



Live News Broadcasting
Credibility vs. Entertainment

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Abstract.

As television news more and more needs to compete with the leisure industry for the available viewers, television news tends to make a shift toward the entertainment genre. Some would argue that this is for the worse, while some would argue that this is a necessity. This paper sets out to investigate whether such a change is present in two different news broadcasts dealing with the same story by adopting critical discourse analysis. The analysis will cover how news personnel make use of different linguistic devices in order to make their reports seem more entertaining and interesting, thus attracting a larger audience. The paper will also analyse whether this strategy endangers the credibility of the news service.

KEYWORDS [credibility, discourse analysis, entertainment, live news, television news]

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1. Introduction

Television news is often thought of as a rather boring but necessary service. Without news we would not know what is happening in the world around us, so we watch it out of some sort of notion that we owe it to ourselves to stay informed. But would we watch the news more closely and more often if it was more entertaining? There are some suggestions that this would indeed be the case. The question that follows then is: does a shift toward more entertaining news threaten the credibility of the news services? Some people would argue that this could be the case, while those calling for more entertaining news argue that if news does not become more entertaining, people will eventually stop watching, or at least quickly forget its content.

News production is constantly changing due to new techniques, allowing reporters to follow and report on events live as they happen. Watching moving pictures is of course more interesting than listening to a newsreader, sitting in a studio, reading from a pile of papers. There are voices warning that this preference to news with an entertainment value threatens the ability and desire to report on socially and politically related issues. But there are also those who argue that if people do not get what they want, they will tune out. Research in these areas has been conducted by Fairclough (2002) and Fiske (1989) respectively.

In this paper I will look at two live news broadcasts reporting on the same piece of news. I will investigate whether, and if so how, these news services use particular linguistic devices in order to make the news more interesting and entertaining than one would expect necessary in order to convey the news. I will also analyse these two news services, one British and the other American, in search for any differences in the use of vocabulary and structure, as well as interaction between the participants. Since both news services have

access to basically the same pictures, the only way to catch the audience's attention, apart from the images of course, is to structure their report as interestingly as possible.

The structure of the findings section of this paper is as follows: first there is an analysis of the voices in each report. In order to report on news events, reporters need to have the authority to report. How this authority is gained, especially in live news broadcasts, has been investigated by Raymond (2000). Second is a look at how these reports are managed. That is: who gets to speak and when. The third part deals with presuppositions. The use of presuppositions can be indicative of who is being addressed. In the fourth part, which is the most extensive of the five parts, I will deal with vocabulary. How does word choice, made by the reporters and anchors, affect the subject at hand? Are there any attempts to mitigate utterances, to hedge statements in order to be able to make the report seem more interesting without the risk of exaggeration? Are there different genres in the discourse? And if so, is there any code-switching between these genres (see definitions about my usage of code-switching). The final part has to do with images. Not the images of the fire itself, but rather with the written texts that are superimposed on the screen.

Finally there will be a discussion where I will present my interpretation of what I have analysed in the findings section.

2. Research Questions.

I will compare two broadcasts dealing with the fire on Staten Island February 21, 2003. One broadcast is from the British BBC World and the other from the American Fox News Network.¹ Both broadcasts are aired live, or at least give the impression of being aired live, with on-the-scene camerapersons filming the drama from helicopters.

¹ The news service broadcasting is British but the news is reported by American Fox News.

I will be focusing on how the newscasts are managed by specially analysing turn-taking, whether there is any difference in the use of presuppositions, hedges and grammar, and I will identify the voices in the two broadcasts and determine if there is any code-switching taking place.

The reason for doing this is to find out whether there are differences in how British news and American news deal with the problem of credibility vs. entertainment. They must at least seem to know what they are talking about and do so in an entertaining manner or the audience will switch to another channel.

The credibility analysis will mainly deal with (expert) voices, vocabulary/code-switching and how the story ties in with the pictures shown. Does the verbal story tell the same story as the pictures? Is there reason to believe that the pictures do not depict what they are said to depict?

The entertainment analysis will also deal with pictures, how the pictures are presented, whether the same picture is shown more than once. Do the pictures add anything to the story other than entertainment? Word-choice will also be analysed to see if there is a switch from news genre to entertainment genre, and whether other genres are used in order to make the news more entertaining.

3. Literature Review.

In my analysis and discussion I will rely mainly on Norman Fairclough's *Media Discourse* (2002) and John Fiske's *Reading the Popular* (1989). Fairclough focuses, among other issues, on the subject of the tension between entertainment and information. The point Fairclough tries to make clear to us is that the knowledgeable reporter whose job it is to inform the interested citizen now also has to entertain his/her audience (5). This development is, according to Fairclough, a result of increasing commercial pressures and competition.

Media now has to compete with the leisure industry in attracting viewers (10-11). This has led to the threatening of the public service aspect of news broadcasting, at least in the UK, according to Fairclough (44). This is impossible for me to fully investigate, but I will be keeping this in mind when I do my analysis.

As a contradiction to what Fairclough sees as a tension between entertainment and information we have John Fiske who claims that there should be a shift towards a popularisation of news. Fiske argues that it is more important to have an audience than to be exceedingly socially responsible if this should result in loss of viewers. Furthermore, Fiske does not think we should oppose popular news to responsible news but “we should seek to develop a repertoire of news services, in which the main aim of the popular news might well be that of catching attention and stimulating interest” (192). Fiske does not suggest that news services should abandon reporting on socially necessary information, but that they should make it popular, “which means to make it matter, to encourage it to be taken up within micro-level cultures” (193).

Since this paper will analyse two live news broadcasts I have found an article by Geoffrey Raymond particularly helpful. Even though Raymond’s article is based on ‘unfolding live coverage’ (357) which, as the name suggests, involves a reporter reporting live from the actual event as it is taking place, and the two news clips I am using have no ‘voice’ from the scene itself, most of his ideas regarding live news broadcasts are applicable to my analysis.

My main focus in this paper is the tension between entertainment and credibility, and the latter is dealt with by Margaret Morse (1986). Morse argues that since the audience can identify who is speaking, which is not the case with print news, and over time can become familiar with the same face on the screen every day, it is much easier to attribute trust and credibility to what that person says. However, a news team cannot simply assume the

audience will believe what they say is true just because the news shows the audience a trustworthy face day after day. News services need to construct their discourse in a manner that removes any doubts the audience may have.

