follow that deadly fire at a
5 West Warwick Rhode Island nightclub.
6 a news conference from officials there is
7 going on right now. the Rhode Island
8 Governor is confirming at least 65 people
9 were killed and more than 150 injured
10 after an on-stage pyrotechnics display
11 ignited the fire at a nightclub called The
12 Station. officials fear that the death toll
13 could rise as you can see there is not
14 much left of the building ironically
15 a local news reporter was at the club
16 filming the performance. for a piece on
17 a local perspective to Monday’s deadly
18 nightclub stampede in Chicago he says
19 the fire spread very fast…

On-site interview with local reporter
Brian Butler:
20 It was that fast. as soon as the
21 pyrotechnics stopped. the flames had
22 started on the egg crate backing behind
23 the stage. an’ it just went up the ceiling
24 and people stood and watched it an’
25 some people backed off when I turned
26 around. some people were already
27 trying to leave and others were just
28 sitting there going ‘yeah that’s great!’
29 an’ I remember that statement because I
30 was like ‘this is not great this is time to
31 leave’. at first there was no panic.
32 everybody just kinda’ turned most
33 people still just stood there in the other
34 rooms the smoke hadn’t gotten to them
35 an’ wasn’t that bad they didn’t think
36 anything of it. well I guess. once we
37 all started to turn toward the door an’

Screen:
Conventional studio shot, still frame of
Renay San Miguel behind anchor-desk.
Voice quality: slightly speeding delivery,
normal volume, and assertive tone.

Screen split in two: on the left the title and
abstract of the story, on the right helicopter
shots of the ruins of the club.
Firemen standing and watching the burned
building, smoke rising from the ruins but
the fire is out.
The volume drops.

Delivery slows down and the volume
drops.

Street scene, interview with Brian Butler.
Zoom in on Brian Butler. Delivery is fast,
volume is normal, but the tone is eager,
persuasive.

Shots of the inflamed club, fire roaring
through the windows.

Shots from behind the stage.
Zoom in on pyrotechnics, fire starts and
smoke pours over. Speeds up delivery.
Zooming out.

Street scene, people running away from the
burning club.
we got bottlenecked into the front door. Everyone popped out of the door including myself. That’s when I turned back. I went around back. There was no one coming out the back door anymore. I kicked down a side window to try and get people outa’ there one guy did crawl out. I went back around the front again. That’s when you saw people stacked on top of each other trying to get out of the front door and out over their heads. I noticed that when the pyros stopped, the flame kept going on both sides. Then on one side, I noticed had come over the top. Then I said ‘I have to leave’. An’ I turned around. I said ‘Get out! Get out! Get to the door! Get to the door!’ And people just stood there. There was a table in the way at the door. I pulled that out. Just to get it out of the way so people could get out easier. I never expected it to take off as fast as it did. It was so fast it had to be two minutes tops before the whole place was black smoke.

Back to studio – female anchor, Holly Firfer:

The 1980’s heavy metal group Great White was performing at the nightclub and now one of the band’s guitarists Ty Longley is missing. The police chief says the club had not applied for a required permit for the pyrotechnics display. The Governor of Rhode Island says: “Someone made a very bad decision.”

On-site statement made by Rhode Island Governor Donald Carcieri:

…it didn’t need to happen absolutely sure on it th th this the people were here to dance an’ enjoy themselves. Somebody made a decision to to pull off this pyrotechnic display and it started a fire … OK. Didn’t need to happened
shouldn’t a’ happened.

**Back to anchor Holly Firfer in studio:**

81 The stage technician says he didn’t know the band was planning to use the fireworks but lead singer Jack Russell says he had permission from the club Russell says there’s *obviously* some sort of miscommunication and he also says he is stunned by the tragedy…

**On-site comment by lead singer Jack Russell:**

88 It was terrible I I mean an’ I was I was even like e: a a I would I would rather 90 be . you know . in there myself than 91 have these people dead . I mean these 92 are my fans an’ we love ‘em I just I just 93 there’s no words to describe what I’m 94 feeling right now I’m in a total shock . 95 in total shock.

