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## Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse

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**Abstract** *In the American political process, news discourse concerning public policy issues is carefully constructed. This occurs in part because both politicians and interest groups take an increasingly proactive approach to amplify their views of what an issue is about. However, news media also play an active role in framing public policy issues. Thus, in this article, news discourse is conceived as a sociocognitive process involving all three players: sources, journalists, and audience members operating in the universe of shared culture and on the basis of socially defined roles. Framing analysis is presented as a constructivist approach to examine news discourse with the primary focus on conceptualizing news texts into empirically operationalizable dimensions—syntactical, script, thematic, and rhetorical structures—so that evidence of the news media's framing of issues in news texts may be gathered. This is considered an initial step toward analyzing the news discourse process as a whole. Finally, an extended empirical example is provided to illustrate the applications of this conceptual framework of news texts.*

**Keywords** News, issue discourse, discourse analysis, framing analysis

Much of the recent research in political communication deals with one or more of the following three questions. First, how do the news media "set the frame in which citizens discuss public events" (Tuchman, 1978, p. ix) and consequently "narrow the available political alternatives" (p. 156)? Second, how do politicians and advocacy groups actively "court" the media to polish their images and frame debates over public policies (see Hertsgaard, 1988; Pertschuk & Schaetzel, 1989)? Third, how do audiences process news information actively and construct meanings using their preexisting cognitive representations (e.g., Graber, 1988; Livingstone, 1990)? One nagging problem for research in these areas has been how to convincingly link news texts to both production and consumption processes (McLeod, Kosicki, & Pan, 1991; Neuman, 1989). This article presents a framing analysis approach to this problem. The basic idea is to view news texts as a system of organized signifying elements that both

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indicate the advocacy of certain ideas and provide devices to encourage certain kinds of audience processing of the texts.

The organization of the article is as follows. We will begin with a brief outline of framing analysis as a theoretical perspective and contrast our approach to several other available models. Next, we will apply this framework to conceptualize news content as a form of discourse by discussing several conceptual dimensions of news texts. We will then illustrate some of the practical implications of our points with a case study of a single news story. Finally, we will discuss some practical research implications of this style of framing research.

## The Concept of Frame and the Framing Process

### *A Sociological Conception*

Erving Goffman's (1974) *Frame Analysis* maintains that we all actively classify, organize, and interpret our life experiences to make sense of them. The "schemata of interpretation," which are labeled "frames," enable individuals "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" (Goffman, 1974, p. 21) occurrences or information. Gitlin (1980) uses the same conception of framing in his seminal study of the relations between the news media and the Student New Left movement. He defines frames as "persistent selection, emphasis, and exclusion" (p. 7). He links the concept directly to the production of news discourse by saying that frames "enable journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely [and to] package the information for efficient relay to their audiences" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7).

Gamson has developed the concept even further. To Gamson, a frame is a "central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143) to events related to an issue. It is the core of a larger unit of public discourse, called a "package," that also contains various policy positions that may be derived from the frame as well as a set of "symbolic devices" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143) that signify the presence of frames and policy positions. There are five such devices that signify the uses of frames: metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images (Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

### *A Psychological Conception*

This constructionist conception of framing in the sociological literature makes strong assumptions about individual cognitive processes—structuredness of cognitive representations and theory guidedness of information processing. These are the same assumptions that are shared or investigated by cognitive psychologists or other cognitively oriented researchers using similar terms. In Minsky's (1975) work on computerized knowledge representation, for example, a frame is a template or a data structure that both organizes various bits and pieces of information and is indicated by more concrete cognitive elements. These assumptions are also the basis of the conceptual definitions of other related concepts such as "schema" or "script" (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Markus & Zajonc, 1985; Rumelhart, 1984; Schank & Abelson, 1977).

In another line of research, framing is viewed as placing information in a unique context so that certain elements of the issue get a greater allocation of an individual's cognitive resources. An important consequence of this is that the selected elements become important in influencing individuals' judgments or inference making (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). This conception of framing has been applied to study voters' sense of causality and responsibility concerning public policy issues (e.g., Iyengar, 1991) and to assess the effects of question framing on public opinion responses (e.g., Kinder & Sanders, 1990; Pan & Kosicki, 1991).