This is a vital element in this paper, the analysis of the discourses used by the two news services. Relying on critical discourse analysis as developed by Norman Fairclough, I will look at if and how the two news stations differ in their use of language when reporting on the same event. In *Introducing Sociolinguistics*, Mesthrie et al. (2000) describe discourse as “continuous speech beyond the level of the sentence” and as “conversational management” (323), the former having to do with grammatical approaches and the latter more with rules for turn-taking and how participants interact within discourse. I will focus on conversational management in my analysis, but there will also be some focus on word-choice regarding e.g. presuppositions and other grammatical features.

The way reporters and news readers use language to emphasize or soften certain aspects of a story is well analysed by Toolan in *Narrative* (1992). For Toolan, grammar means “the systematic account of all the principles governing choices of words and sequences of words within a language” (112). By these active choices “we characterize our view of reality” (112).

This has been a very brief summary of what has been done earlier, but as Barbara Johnstone says: “But the work sociolinguists do almost never consists of library work. Sociolinguists’ claims are based primarily on field research” (21). Which leads us to how I am going to carry out this analysis.

4. Methods

This paper is based on qualitative critical discourse analysis as described above. The corpus is collected from two news broadcasts recorded on February 21, 2003. They are both live

broadcasts and both are from British news services, BBC World and Sky News. However, the clip of the Sky News broadcast is from Fox News, an American news service with American reporters. As mentioned earlier, this paper sets out to analyse the tension between credibility and entertainment in news, and to do this a corpus as extensive as possible from as many news services as possible would be preferable, but since there is a limitation in time I will use only two news broadcasts dealing with the same story. This also gives me the opportunity to analyse the contrastive elements in the news reports.

After transcribing the two reports, I used the methodology laid out by Fairclough for analysing media discourse. Fairclough points out that text analysis covers the traditional forms of linguistic analysis, such as analysis of vocabulary, grammar, semantics and so on, but also analysis of textual organization above the sentence. This includes turn-taking, cohesion and overall structure (57).

Further, many of Fiske's ideas about how news needs to be relevant to its viewers and that achieving this is possible through a more entertaining approach in news are applicable to my analysis.

Morse is also helpful with her work on news and credibility even though this work is now a bit old and, perhaps, out-of-date. Her analysis and her findings are, however, very helpful as a guide as to what to look for in the analysis I am conducting.

5. Definitions

There are some terms that are worth explaining. (NB, I have not included terms explained in the literature review.)

Code-switching: usually the way people shift between two languages or dialects when speaking. I am extending it to denote a shift between different genres, similar to what Fairclough calls intertextuality.

Deixis: The marking of the orientation or position of entities and situations with respect to certain points of reference such as the place and time of an utterance (Finegan 1999, 588).

Genre: in this sociolinguistic context a use of language associated with some particular social practice (Fairclough 56). In the news I am analysing there is, obviously, foremost the genre of news, but also of economics and of the oil industry.

Hedge: a linguistic device by which a speaker avoids being compromised by a statement that might turn out to be wrong (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics*),² e.g. *Maybe I'm wrong, but as far as I'm concerned Patty is correct.* Hedges can be adverbs, as in the example above, modal verb forms or phrases.

Micro-level: Fiske argues that culture occurs on three interlinked levels: macro-, mid and micro levels. The micro level has to do with the people in a society, and Fiske's view is that there have to be relevances between texts and their readers, that is, in this context, news; if the news does not concern or interest the viewers it will rapidly be forgotten (186-187).

Presupposition: taken-for-granted assumptions (Fairclough, 14).

Voices: are the identities of particular individuals or collective agents (Fairclough, 77). Voices can be direct or indirect.

6. Findings

In this section of the paper I will present the results of my analysis of the two news services. I have divided the section into four parts, voices, management, presuppositions, vocabulary and Images. The third part, vocabulary, will also deal with hedges, genre and code-switching. First off, though, is a presentation of the two services.

When browsing BBC World's web-page one can read that "BBC World is the BBC's commercially funded international 24-hour news and information channel broadcasting

² Retrieved from www.xrefer.com

around the world from its base at BBC Television Centre in London.” And that “BBC World keeps its viewers not just informed, but well informed, with in-depth analysis and cutting edge interviews - the story from all sides” (www.bbcworld.com).

Fox News is part of the News America Group and is available through Sky News in Great Britain as well as several other countries all over the earth. On their web-page, Fox claims to “understand what people want from today’s news: More information, presented in a fair and balanced format” (www.foxnews.com).

The two broadcasts differ in style in that in the clip from BBC the two persons involved in the discussion, a Washington correspondent and the anchor in the studio, are visible throughout the report whereas in the clip from Fox there is no one visible; there are only pictures of the fire and some additional text together with the voices of the reporters and an interviewee on the phone.

6.1 Voices

This segment explores the voices in the reports. There are not many voices but they are important to investigate since there are connections between voices, genre and credibility.

6.1.a BBC World

The voices in the BBC news report are, obviously, the two reporters, the Washington correspondent John Lion and the newsreader, or anchor (a woman whose name I unfortunately have not been able to obtain), in the studio in London. These are the only ones who actually speak but there are some other voices that need attention and I will return to them later.

In the BBC report there is no obvious expert voice. Even though the Washington correspondent sometimes appears to be more up-to-date regarding the events taking place and more knowledgeable about the oil and gas industry, he is merely corroborating what the

anchor already knows and provides a setting through his local presence. But the correspondent's role is more important than that. Since both viewers and reporters have access to the same pictures, the news service needs an authority and will therefore work to cast, in this case, the correspondent as that authority (see Raymond 357). To further make the image of the correspondent an authority whom the audience can trust completely there is the tone of his voice. The correspondent's close-to-RP accent is also an important feature when it comes to trustworthiness. According to Howard Giles (in Mesthrie et al. 150), RP speakers are rated more highly in terms of competence than speakers of certain regional accents and thus we have the authority in Washington making sense of what is happening, and the newsreader summarizing and moving the story forward by asking questions and making comments on what she hears from the correspondent as well as reports from elsewhere. This authority is somewhat bruised by the newsreader when she says: *the fire as we ourselves can see from these pictures (line 68)*. If we ourselves can see what is happening, why do we need the correspondent? The authority of a reporter is accomplished interactionally, and that authority often rests on the newsreader (Raymond 358). Here the newsreader undermines that authority. It could be argued, though, that the pictures are there to reinforce the words of the newsreader and correspondent.