**Holly Firfer in studio:**

96 CNN Headline News will be following 97 the story closely today and bring you 98 updates as we get them.

**Renay San Miguel in the studio:**

99 Now the fire in Rhode Island comes just 100 four days after another fatal tragedy in 101 Chicago . the first pictures have been 102 released from the *inside* the club 103 where 21 people died in a stampede 104 early Monday panic was set off at the 105 E2 nightclub when a *security guard* 106 used *pepper* spray to brake up a fight . 107 this video shows the *aftermath* but 108 investigators say surveillance camera 109 show people trapped in a *narrow* 110 stairway like a cork in a bottle 111 during the stampede . a source who 112 have *seen* the tape told the Chicago 113 Tribune newspaper you can see people
gasp ing for air and being swallowed up by the crowd. so our question for the day is on the e-mail do the Rhode Island nightclub fire and this week’s stampede in Chicago have you thinking twice about going out tonight specifically when you know you’re gonna be in a crowded situation you’re probably been in that before if you’re been in a very a a nightclub that’s got a lot of people in there and you’re wandering where the fire exists. are in situation like that this is our e-mail question for the day give us your thoughts at Kathleen & Renay at CNN dot com and we will read some of your responses later on today.
Soundtrack:

Rick Folbaum in the studio:
1 And with that sad news we say hello to
2 Patti Ann Browne welcome back.

Patti Ann Browne in the studio:
3 Yeah certainly e: tragic news day
4 certainly that doesn’t help that story
5 but a: obviously we’re also
6 covering this tragic night club fire
7 in Rhode Island . the death toll now
8 up to sixty-five . in that case and .
9 big question’s now about . why it
10 was that this band Great White .
11 was shooting off these pyrotechnics
12 during the show . band members
13 have said that they asked for the
14 clubs permission and . that the club
15 granted that permission and . now
16 we’re hearing the club saying that
17 they did not granted such
18 permission and we also have a
19 quote from a: an th owner of a New
20 Jersey club that says that Great
21 White played there . at a: Stone
22 Pony and Asbury Park actually very
23 well known club on a Jersey shore
24 . they played there a week ago and
25 the owner of that club says that the
26 Great White did not tell them in
27 advance that they were going to use
28 pyrotechnics they did use the
29 pyrotechnics at that show and
30 luckily everything wor worked out
31 well but this owner of The Stone
32 Pony says my soundman freaked
33 out because of the heat and
34 everything . they jeopardized the
35 health and safety . of our patrons .
36 again that’s the owner of The Stone
37 Pony and Asbury Park New Jersey
38 saying that Great White despite its
39 claims that it always asks for
40 permission before using these
41 pyrotechnics . this is one owner
42 who says it didn’t and of course the

Screen:

Unconventional studio shot, Rick and Patti Ann are sitting at a table and not behind an anchor-desk. In the background there is a big TV screen with changing images, rolling text. Rolling graphics at the bottom of the screen. She speaks facing Rick in a normal volume and speed.

Footage from the nightclub: band is playing, there are pyrotechnics, people are dancing and jumping.

Street scene, inflamed club, cars in front of it, people walking looking at fire.

Speeds up the delivery.

Slows down.

Speeds up.

Conventional still frame of Patti Ann, Face-to-face setting.

Slows down to normal speed.
latest news we’re hearing now is that the owners of The Station the Rhode Island club are saying that they were not asked for permission either. well meanwhile local station TV news reporter was at The Station on assignment when the fire broke out. ironically Brian Butler was preparing a story on the safety of night clubs this in the wake of Monday’s deadly stampede in a Chicago dance club Butler shut the scene he says he saw dozens of people crushing against each other pushing and shoving running desperately the doors. the scene now in his words.

Vox pop: Edited interview with Brian Butler, a local TV reporter:

As soon as the pyrotechnics stopped. the flame had started on the egg crate backing behind the stage and it just went up the sealing an’ people stood and watched it some people backed off when I turned around some people were already trying to leave an’ others were just sitting there going yeah that’s great and I remember that statement because I was like this is not great this is time to leave there was no way to stop the fire once it started no one had water there was the crowd there’s at least ten to twelve deep from where I was an’ I never expected it to take off as fast as it did it just it was so fast it had to be two minutes tops before the whole place was black smoke a lot of people did get out the majority I would say got out. but to see people stacked a on a top of each other and others heroically jumping in an’ trying’ to push people back just enough to get someone lose. every life was important to everybody there
R.F:

97 Well as you just heard from that camera man a lot of people who were inside the club thought it was part of the show they didn’t immediately realize at first how serious this fire was and how quickly their lives would be in jeopardy…

Vox pop: Interview with a woman in the hospital bed:

105 We were watching the pyrotechnics go off an’ then we realized the crates above the seal on the sealing were spreading the fire was spreading as like this isn’t right and then of course me and my friends tried to get out as long as well as a lot of other people tried to get out so it was kinda’ hectic inside everybody trying to get out at one time they’re little burns but they’re mostly second to third degree burns from being on the pile and the embers falling off the roof. I’m still in a state of shock especially for the twenty-something people and their families that the people that didn’t got out and I’m grateful to be here [uh-huh] gotta look at those pictures and I’m like I was just in that club and I can’t believe it’s gone and I’ve spent a lot of time in that club.