### ***Integration and Distinctions***

The overlapping conceptions from different disciplines suggest that frames function as both "internal structures of the mind" and "devices embedded in political discourse" (Kinder & Sanders, 1990, p. 74). More specifically, we may conceive a news media frame as a cognitive device used in information encoding, interpreting, and retrieving; it is communicable; and it is related to journalistic professional routines and conventions. Framing, therefore, may be studied as a strategy of constructing and processing news discourse or as a characteristic of the discourse itself.

This conception of framing in the process of news discourse is depicted in Figure 1, which draws in broad terms a contour of the news discourse process that emerges from several lines of research (e.g., Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978; van Dijk, 1988). In this scheme, the news discourse process is normally initiated when a source stages an event that is recognized as newsworthy or when information about an event or an issue is sought by a journalist. However, this process is a circular one with endogenous loops. The three players in the process (i.e., sources, journalists, and audience members; see Gans, 1979) all engage in the process based on their socially defined roles and are linked to one another by the news discourse that they design, construct, transmit, and act on.

The domain in which the news discourse operates consists of shared beliefs about a society. These beliefs, despite the elusive nature of their content, are known to and accepted by a majority of the society as common sense or conventional wisdom (e.g., "Equal opportunities are desirable"; "Opposing political candidates compete to win"; "Truth means something real," etc.). They are pervasive and are often taken for granted. They set the parameters of a broad framework within which news discourse is constructed, transmitted, and developed.

Centrally located in the cyclical process is news text, a system of sign vehicles operating within some systematic rules (Hall, 1980) that regulate as well as differentiate between intended and processed meanings.<sup>1</sup> It is produced by journalists (broadly conceived to include reporters, editors, and writers) in the production settings with the guidance of (a) their working theories of the news media (McQuail, 1987) (i.e., journalists' mental representations of organizational constraints); (b) rules, conventions, rituals, and structures of news discourse; and (c) anticipated audience responses (see Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). When it is transmitted to audiences, the structural and lexical features of the news text will "have the effect of constructing some of the limits and parameters within

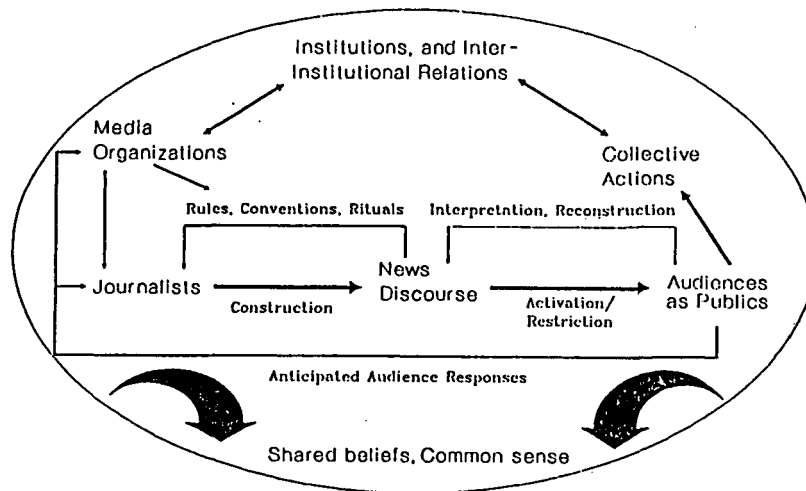


Figure 1. News media discourse process.

which decodings will operate" (Hall, 1980, p. 135). However, audiences will interpret news presentations from media actively (see also, Livingstone, 1990). It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the exact nature of the constructive interpretation processes. Suffice it to say that such interpretive activities involve processing the structural and lexical features of the news texts, relating them to the knowledge bases in their memory, and deriving inferences of the semantic meanings from the texts (see van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983).