The main reason for the conversation between the newsreader and the correspondent seems to be to confirm whatever background information from various sources the BBC studio might have received. For example: *John we're already getting reports that oil prices have gone up... (line 9)* indicates that the correspondent is not the only source of information besides the pictures on the studio monitors. This particular source is later defined a little more specifically when it is referred to as *the economic wires (line 37)*. These reports have in turn reacted to another voice, or action rather (Fairclough 80), the reaction of the market.

The correspondent also has his sources, of course. *[W]hat we know so far... (line 3) and terrorism has not been ruled out...by anybody (lines 6-7)* are unnamed voices intended to give assurance to his statements. Compared to the newsreader, though, the correspondent relies more on personal experience from living in America at the moment than on secondary sources, thus attaining the same frame of reference as the average American. He refers to people's feelings as well as the whole nation's in a way that blurs the boundaries between his own voice and voice of the American people: *we're on a code orange here (line 53), this is a nation on high alert (line 59)*. There are no references to where he has got this information, he simply knows it and reports it.

6.1.b Fox News

In the Fox report there are three speaking voices: the two newsreaders, Patti Ann Browne and Bob Sellers and an expert voice, Edward Earlmeyer, on the phone. The only confirmation of Edward Earlmeyer as an expert voice is from Sellers, *Edward Earlmeyer has been talking with us he used to run this area (line 60)*. The roles of the two newsreaders differ a bit. Patti Ann Browne seems to be the anchor in charge of the discourse. She is the one who gives the audience an overview of the situation and appears to be more concerned about people's safety and how the fire will be fought: *how difficult will it be do you believe for fire fighters to get this under control (lines 15-16)*. Bob Sellers, on the other hand, is more interested in the technicalities surrounding the events: *how long does it take for the process of a barge to pull in to load up and to go out (lines 43-44)*.³

With an expert voice on the phone the newsreaders from Fox do not have the pressure to establish authority the same way the BBC reporters do. Their authority lies in the fact that they have an expert explaining what is going on. However, the conversation with the expert,

³ The implications surrounding gender and social interest and concerns will not be dealt with in this paper, but the data used for this paper could be used for such an analysis.

who is not a person from the news genre, needs to be managed more thoroughly by the anchors. There is, as I see it, a tendency to not let the expert talk too long; when he has given an answer that the anchors feel is adequate they cut in and move on to the next question. The expert voice also reduces the need for other sources but there is some information from other voices: *there are some reports (line 5)* and *from what we're hearing (line 56)*. At one point Patti Ann Browne takes on the voice of the people saying that: *people are wondering what might have caused this (line 10)*.

6.1.c Summary: Voices

There are voices that are named but they are named in a manner that makes it impossible for the viewer to identify the source. On line 67 in the BBC transcript the newsreader says: *reports from New York City*. We are not told whether this is the city of New York or just anybody within the city of New York. This presence of unnamed voices occurs in both the BBC report and in the Fox report. In many other cases this would not do; we would want to know who these voices belong to and then decide whether to trust them or not but since these voices are referred to within the news genre we are expected to accept them without question.

Information cannot simply be there; it must originate from somewhere; the sources are most likely known to the news services, but not necessarily to the reporters on screen or on the scene, and it is doubtful that the viewers are interested in knowing all sources. It is also probable that naming too many sources would only confuse the viewers. The need for several voices can in some instances be questioned: Does BBC's Washington correspondent really add anything the London studio could not find out without him? I doubt that, especially since he is not in New York. The main purpose for the anchor - correspondent format is authority according to Raymond, but I would like to argue that entertainment also plays a vital role. It is more interesting and easier to listen to a dialogue than a monologue. But as Raymond points out: the "division of descriptive labour does *not* result from the 'objective fact' of the

reporters' superior knowledge about the events all are witnessing" (357). Along with being entertaining the news team must seem to have some knowledge the audience does not have; otherwise there would be no point in watching the story.

6.2 Management

After identifying the voices in the two news broadcasts I will analyse how they are managed, what managerial roles the anchors have and how they control the conversation. This will include turn-taking and overlapping speech. I have briefly touched on this subject above, but a closer analysis follows.

6.2.a BBC World

The BBC broadcast is very well managed in the sense that there is no overlapping speech, and no obvious interruptions of any kind which could indicate that this is to some extent a rehearsed conversation. There are certain features that contradict that notion though. First is the fact that this conversation is transmitted via satellites across the Atlantic Ocean which creates a certain time delay; it takes a while for the signal to get through and this makes interruptions somewhat tricky. Second are the correspondent's hesitations in some of his replies. In both line 11 as well as in line 21 he starts with *well I yes mean* and *well I mean* respectively. To me this would indicate that he is thinking and searching for an answer while starting to speak in order to avoid dead air.

6.2.b Fox News

The Fox report is not as clearly managed as the BBC report. There are, for one thing, three people talking instead of two and there is no time delay in the transmissions between the reporters and the expert on the phone, at least not a noticeable delay. Another difference is that in the Fox report the reporters ask the expert specific questions which he then answers; he is not supposed to elaborate too much on his own it seems. To these answers there is often

a minimal response, especially from the woman, as a signal that they have understood the answers, that they are listening but also to indicate that the expert's speaking-turn is now over. At the end of the conversation, or interview, the expert corrects the anchors about the nature of the property on fire: *I can tell you that though it's not a refinery it's a storage facility (lines 69-70)*. From this point on the anchors try to cut him off but allow him to finish. On the other hand, the expert is not asked any more questions.

6.2.c Summary: Management

Basically the two reports are very similar; they are conversations between two or three people about an explosion on Staten Island. About halfway through both reports there is a recapitulation of the story for any new viewers. Both these recapitulations begin very similarly, almost word for word. The main difference is that the BBC uses a phrase that is in the passive tense and Fox uses a progressive phrase. This way of informing viewers who tune in at different times is perhaps necessary, but it is also a way for the news casters to exhibit power and control. By this I'm referring to how Fox News is keeping what they themselves call a guest on the phone waiting and then only ask him one more question.