Back to anchor Rick Folbaum in the studio:

129 Patti Ann just mentioned a couple of minutes ago about a club in New Jersey where this band performed just a couple of weeks ago it’s a very famous club called the Stone Pony in...
Asbury Park New Jersey of course the hometown of Bruce Springsteen. Dominic Santana is the owner of that club, The Stone Pony, joins us now on the telephone.

RF: Dominic what happened when this band came and played the Stone Pony?

DS: Well e: we were looking forward to a great show e: and we went through all our advanced procedures. gone through their riders and their contracts, crossing the t’s and dottin’ the i’s, and we normally a week prior to the show we advance with their road manager an’ our general manager makes all the details all the arrangements. if they want e: you know how many towels the stage plots all the technical rider stuff an’ then we talk to our e: technical folks our stage managers sound and lightening guys an’ all that good stuff an’ we basically had no notice of any pyrotechnics for we have a house policy that does not allow pyrotechnics because of our ceiling height and e: we were not aware of pyros until in the show. all of a sudden everything starts to all the flash pots start going off th e: our stage manager ran over to the road menager ‘what the hell is goin’ on here?!’ an’ the road manager just turned around an’ said ‘this is part of our show’ an’. we don’t allow this oh e so that to make a long story short it was done in all the ways an’ we decided you know ok let’s not let’s cool out. thank God nothing happened. let’s just the show go on but now. after this circumstance understanding what had happen’. last night. that that could have been us it’s just you know it’s pretty shocking. to find out that you know that bands come in. an’ think that they could do whatever they
180 could for the flash, for the e: you
181 know a: to get excited an’ this is not
182 exciting at all this is a very serious
183 business an’ we are responsible
184 business owners and we realise with
185 the liabilities nowadays an’ with the
186 liquor laws an’ everything that safety
187 comes first. (cut off)

RF:
188 Mr Santana, let me ask you a
189 question. because ah. ah. the owner
190 of this club where this tragic fire took
191 place in Rhode Island is saying the
192 same thing telling the same story that
193 they had no notice they had no
194 advance word that pyrotechnics e:
195 were part of the show at all. e: it
196 seems like if that were to have
197 happened that maybe your e manager
198 might have e stopped the show right
199 then an’ there, I mean
200 would...did...did...he give any thought
201 to that was there any consideration
202 given to stopping the show once they
203 broke your club’s rules?

DS:
204 Yeah uhw uhww at that point the
205 stage manager ran. to their manager
206 was gonna stop at that point while they
207 were arguing that this is part of the
208 show an’ everything the the
209 pyrotechnics stopped an’ there was he
210 felt at that point ‘allright there’s no
211 more pyros let the show go on’ cause
212 then if you disrupt the show an’ throw
213 them out now you’re gonna have a lot
214 of patrons that are gonna start booing
215 an’ we’ve been in situations before
216 where we have thrown bands off the
217 stage an’ then they start riots an’ bottle
218 throwing so we decided at that point
219 ‘allright, just walk away from it’.

RF:
220 Dominic can I ask you real quickly do
221 you have ah: sprinkler system at your
222 club?
DS:  
223 Absolutely.

RF:  
224 How long have you had it?

DS:  
225 For twenty-nine years. (cut).

RF:  
226 Dominic Santana the owner of The Stone Pony the famous nightclub in Asbury Park New Jersey where Great White played just a couple of weeks ago and did the same thing with their pyrotechnics display. Patti Ann?

Still of Rick nodding.

Change in tone, less eager and slows down the delivery.

Unconventional studio shot, Rick and Patti Ann are sitting at a table and not behind an anchor. In the background there is a big TV screen with changing images, rolling text. Rolling graphics in the bottom of the screen. Change of subject.