In this context, framing analysis distinguishes itself from several alternative approaches to news texts, although it borrows heavily from them. First, unlike the traditional approach to content analysis, framing analysis does not conceive news texts as psychological stimuli with objectively identifiable meanings (see Livingstone, 1990); rather, it views news texts as consisting of organized symbolic devices that will interact with individual agents' memory for meaning construction. Second, framing analysis is not constrained within the content-free structuralist approach of news discourse. Rather, it accepts both the assumption of the rule-governed nature of text formation (van Dijk, 1988) and the multidimensional conception of news texts that will allow for cognitive shortcuts in both news production and consumption. Third, the validity of framing analysis does not rest on researchers' resourceful readings of news texts (see Anderson & Sharrock, 1979). Rather, it retains the systematic procedures of gathering data of news texts in order to identify the signifying elements that might be used by audience members. Finally, framing analysis differs from its closest conceptual ally—William Gamson's (1988) work on news discourse—in that it does not assume the presence of frames in news texts independent of readers of the texts.

### Structures of News Discourse and Framing Devices

We will begin our discussion in this section by assuming that every news story has a theme that functions as the central organizing idea (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). A theme is not the same as a topic, which is a summary label of the

domain of social experiences covered by a story. A theme is an idea that connects different semantic elements of a story (e.g., descriptions of an action or an actor, quotes of sources, and background information) into a coherent whole.<sup>2</sup>

Theme is intrinsically related to meaning. Without getting into the impossible task of defining meaning (Palmer, 1981), let us assume that there are certain functional relations between the signifying elements and meanings of a news story. The signifying elements can be experienced by an agent according to shared rules or conventions. The meanings of the story may result from such experiences. There is no one-to-one correspondence between signifying elements and meaning, but the functional relations between them may be exploited by newsmakers or news consumers to maximize the probability of getting their intended or preferred meanings across.

An intended and comprehended theme of a story may not be identical because of the active nature of discourse comprehension (van Dijk, 1988). However, the structured array of signifying elements does set up parameters of a cognitive "window" through which a news story is "seen." In other words, the intended meaning of a news story has the capability of directing attention as well as restricting the perspectives available to audiences (Hall, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). Because of this structuring function, a theme is also called a frame.

What are the signifying elements of a theme then? They are structurally located lexical choices of codes constructed by following certain shared rules and conventions. They have varying functions in signification. They function as framing devices because they are recognizable and thus can be experienced, can be conceptualized into concrete elements of a discourse, can be arranged or manipulated by newsmakers, and can be communicated in the "transportation" sense of communications. In essence, they are tools for newsmakers to use in composing or constructing news discourse as well as psychological stimuli for audiences to process. They make a frame communicable through the news media.<sup>3</sup>

Framing devices in news discourse may be classified into four categories, representing four structural dimensions of news discourse: syntactical structure, script structure, thematic structure, and rhetorical structure.

### ***Syntactical Structures***

At the most mundane level, syntactical structures refer to the stable patterns of the arrangement of words or phrases into sentences. In news discourse, the structures at this level convey very little information to make news a distinct genre of composition. Here, the syntactical structure of news discourse is what van Dijk (1988) calls "macrosyntax" (p. 26), which, for most news stories, is characterized by the inverted pyramid structure and by the rules of source attributions.<sup>4</sup> An inverted pyramid refers to a sequential organization of structural elements (i.e., headline, lead, episodes, background, and closure). The signifying power of these elements varies in the same descending order. For example, a headline is the most salient cue to activate certain semantically related concepts in readers' minds; it is thus the most powerful framing device of the syntactical structure. A lead is the next most important device to use. A

good lead will give a story a newsworthy angle, suggesting a particular perspective to view the event reported.

In addition, a number of professional conventions in news writing that have been developed to indicate balance or impartiality—the working definition of “objectivity” (Hackett, 1984; McManus, 1991)—are also part of the syntactical structure of news as a genre of composition. They may be used effectively as framing devices in at least three ways: claiming empirical validity or facticity by quoting experts or citing empirical data, linking certain points of view to authority by quoting official sources, and marginalizing certain points of view by relating a quote or point of view to a social deviant.

### ***Script Structures***

News reports are often conceived as stories. This feature of news discourse results from two factors. First, most news reports cover concrete newsworthy events—arbitrarily chunked concretes in a continuous flow of history. They are stories in the literal sense of describing events. Second, news is expected to orient audiences toward their communal environment and to help link audiences with the environment that transcends their limited sensory experiences (Bird & Dardenne, 1988). These are the social functions of story telling. As stories, news discourse has recognizable organizations called scripts.