6.3 Presuppositions

In these reports there are many presuppositions, but I will look at a few key ones. Since one of the reports analysed is British and the other one American, there is reason to believe that the presuppositions in the reports will be different from one another. This will be investigated in the following section.

6.3.a BBC World

In the beginning of the BBC transcript there is a description of the area where this event is taking place. This is a presupposition that this place actually exists and that the audience needs a geographical overview as well as a factual. In lines 37 through 39 in the transcript

there are references to the oil market as well as the financial market. This mentioning of *Brent Crude Oil* and *Brent Futures for April* would presuppose that the audience is knowledgeable about the stock market and familiar with its processes. It could also be that this is not a presupposition but an omission. There is no need for explanations about the subject. Those who are interested in the fluctuations in the stock market know what the newsreader is talking about and the rest of us do not care. She does give a hint though, as to what she is talking about (see section 6.4.a). In line 60 there is a reference to *9-11* and *the crisis in Iraq*. Here the presuppositions are almost necessary; it would almost be an insult to viewers to act as if we did not know about these major events so closely connected to each other.

6.3.b Fox News

The correspondent from BBC has no problem with the word terrorism; he dismisses it but he does not mind talking about it. This is not the case with Fox. Patti Ann Browne is thinking about the possibility, it would seem, but she does not want to use the word terrorism. Instead she uses the phrase: *people's minds go to other possibilities (line 12)*. Here she presupposes that everyone watching, most of them anyway, will think about terrorism. But this is not merely a presupposition. It is also a form of hedging, which will be dealt with later. The geographical lack of presuppositions in the BBC report is present in the Fox report: there is no explanation about the layout of the area, except that the nearest residential area is *a good quarter of a mile up the road (lines 27-28)*. And the reference to the Arthur Kill (line 33) also presupposes local knowledge.

6.3.c Summary: Presuppositions

The presuppositions analysed in the two broadcasts have to do with the same aspects of the event: geography. The British news service presupposes that their audience is not

knowledgeable about the area, and the American news service and their expert on the phone presuppose that their viewers know about the major city of their nation. Another presupposition has to do with terrorism. Both news services mention terrorism, BBC more explicitly than Fox admittedly. The reason for BBC to name 9-11 could have to do with the British viewers not necessarily equating terrorism to Al-Qaeda and 9-11, but rather with more domestic disturbances.

6.4 Vocabulary and Linguistic Strategies

After analysing who is speaking and when, and what is not said, it is now time for a closer look at particular words used. As mentioned earlier, this section will, in addition to vocabulary, deal with hedges, genre and code-switching.

6.4.a BBC World

In the BBC report, the correspondent almost immediately refers to the pictures shown when describing the scene. He does, however, use the adjective *huge* to describe both the size of the port and the size of the explosion. The adjective *massive* is also used to describe the explosion, or blast, and the fire by both the correspondent and the newsreader in the studio. This may seem a bit redundant since we all can see the fire on our TV-sets, but perhaps it is important for news people to emphasize that even though the pictures on the screen are quite small, the real thing is indeed big.

It is not just the fire and the blast that need emphasis: The American people are *extremely twitchy* (line 54), and the nation itself is *very very very twitchy* (line 56). There is a tendency for the correspondent to stress the severity of the incident while at the same time pointing out that caution is needed when speculating about the causes. As the correspondent urges people to be careful and not jump to conclusions about the cause of the explosion; he uses the phrase *non-terrorist causes* (line 46) as a probable cause. Why not accident?

The correspondent uses *we* in several different ways: in line 3 of the transcript the use of *we* in *what we know so far* is ambiguous, it can mean either we here in America or we news people. In line 12, however, everyone watching is included in *that's why obviously we're watching...* It is interesting to see how the correspondent at least twice uses personal as well as spatial deixis in order to include himself with the American public and then to exclude himself: *yeah we're on a code orange here...[on the] alert system they've got here (lines 53-54)*. Further down in the transcript he says: *we gotta be careful about what we're seeing...this is a nation on high alert they've been fearing another terrorist attack (lines 58-59)*. The nervousness the correspondent ascribes the American people does not seem to apply to him. But then again, he is British, not American, and wishes to make this clear. In contrast, when the newsreader in the studio uses *we* it exclusively means we the news service when she is talking with the correspondent, e.g. *we're already getting reports (line 9)*, *we hear that fire department crews (line 18)* and *we've interrupted normal programming (lines 33-34)* to mention but a few. When she is addressing the audience they are included: *we already have the impact (line 40)* to take one example.

Because this is live news broadcasting the anchor, who according to Morse is “authorized to speak the truth” (59), as well as the correspondent need to be a bit cautious. There has not been sufficient time to do proper research and therefore they cannot be absolutely certain what they say is always correct. In line 3 in the transcript the BBC correspondent hedges his statement by saying *what we know so far is that this is an oil and gas refinery*. The anchor in the studio never calls it a refinery, she calls it *an oil and gas facility (line 35)*. This is what Fox's expert calls it and it is likely that the BBC anchor knows that it is not a refinery but refrains from correcting the correspondent. In a way this also diminishes the correspondent's authority - what is the use of an expert if he has less information than the newsreader who is relying on him to verify her information? In line 14

he *think[s]* people on the market are nervous and even if they are not he is entitled to think so. Further on he *imagine[s]* *there's a pretty good force there already* (line 26) but he does not know for sure. He is not completely sure about how fires of this sort are fought either, although he has a good theory about it (lines 29-31). The correspondent uses *I imagine*, *I think* and *I guess* in lines 25 to 29; to me this indicates that the correspondent clearly has his mind made up how he sees the accident and any developments surrounding it, and he makes it clear that these thoughts are his thoughts and not necessarily the absolute truth.

As I mentioned in the definitions section I am extending the concept of code-switching to include switching between different genres. In the BBC report I have identified four different genres: news genre (obviously), economic genre, security genre and what I would like to call a more colloquial type of genre within the news genre. The phrase *so there we already have the impact on both the price of oil as well as on shares* (line 40) indicates this: *crude oil* (line 38) is substituted for simply oil, and *Brent Futures for April* (line 39) is referred to as having to do with shares. Interestingly enough there is no attempt to enter the oil industry genre.