A script refers to an established and stable sequence of activities and components of an event that have been internalized as a structured mental representation of the event (see Schank & Abelson, 1977). A news script has its distinct structure defined by the rules that may be called story grammars (van Dijk, 1988, p. 50). A generic version consists of the familiar five Ws and one H in news writing: who, what, when where, why and how. Even though they do not have to be present in every single story, these are categories of information that a reporter is expected to gather and report.

The presence of the news script conveys the impression that a news story is a relatively independent unit, because it appears to contain complete information of an event with a beginning, a climax, and an end. It also contains the intrinsic push of our attention to drama, action, characters, and human emotions. To this extent, a reporter writing a news story is not that much different from a storyteller or a novelist writing a fictional story. Largely due to these characteristics of the news script, news often appears to be excessively fragmented, personalized, and dramatized to some of its critics (Bennett, 1988).

### ***Thematic Structures***

Not all news stories are action or event oriented. Some news consists of so-called issue stories that focus on one issue or topic at a time and report several events, actions, or statements related to the issue.<sup>5</sup> A story of this kind contains certain hypothesis-testing features: Events are cited, sources are quoted, and propositions are pronounced; all function as logical support for the hypothesis. Even the action-oriented stories very often contain certain hypothesis-testing elements: A theme is presented or implied, and evidence in the forms of journalists' observations of actions or quotations of a source is presented to support the hypothesis.

The hypothesis-testing features result from the nature of news as a form of knowledge (Park, 1940) and journalism as a knowledge-acquiring discipline using the logical empirical principles of the social sciences (Gans, 1979). A news story may thus be viewed as a set of propositions that form a system of causal or logico-empirical relations. We call this hypothesis-testing (or research finding) aspect of news discourse "thematic structure." (See van Dijk, 1988, for a somewhat different conceptual description.)

Causal statements are often made explicitly in a news story through the use of such words as *because*, *since*, or *for*. Sometimes, causality is less explicit by the contingent relations among a set of propositions, indicated by phrases such as *if . . .*, *then . . .* and *not . . . unless*. Still, many factual reports often make causal representations of a news story implicitly by simply presenting actions in a context in which one may be seen as an antecedent and another as a consequence (van Dijk, 1988).

News discourse is inherently empirical given the nominal definition of news. The predominant empiricism in news discourse is apparent through the frequent uses of descriptive words in presenting direct observations or direct quotes of a source. At the same time, news discourse also contains cues revealing the deductive or inductive reasoning of its producer. For example, in one 1991 issue of *Newsweek*, the cover story carried the headline: "The No Bull Campaign" (Fineman, 1991). The headline essentially stated a hypothesis about the sentiment of the voters in the 1990s and how that was related to campaign styles in the 1992 presidential campaign. The examples, quotes, and background information in the article all functioned to illustrate the point (i.e., to show empirical support for this hypothesis).

A hypothesis does not have to be the headline or lead sentence. Very often, to appeal to human interest and to increase psychological proximity to the audiences, journalists start a story with a vivid image or a concrete case and gradually lead to a point that logically functions like an empirical generalization.

It is difficult to identify the basic units of thematic structure. Some empirical assistance in parsing thematic structure may come from the analysis of the macrosyntax (van Dijk, 1988) of news stories. We may consider a thematic structure as consisting of a summary and a main body. The summary is usually represented by the headline, lead, or conclusion. The main body is where evidence supporting a hypothesis is introduced that contains episodes, background information, and quotes. Similarly, one may identify subthemes and their empirical support through episodes, background information, and quotes in a complex news article. A thematic structure of a news story, therefore, is a multilayer hierarchy with a theme being the central core connecting various subthemes as the major nodes that, in turn, are connected to supporting elements.

### ***Rhetorical Structures***

Rhetorical structures of news discourse describe the stylistic choices made by journalists in relation to their intended effects. Gamson's five framing devices (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989)—metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images—belong to this category. Often, key rhetorical features



of a news story are shaped by sources' proactive newsmaking (e.g., placing George Bush in front of a national flag to have his picture taken). However, journalists also use rhetorical devices to invoke images, increase salience of a point, and increase vividness of a report. For example, in the *Newsweek* story mentioned earlier, the phrase "no bull campaign" was created by the writer as a catchphrase to improve the effectiveness of his point.

Rhetorical structures of news discourse also refer to the tendency of news to tout its facticity (van Dijk, 1988). One important indication of journalists' professionalism is to use various devices to maximize the survival of his or her observations and interpretations as facts or to increase the effectiveness of news. In attempting to do so, journalists are in effect accepting the proposition that there is no clear distinction between factuality and persuasion. The rhetorical claim of news being factual and impartial helps establish the epistemological status of news as a source of factual information and the authority of news as a mirror of reality. Such a rhetorical claim is clearly used by journalists in constructing news stories. For example, the *New York Times* marks distinctly as news analysis articles that contain journalists' opinions or interpretations. The effect is to reinforce the legitimacy and authority of the other news stories as being factual. In so doing, the truthful value of the frames of news discourse is enhanced as is the likelihood of these frames being accepted.

### ***The Role of Lexical Choices***

The four structural dimensions contain only slots with varying power of signification when filled with lexical elements. Although the syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions of discourse are often differentiated (Hartley, 1982), the distinction has little empirical value in analysis of news discourse, because nobody processes one without simultaneously considering the other. It is our view that lexical choices constitute an important aspect of news discourse construction and that they are often made in conformity with structural rules.

Very often, lexical choices of words or labels are made to designate one of the categories in syntactic or script structures. We will call the resulting choice a "designator" because it functions to establish a correspondence between a signifier and "signified" as well as allocating the signified in a specific cognitive category. The latter, being contingent on the former, often signifies the presence of a particular frame. A large portion of choosing a designator involves labeling, which reveals cognitive categorizations on the part of newsmakers. For example, news reports use designators such as "sources" or "the Administration" to give indications of the authoritativeness of an action or a statement. By using "Iraqi dictator," a news report places Saddam Hussein in the same category with Hitler, Noriega, Stalin, and other generally hated men in American culture. By designating the 1989 uprising in China as a "prodemocracy movement," news reports interpreted the meaning of the uprising and categorized it in the same general category that the American Revolution might belong.

Reporters have a large repertoire of designators to choose from. The repertoire is the culture in which news discourse is constructed. Choosing among the plausible designators from such a cultural repertoire is a function of a number of factors, including journalistic professional considerations (Gans,

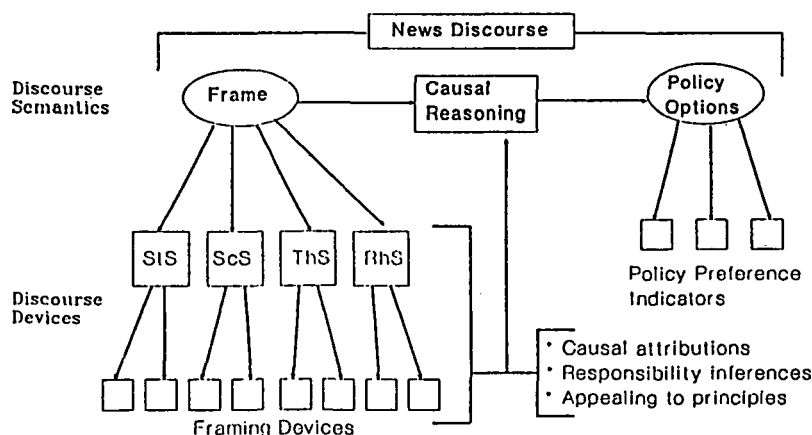
1979), news routines, and organizational processes (Tuchman, 1978). Ideology certainly plays an important role. For example, when Nicaraguan antigovernment rebels are designated "freedom fighters," a clear ideological orientation is presented. Choosing a particular designator, then, is a clear and sometimes powerful cue signifying an underlying frame.

### *Collating the Four Structural Dimensions*

Figure 2 summarizes the various dimensions of news discourse that we have considered so far. The frame or theme of a story is the central idea collating the threads to form a coherent whole. However, it is constructed through comprehending and interpreting the structural relations and functions of the various signifying elements. Collating the structural and lexical features of a news story is a process of following the rules in discourse structures: syntactical, script, thematic, and rhetorical as well as the psychological principles of coherence and consistency (van Dijk, 1988).