To further his authority the correspondent adds to the authority gained from his accent (recall the discussion about accent and trust in section 6.1.a) by switching to another genre, thus giving the impression that he is knowledgeable in several fields. When the correspondent explains about the *code orange* (line 53) he is switching to the security genre, but returns almost immediately to the more familiar news genre. The anchor in the studio also code switches. In her case it is not so much a matter of establishing authority when she switches to the economic genre, but rather a necessity in order to be clear and concise. However, when she returns to the news genre it is a very colloquial style as if to give viewers who are not familiar with the economic genre a hint about the subject (lines 37-41).

6.4.b Fox News

Contrary to the BBC reporters the reporters from Fox actively describe what we are all seeing. Especially Browne feels the need to explain to the audience what they are witnessing: *what we're looking at right now is just an enormous inferno (line 47-48)*. And prior to that: *the flames themselves up to a thousand feet in the air and obviously the plume of smoke even higher than that (lines 8-9)*. This behaviour is not uncommon. According to Raymond "news personnel rarely let these pictures 'speak for themselves'" (356).

The use of inclusive *we* in the Fox report feels more authentic than in the BBC report. When Browne calls for pure speculation in line 10 in the transcript she is including the people whose minds *go to other possibilities (line 12)*. The only instance where there is reason to question whether Browne uses inclusive *we* or not is in line 56 in the transcript. This time *we're hearing (lines 66-67)* instead of seeing or looking at.⁴

The thoughts about being cautious when covering an event live mentioned above in the BBC section apply, of course, to the Fox news team as well. As I also mentioned earlier, Browne's presupposition about terrorism (line 12) is also a form of hedge. If people are upset with the news team frightening people with talk about terrorism, Browne can claim to have been thinking of other things. Browne not only makes hedges for her own benefit, she is also kind enough to provide her expert on the phone with hedges: *I realize we're calling for pure speculation on your part (lines 10-11)* and further down: *how difficult will it be do you believe (lines 15-16)*. Even with these hedges provided, Earlmeyer feels the need to be a bit cautious: *I assume it's an accident (line 13)* and *the primary way to fight this would be with foam (line 18)*. The expert voice is cautious, which is not surprising. He is after all in an unfamiliar situation: being interviewed on live TV. It is not only Earlmeyer's use of hedges

⁴ The reason I cannot be sure if this is the only instance during the report is because the news reports I am using for this analysis are unfortunately not complete; the beginning is missing in both reports, and therefore I am not absolutely certain who told Browne about the oil tanks she is referring to in line 57.

that suggests this, but also the way he hesitates in many of his answers. It is easy to get the impression that he is not comfortable with the questions; some of them are not in his line of expertise. At the end of the interview he admits that he does not know *it's all conjecture at this point (line 69)*. But when he gets to speak of what he does know, he is much more fluent and sure of himself.

In the Fox report there are two obvious genres: the news genre and the oil industry genre. The participants in the report stay within their own genre. That is, Browne and Sellers keep themselves within the news genre and their expert, Earlmeyer stays within the oil industry genre. The only thing I have found that can be thought of as a code-switch is when Sellers asks how long it takes for a *barge to pull in load up and to go out (lines 43-44)*. It could be argued that this is a code-switch to a shipping genre.

There is a more colloquial style within the news genre in the Fox report too, as I said, than there is in the BBC report. Bob Sellers sometimes uses a vocabulary that is more colloquial than the vocabulary used by Browne. In line 63 Earlmeyer is not being interviewed, he is *talking* with the reporters, and he *used to run this area* as opposed to once being in charge of it.

6.4.c Summary: Vocabulary and Linguistic Strategies

As we have seen, the news teams differ on some points when it comes to use of language, but there are similarities as well. The main difference as I see it is the way the Fox anchor Browne vividly describes the pictures on the screen. This is not done by the BBC anchor.

The way both services establish a connection with their viewers by the use of inclusive *we* is interesting considering that the BBC anchor and correspondent are visible on the screen, whereas the Fox anchors are not. Morse suggests that instead of using linguistic shifters, such as *I* and *you*, anchors shift their gaze instead (62). This could have been done

by the BBC reporters, but not by the reporters from Fox. Regardless of this both news teams use the same linguistic style, or genre.

Regarding hedges, genre and code-switching, both news teams use these linguistic devices, in different ways admittedly, but the similarity in structure in the reports suggests that there is a news genre and these services use that genre (not that the existence of a news genre was in question). Hedges are used by both services and this is not surprising since we are dealing with live news broadcasting. One little thing to note though: the only time the Fox team does not hedge is when calling the place on fire a refinery. This is later corrected by their expert on the phone.

There are different genres used in both reports, but the BBC team code-switches between these genres, whereas the Fox anchors stay within their genre and let the expert deal with his.

6.5 Images

In these news reports there are the images of the barge on fire and the images of the two BBC reporters. There are also some pieces of text superimposed on these pictures. A basic description of the pictures in the two news broadcasts is found in the appendix. In this section I use the word text as reference to written text.

6.5.a BBC World

In addition to the texts described in the appendix there are four different texts shown at intervals during the BBC report (a slash denotes new line):

1. A blast has ripped trough an oil and / gas facility off Staten Island in New York.
2. Refinery blaze / A major fire has broken out at an oil refinery / on the edge of Staten Island.

3. The fire is sending black smoke and flames / hundreds of feet over New York harbour.
4. Reports say that a barge carrying propane / exploded outside New York harbour.

They show these texts in the order: 1, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4. When comparing these texts to what is said they seem to go from being quite sure of what has happened via what is obvious from the pictures to 'that's what we've heard'. This is further supported by the hedge in the last text: *Reports say...* Earlier I mentioned that the BBC were not at all cautious with the word terrorism. The first time they change the text from text one to text two, they also add a smaller textbox with the words: Iraq / Crisis. This box appears when the correspondent is talking about large explosions (line 10), but disappears very quickly. This short period of time, compared with the other texts, could be a form of hedge. If anyone would ask what that sign was doing there BBC could claim it was a mistake; it was not supposed to be there at all.

6.5.a Fox News

The descriptive texts shown in the Fox report are: Fire at oil refinery in / Staten Island, New York. This text is later changed to: Fire at oil storage facility / in Staten Island, New York. This change occurs shortly after Fox's expert on the phone has corrected the anchors about the function of the facility.

6.5.c Summary: Images

The texts provided by the two services are descriptions of what is happening, or what is shown on the screen rather; and in the case of the BBC the (probable) causes and effects of this. The texts provided by the BBC are perhaps a bit more descriptive, but at the same time they are somewhat disturbing because they do not follow what is said by the reporters. This behaviour adds to the speculative tone in the reportage in a negative manner, as I see it.