Among the four dimensions, the syntactical dimension is truly structural in that its categories may be identified without semantic analysis of a news story. Furthermore, there is a sequential order of signifying power of these categories. The script dimension is structural in the sense of organizing events or actions, and the signifying power of its elements is determined by their locations along the syntactic structure, with additional power coming from the uses of rhetorical and thematic structures. It is therefore possible to crosstabulate the syntactical dimension with the other three to construct a data matrix of signifying elements. Each news story may be represented by such a matrix filled with unique elements.

One frustration in empirical analysis of news texts concerns discourse parsing or "unitization" (Krippendorff, 1980). It involves more than methodological decisions about the units to be sampled, coded, and analyzed; it also involves conceptual formulation of the rules of "chunking" texts based on cognitive theories of how the texts are processed and represented (Cappella &



**Figure 2.** An illustration of news discourse structure. Notations: StS = Syntactic structure; ScS = Script structure; ThS = Thematic structure; RhS = Rhetorical structure.

Street, 1989; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). To a large extent, the syntactical structure based on what Chomsky (1965) calls "constituent analysis" provides us with a linguistic basis for chunking: Phrases as the basic units at the syntactic level are grammatically organized into sentences. For many purposes of political communication research, this unitization operation may be far too micro, because the overall context of a news story may be insufficiently emphasized. As van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) point out, "(U)nderstanding sentences as part of a discourse is a different process from understanding sentences in isolation" (p. 32). However, the micro units should be helpful for researchers to identify the elements of the script, thematic and rhetorical structures, and to examine the level of logical consistency between the analysis of news discourse at the level of macrosyntax and the models of comprehension at some lower levels (see Kintsch, 1988; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983).

We should emphasize that framing analysis does not assume a one-to-one correspondence between the structural and lexical features and meanings of a news story. As we argued earlier, meanings result from active interpretations by audiences in relation to their knowledge and their life experiences. We may consider the meaning variations as having individual-specific components as well as a shared component in a population. The individual-specific components are functions of unique individual knowledge structures and life experiences as well as situational factors at the time and setting of news processing. The shared component results from the common structural and lexical features that they process and the predictable functions between these features and the meanings that are most likely derived.

This conception of news discourse is meant to maintain consistency with some existing cognitive models of discourse representation and comprehension (see Cappella & Street, 1989; Kintsch, 1988; van Dijk, 1988). The task of cognitive models of discourse comprehension then is to describe the varying functions between the identified structural and lexical features of news stories and the predictable mental representations of the story on the part of audiences. With some additional elaboration, we believe that this conception of news discourse can be moved beyond the level of individual news stories to the level of a stream of news discourse concerning a public policy issue. It is even possible to trace and document the evolution of the discourse concerning an issue over a period of time.

We should also note that we borrowed from Gamson (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; 1989) to include issue positions or policy options as a part of news discourse in Figure 2. News discourse is directly relevant to public policy making (see Linsky, 1986). Within the realm of news discourse, causal reasoning is often present, including causal attributions of the roots of a problem, inferences about the responsibility for treatment of the problem as well as appealing to higher level principles in framing an issue and in weighing various policy options (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Iyengar, 1991). Sometimes, policy options or preferences are implied in the news text in that readers could derive them from the central idea of the news discourse concerning an issue; at other times, policy options or preferences are explicitly stated in news discourse. The latter is particularly possible when the thematic structures of a news story clearly reveal causal inferences and responsibility attributions (see Iyengar, 1991).

### An Illustration: A News Story of the Wichita Protest

In this section, we will analyze a single news story as an empirical illustration of our model of news texts. The news story was published in the *Los Angeles Times*, August 26, 1991 (see Appendix for the full text). The topic is the anti-abortion rally held the previous Sunday in Wichita, Kansas, that marked the suspension of the Wichita anti-abortion protests.