Fox, on the other hand, uses the text in order to supply viewers who are just tuning in a short and concise description of the event itself. When they are told that they are wrong they almost immediately change the text according to the new information.

7. Discussion

This short study set out to examine whether the news genre is adopting traits from the entertainment genre, and if there are differences between British and American news services in that respect. Depending on how you choose to define 'entertainment' there is a shift towards the entertainment genre. There are obvious linguistic devices used for the purpose of attracting and keeping the viewers hooked to the screen which are of an entertaining nature, or at least borrowed from the entertainment genre. If one defines entertainment as something that engages and excites people, and even provokes them, then these two news broadcasts have adopted traits from the entertainment genre.

The idea of an anchor seeking new information and confirmation of old information through a correspondent, as is the case with the BBC constellation, is to make the reportage easier to follow and less monotonous, as I see it. As I have pointed out earlier, Fiske sees this as a necessity, a way to make news more interesting in order to gain attention from the audience. But there is a danger in this. If television news services do as Fiske suggests and then try to get higher ratings by giving news events more content and relevance than they really have, is this not a chink in the credibility armour? I think so. In order to make this fire relevant to the people of New York City, Fox News has called in an expert to answer questions about the fire, not only for the purpose of calming people but also to sow a seed of fear. So, if we define entertainment the way I suggested above, fear is definitely entertaining to many people. Especially if they themselves are not being directly in harms way. When Patti Ann Browne asks the expert about the probable cause of the fire she cannot resist

suggesting other possibilities apart from the whole thing being an accident, thus alluding to terrorism (lines 11-13). The BBC correspondent does basically the same thing, but more directly: he brings up the possibility of a terrorist attack and then urges people to be careful about drawing any conclusions from what they are seeing (lines 57-59). Furthermore, the correspondent's frequent talk about people's fear of terrorist attacks (lines 59-60) and description of how people seal up their houses with duct tape and plastic (lines 54-56) adds to the possibility of frightening more people than reassuring those already scared.

As mentioned in the findings section, Bob Sellers from Fox seems to be more interested in the technicalities surrounding the fire and the facility than in thoughts about whether or not this has been a terrorist attack. This can be reassuring to some people, I assume: if Sellers bothers with these 'less important' issues maybe this is not that bad after all. This is also a way to make the fire more interesting to more people, more entertaining or at least more relevant.

Fiske argues that viewers dip into and out of texts seeking information that fit their criteria (196). It would seem, then, that the BBC correspondent uses this to add another element to the incident: the fear of terrorists using gas or biological weapons, and saying that there might be a connection between that threat and the fire on Staten Island. By doing this he most certainly adds to the number of people to whom this news is relevant.

According to Morse, "news must above all be worthy of belief" (56). I do not think anyone would question that there indeed is a fire just off Staten Island when there are pictures showing an enormous fire. Morse continues: the anchor must be seen as "one who speaks the truth as he sees it" (59). From the information the BBC correspondent and the Fox anchors have access to, this is what they are doing. Some of their statements and claims, although they are often enough hedged, turn out to be inaccurate. This inaccuracy itself does not make the reporters less credible. The problem, as I see it, is when they begin speculating

as to the causes of the accident. Terrorism is introduced early in both reports: *terrorism has not been ruled out so far (lines 6-7, BBC)* and *are you assuming it was an accident because obviously people's minds go to other possibilities (lines 11-12, Fox)*. From here on the two reports differ quite a bit. The Fox anchors do not mention terrorism again whereas the BBC correspondent repeatedly returns to the terrorist theme. I can only speculate about the reason for this, but the effect of it, together with the Iraq / Crisis sign shown on the screen for a short period of time, is that the BBC seems to be more sensationalist than the American Fox. This might be a bit surprising at first, but given a little thought it is not surprising at all. In the same way that the American school system in the late 19th century displayed America as virtuous and natural, and Europe as unstable and tyrannical (Fiske, 188), news services most probably want to display the rest of the world as more unsafe than their own country. So, BBC would want to show the world, and particularly British subjects, that Britain is safer than most other countries in the world. In the same way, Fox would want to reassure the American people, and the rest of the world, that their country is safe to live in.

Both these reports are approximately five minutes in length. As a comparison, CNN had a spot less than a minute long covering just about everything both BBC and Fox report on. In the CNN spot the anchor simply reads the news while they are showing some of the pictures shown in the BBC and Fox reports. As I see it, the CNN report is much easier forgotten than the BBC and Fox reports. Even though the CNN report covers the whole story it does not engage the viewers in the same effective way as the other two reports. As I said, this is how I perceive and read these reports. What I would like to do is to test these reports on other people, as Prabu David (1998)⁵ did, in order to determine whether the longer reports from BBC and Fox are better remembered than the shorter CNN report, but there is no time for that.

⁵ David's experiments investigated how pictures improve recollection of news, but one could easily use his model for investigating if more entertaining news has the same effect.

Humankind has always been intrigued by fire, so it is not that odd that this accident on Staten Island is given a lot of airtime. In *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*⁶ one can read that Gaston Bachelard (1938) showed how the phenomenology of fire as painful, dangerous, soothing, purifying, destructive, and a symbol of life and passion, determined scientific discourse. So it is not too bold to say that the news recognises fire as something that engages and fascinates people, thus giving it an entertainment value. This is obvious when watching the following spot on Sky News (the news service airing the Fox report). In this spot on world terrorism with an expert on terrorism in the studio, the pictures of the Staten Island fire are still shown on the major part of the screen.

8. Conclusion

In view of what I have found when analysing these two news broadcasts I think it is fairly safe to say that news services (at least the ones I have analysed) have adopted the theories laid out by John Fiske. Both BBC and Fox use different techniques to engage their audiences. The way anchors and reporters interact with each other and with interviewees has the ultimate goal of getting the viewers' attention and hopefully managing to keep that attention throughout the length of the program. In order to increase their chances they also use a vocabulary that ensures that the story is presented as something out of the ordinary. The dangers of misinforming people or even frightening them are mitigated by the use of hedges and code-switching is used to give the impression of knowledge beyond the average viewer.

The appearance of knowledge and the authority to report are achieved by managerial techniques which also have the benefit of making the whole report seem more interesting and entertaining. This shift toward more entertaining news is in no way threatening the credibility in these reports. The pictures shown on our screens leave little doubt as to whether this is

⁶ Retrieved from www.xrefer.com

happening or not. To find out if this shift is a threat to the ability and interest to report on political and social issues a more quantitative analysis would be needed, but I believe it would be difficult getting news services to admit they care more about being populist than socially committed.

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10. Appendix: Transcripts

I have chosen not to include descriptions of the visual images parallel to the verbal reports in the news broadcast transcripts because there are very few changes in the actual images. The vital changes are taken up in the analysis. I will, however, describe the general setting of each broadcast. The two broadcasts show, basically, the same pictures: a big plume of thick, black smoke and fire burning just next to the water. The pictures are filmed from helicopters circling the area.

Unfortunately these reports are not complete; the beginning is missing in both reports on the tapes I have used for this analysis (see also the footnote on page 19).

Notes on the transcripts

- Centre dot denotes short pauses
- (0.0) denotes a timed pause
- [Brackets denote overlapping speech
- [
- = Equal sign denotes that there are no gaps between utterances from different speakers
- () Empty parenthesis denotes unintelligible speech
- (Earlmeyer) Filled parenthesis denotes unclear speech

BBC World

The BBC correspondent is sitting in a studio with a picture of the Capitol in the background. In the top left corner of the screen the text “BBC World Live” is superimposed. The next scene is a full screen shot of the fire followed by a split screen with the images of the fire to

the left and the images of the correspondent and images of the newsreader alternating on the right side of the screen. In the lower right side of the screen the text “New York Blast” is superimposed. Beneath this text four different texts alternate throughout the report.

1 **CORRESPONDENT:** it’s on the far side of Staten Island eh the side that faces to New Jersey so
there’s a waterway there as you can see in the pictures a waterway with a lot of major
shipping goes through to that · huge port of New Jersey and what we know so far is that this
is eh an oil and gas refinery · and a propane eh barge carrying propane gas eh was
5 approaching it when there was a huge explosion and the consequences e-he are · most clear
to us in the dramatic picture we are seeing · we don’t know obviously the cause eh terrorism
has not been ruled out so far by anybody · but also clearly with that amount of flammable gas
· and oil products · obviously any other cause is extremely eh possible as well

STUDIO: · mm John we’re already getting reports that oil prices have gone up by almost a
10 dollar a barrel on world markets · in response eh to this news of the massive blast

CORRESPONDENT: · well yes I mean I - I eh - eh anything that goes any large explosions at
the moment in the world make people very nervous eh that’s why obviously we’re watching
very closely to see what the cause of this · is · this explosion of itself is not going to reduce
the amount of oil in world supplies it’s y’ know no one refinery can do that so I think clearly
15 people on the markets are nervous of the dangers of a possible terrorist attack but let’s just
let’s just keep calm for a moment and wait and see and - and check out what the causes really
are ·

STUDIO: now john we hear that fire department crews have been arriving at the area but no
reports yet that they have arrived at the scene just how far would this place be from an area
20 where they could quickly get eh emergency crews to the scene

CORRESPONDENT: · eh well I mean Staten Island is · it's like a suburb really of New York City it is part of the city itself but it's much more suburban eh there'd be fire departments on the island itself although not that many fire trucks and then you'd gotta come over ehm - ehm either from New Jersey there's a whole series of bridges from New Jersey or from the next
25 borough along Brooklyn eh the spectacular Verrazano Narrows Bridge so they'll be there I would imagine there's a pretty good force there already we've already seen eh coastguard helicopter hovering off shore we've seen fire department · boats going to the scene as well but it is such a massive fire it's - it's hard to see how they're gonna make much impact on it to start with I think sometimes the policy on these refinery fires is just to contain them and let
30 them burn themselves out to I guess to turn off the spigots sending the extra oil and gas and - and petrol to the actual scene of the flames but clearly it's gonna take them a long time to get this under control

STUDIO: · John stay with us for a minute just a reminder of viewers who just joined us we've interrupted normal programming to bring you live eh pictures from just off Staten Island in
35 New York there's been a massive explosion at an oil and gas facility we understand there was an explosion on a barge which was loading propane and as you can see there's been a massive blast now at the scene we're getting reports now on the economic wires that Brent Crude Oil has hit a high of 32 point 50 US dollars in mid afternoon after this explosion at this oil facility and Brent Futures for April traded up 61 cents at 32 points 17 US dollars so there
40 we already have the impact on both the price of oil as well as on shares in response to this massive explosion that has taken place in the past hour at New York City's Staten Island John Lion is with us now from our offices in Washington · John how unusual would this s-sort of explosion be

CORRESPONDENT: · there are explosions at oil refineries I - I - I actually live near one in
45 Britain and there were fires every year or two there so it's it would not be unusual for there to

be an explosion caused by eh non-terrorist causes if you like I imagine if you're loading propane gas there's a lot of flammable material around so I think that we shouldn't leap to any conclusions whatsoever what the cause is of this

STUDIO: · and you mentioned John that of course that nothing can be ruled out you're saying
50 there's no sense that this was a terrorist attack but of course nerves are fairly raw across the United States in major cities like New York because of constantly being on terror alert so anything of this kind of course would cause jitters

CORRESPONDENT: yeah we're on a code orange here which is the second highest of the five
55 ehm five step alert system they got here people are extremely twitchy you may have seen the stories in the last week or two of people getting duck-tape and plastics so they can seal up a safe room in their houses eh so this nation is definitely very very very twitchy at the moment so yeah when anything goes bang when there's a big fire like this people are prone to leap to conclusions very quickly that's why I think we've gotta be very careful about what we're seeing at the moment this is a nation on high alert they've been fearing another major
60 terrorist attack since 9-11 and now with the crises in Iraq building up there's a double fear that perhaps who ever might want to harm America has a double reason to want to attack so yeah people are pretty nervous

STUDIO: John now you stay with us just to give some more details now of what is known about this facility off Staten Island in New York we understand the facility is known as Port
65 Mobile and that it indeed may be owned by the (exen) · Exxon Mobile Corporation the first indications as to exactly who owns eh this facility at which there has been a major explosion we understand also reports from New York City that the explosion took place at 10.10 New York time and the fire as we ourselves can see from these pictures still does not seem to be spreading to other areas it's taking place in what is largely a commercial area not a
70 residential area there would of course be concerns about any casualties but so far we have no

reports at all of any casualties we also hear that eh fire department vehicles and crews have been speeding to the area we may be able to them on these live pictures when they happen but we understand so far that none have arrived at the scene

FOX News

The report from Fox News has no pictures of the people involved. What we see is basically the same pictures shown in the BBC report. In the top left corner of the screen “Sky News Live” and the time of day is superimposed, and in the lower left hand side of the screen the text “Sky News Flash” and “Breaking News” are superimposed. Beneath this text another text saying: “Fire at oil refinery in Staten Island, New York”, this text is later changed to “Fire at oil storage facility in Staten Island, New York”.