There are several alternative ways of treating the news article. Working in the agenda-setting tradition, one would measure the location and length of the article and combine the findings with those from other articles dealing with the abortion issue. The article then contributes to an index of salience of the abortion issue in the news. Working in the tradition of media bias, one would measure how many pro and con statements on abortion the article contained and then aggregate the findings from similar articles. Missing from both of these types of analysis is how the abortion issue is discussed in the news and how the ways of talking about the issue are related to the evolution of the issue in political debates (see Shaw, 1990). That is what framing analysis attempts to provide.

In this example, although the analysis is conducted at the level of a single news story, each meaningful proposition—in the form of a noun unit plus a verb unit—could be coded.<sup>6</sup> The two different units are made consistent through the macrorules (van Dijk, 1988) that integrate structural and lexical features into a coherent frame.

Table 1 shows the data analysis. The story is a fairly straightforward report of the protest events on one day: The anti-abortion protesters in Wichita held a rally at Cessna Stadium to mark the end of their 6-week-long protest and the beginning of continued opposition by local anti-abortion organizations. The story has three main parts: the rally, a violent confrontation between the anti-abortion protesters and the police shortly before the rally, and a review of the previous protests. The headline does very little to frame the story other than by summarizing the main ingredients of the main event, the rally. However, the signifying devices identified in the text may be used to construct a conflict-and-confrontation frame.

In terms of the syntactic structure, the lead summarizes the event—the Sunday rally—and presents it as a turning point of the Wichita anti-abortion protest: capping the 6-week protests and turning the opposition to the local organizations. The supporting paragraph is parallel to the lead with more specifics. In the remaining paragraphs, descriptions of the earlier clash between anti-abortion protesters and police and the earlier arrests of the Operation Rescue leaders were woven into the text as background information. This is achieved through transitional sentences. For example, the transition from the rally to the morning confrontation is made through a sentence of contrast: “Although the rally . . . was without incident, it was preceded by a protest at an abortion clinic that turned violent.” The transition to the arrests of the Operation Rescue leaders is made by noting their absence at the rally.

Analyzing the thematic structure of the story will yield exactly the same readings of the text, with additional possible interpretations emerging. The confrontation frame is very effective in depicting and marginalizing opponents (see Gitlin, 1980). In this story, several subthemes may be derived from the

**Table 1**  
Structural Elements of the Abortion Story

Sentence	Proposition	Syntactic	Script	Thematic	Rhetorical
S <sub>1</sub>	Antiabortion activists capped their protests rallied on Sunday Speakers exhorted Wichitans to continue to oppose abortion	Lead paragraph References	Actor, action Action, time Actor, action	Abortion debate is a conflict and confrontation.	Militant (modifier of the actor)
S <sub>2</sub>	Antiabortion activists gathered at Cessna Stadium	Supporting paragraph	Actor, action Setting		Quantification "25,000" Neutralization with "so called" & quotation marks Quantification, "2,600"
S <sub>3</sub>	Protests polarized the city resulted in arrests George Grant said ordinary people change history God is at work here	Quotation Quotation	Causal connection between events	Subtheme 1: Antiabortion protesters want to change the established law. Subtheme 2: Antiabortion protesters are religious fanatics.	
S <sub>4</sub> -S <sub>8</sub>	(Further details of the rally)	Episodes & secondary information	Strategies of the protesters	Subtheme 3: Antiabortion protesters are confrontational. Subtheme 3a: Antiabortion protesters planned confrontational strategies.	
S <sub>9</sub>	The rally drew more people than expected (auxiliary) had no incidents Earlier protest turned violent	Transition Background	Context		
S <sub>10</sub>	A spokesperson (of the antiabortion protesters) said police rode into the crowd on horses police used Mace	Background	Context	Subtheme 3b: Antiabortion protesters were in violent confrontation with the police.	
S <sub>11</sub>	Bryan Brown blamed police for violence Demonstrators shoved the clinic director (passive)	Background	Context		Balancing narratives
S <sub>12</sub>	Police used Mace on some protesters protesters blocked the clinic door				
S <sub>13</sub>	Brown claimed police beat several protesters				
S <sub>14</sub> -S <sub>16</sub>	(Further details of the confrontation from the point of view of Bryan Brown)				