1 **EARLMEYER:** barges vary in size but they could have · eh up to a million gallons of eh
petroleum products on it

SELLERS: a million gallons

EARLMEYER: yes

5 **BROWNE:** sir this is Patti Ann Brown also here with Bob Sellers and in fact there are
some reports that eh this fire did indeed start on a barge and they’re saying
now that it started at about eh 10 minutes after 10 just twenty minutes ago and
obviously still these flames no where under control in fact the flames
themselves up to a thousand feet in the air and obviously the plume of smoke
10 even higher than that eh people are wondering what might have eh caused this
eh I realize we’re calling for pure speculation on your part but are you
assuming this was an accident because obviously people’s minds go to other
possibilities

EARLMEYER: I you know I assume that it’s an accident at this point I wouldn’t know no
15 reason to to em to know any thing [different

BROWNE: [mm right and again eh how difficult will it
be do you believe for fire fighters to get this under control considering the
possible volume one million gallons of petroleum possibly involved here

EARLMEYER: h - ' hh · the primary way to fire to fight this would be with foam the facility
20 does have the ability to generate foam along with you know the fire
department · ehm · in lot of times in cases like this ehm if there's no other
serious structures · ehm in danger they might just let it burn out a little bit · eh
the question is can you get close enough to put foam [on it

BROWNE: [yeah I guess it's
25 fortunate that it is right on the water as it it is it doesn't look though as if there
is a residential area · very close to this but would you assume that they'll be
evacuating any nearby residents

EARLMEYER: ehm · I would - I would say that the nearest (resid) - residential area is a good
a-a-a-quarter of a mile up the road [it's a very rural area =

30 **BROWNE:** [m-hm = right =

SELLERS: = has this area
had a similar kind of fire in the past as eh eh i like back in the seventies

EARLMEYER: ·(4) ehm ·(2.5) I don't remember I mean I know I know in the history of the
area eh there been some eh some barge fires there were some on the Jersey
35 side of [the Arthur Kill · ehm =

SELLERS: [Right = by the way sir how many people normally are
working on a barge

EARLMEYER: · eh · on the b- usually there's somebody who works on the barge itself there's
a - there's a two or three [people and usually there's a couple of people that

40 **SELLERS:** [m-hm

EARLMEYER: work on the shore side

SELLERS: right

EARLMEYER: so the number of people that were there the given time when this started ehm I wouldn't know

45 **SELLERS:** and how long does it take for the process of a barge to pull in to load up and to go out how long does that take

EARLMEYER: ehm depending on the amount of petroleum products that are gonna be put on to it it could take eh it could take 24 hours

BROWNE: hm just reminding those who are just joining us what we're looking at right
50 now is just an enormous inferno at an oil refinery in Staten Island one of the five boroughs of New York City it's (cord) it's called Port Mobil and it is as we said a gasoline refinery eh possible that this refinery produces around 55,000 gallons of gasoline a day but the fire itself may have begun not at the refinery itself but rather at a barge that was pulled along next to that refinery
55 and eh from what we're hearing now from our guest on the phone a barge might hold as many as one million gallons of petroleum which would explain the incredible inferno that we're seeing flames apparently up to a thousand feet in the area and an incredible plume of smoke that can be seen for miles possible from what we're hearing as many as 90 oil tanks might be involved
60 in this and eh not yet being attacked from the water we can't see any fire boats on the scene yet it all began just about 25 minutes ago so still a developing story

SELLERS: and Edward (Earlmeyer) has been talking with us he used to run this eh this area here ehm how exposed I mean we're seeing what appears to be an oil
65 product gasoline go up in smoke literally but how would that catch on fire I

assume once these things are in the barrel they're not really exposed to anything to set them on fire

EARLMEYER: eh the system is normally enclosed it goes from piping to an enclosed eh storage compartment on the barges themselves all we can assume is that eh ·
70 somehow · that product · ehm was released

SELLERS: m-hm =

EARLMEYER: = I don't know it's all conjecture at this point I can tell you that though it's not a refinery it's a storage facility [it doesn't refine eh gasoline · it

SELLERS: [okay

75 **EARLMEYER:** usually receives gasoline and heating oil eh stores it and then loads it out on barges again to be sent to other areas

SELLERS: all right so [a storage facility

EARLMEYER: [from what I can see on the news so far there are no other tanks involved in this =

80 **SELLERS:** = m-hm [all right

EARLMEYER: [it's just an area that's off on one end of the loading facility ehm there are no tanks in that particular area they're

BROWNE: [mm

SELLERS: [all right Edward (Earlmeyer) thank you very much sir for eh for following up
85 here with us on this fire burning now apparently on a barge at the Port Mobil oil refinery it's a storage facility and we will continue to follow this including see whether any people have been injured in this

CNN Feb 21 2003

NEWSREADER: well · we begin with the massive fire that swept through an oil refinery on Staten Island· officials believe there may be fatalities· this is the scene now as you will see in just a moment fire crews has significantly knocked down the fire· there's that scene it began with an explosion this morning followed by tremendous fire at the Exxon-Mobil oil refinery earlier it looked like this, roaring flames and plumes of black smoke that could be seen for miles a fire department spokesman says they've received reports that a tanker either was transferring a product or was refuelling and somehow ignited it's unclear if any of the (may) many other oil tanks in the area has burnt the Homeland security department is monitoring the situation but says it does not look terrorist related officials are recommending that people stay at least half a mile away to keep from breathing the vapours which can be harmful CNN financial news has confirmed that the fire initially pushed crude oil prices up by one dollar a barrel that later dropped to about 83 cents increase.

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