S <sub>17</sub>	Protesters arrested	Attribution			
S <sub>18</sub> -S <sub>21</sub>	(Conflicting account by Bryan Brown and police about the Sunday morning confrontation)				
S <sub>22</sub>	Operation Rescue did not show on Sunday started the Wichita protests	Transition Background	Context		Radical (modifier of the actor)
S <sub>23</sub>	leaders arrested (passive, auxiliary) lowered profile				
S <sub>24</sub>	A coalition of local organizations sponsored the rally take the baton Organizers leave town (auxiliary)			Subtheme 4: Protests will continue.	
S <sub>25</sub> -S <sub>28</sub>	(Further details about leaders of Operation Rescue)			Subtheme 3c: Protest leaders have trouble with the law.	Out-of-state (modifier of the actor)
S <sub>29</sub>	Keith Tucci spoke to "keep the faith, keep up the fight"	Quotation		Support subtheme 3.	
S <sub>30</sub>	Pat Robertson spoke God is on their side arrestees are heroes	Quotation		Support subtheme 2.	
S <sub>31</sub>	not to interfere with a woman's reproductive rights				
S <sub>32</sub>	to protect human beings men use money-grubbing forceps men masquerade as men of medicine				
S <sub>33</sub>	Pat Robertson predicted Supreme Court will reverse Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973	Paraphrase		Support subtheme 2. Support subtheme 1.	Depiction from a source
S <sub>34</sub>	Bishop Eugene Gerber condemned abortion compared it to the crucifixion of Jesus called for civil disobedience with "dignity and without violence"	Paraphrase Quotation		Support subtheme 2.	Metaphor from a source
S <sub>35</sub> -S <sub>36</sub>	(A brief mention of an abortion rights demonstration a day before the rally.)	Background	Context		Neutralizing with quotation marks

logical relations of the propositions, quotations, sources, and depictions (see Table 1).

First, the anti-abortion activists are portrayed as wanting to overturn the established law. The quote attributed to George Grant, conspicuously placed in the third paragraph, clearly makes this statement. This point is more vividly expressed through the report of the arrests of the activist leaders and heavy fines imposed by a federal judge. It was reinforced very specifically through a quote attributed to Pat Robertson.

Second, the anti-abortion activists may also come across as religious fanatics. Among the six named sources quoted in the story, three are clearly identified as religious leaders (i.e., minister, Christian broadcaster, and bishop). The quote attributed to Pat Robertson contains a substantive argument refuting the anti-choice ideological frame imposed on the anti-abortion activists, and the quote attributed to Bishop Eugene Gerber indicates his desire for conducting civil disobedience with "dignity and without violence." However, it is the quote stating "God is at work here" that is placed in a much more conspicuous position.

Third, the anti-abortion activists emerge from the story as being militant, radical, and confrontational. This subtheme is revealed by the use of the words *militant* and *radical* to characterize the main actors of the event; the depiction of the protesters "shoving" a clinic director and "locking arms to block the clinic door"; the report of numerous arrests and fines imposed; and the quote from the spokesperson, Bryan Brown, accusing the police of using "police-state tactics."

Finally, a subtheme throughout the article is that the protesters vowed to continue their protests and that similar confrontations are likely to continue.

Similarly, indications of the underlying confrontation frame may emerge from analysis of the script structure of the story. The normal script of a rally is likely to involve a large group of people gathered together, listening to speakers, chanting slogans, and so on. In this story, the first two paragraphs basically complete the construction of this script. The lead paragraph clearly identifies the actors (who), the action (what), and time (when). The supporting paragraph further identifies the place (where). Together, they have also identified the purposes of this rally (why).

However, the following paragraphs, which provide more detailed depictions of individual actors in contrast to the faceless aggregate called "anti-abortion activists," the episodes of the background events, the quotes, and so forth—all of which may be the "how" element of a news story script—add the unique elements to the standard script of rallies, though none of them deviates from our anticipation of how the story is to be narrated. These elements vividly present Operation Rescue's strategy of overt confrontation through civil disobedience. The strategy is quite effective in creating conflicts, emotions, dramas, and visual images, all necessary ingredients of newsworthiness. However, it also tends to backfire in that the action per se rather than the rationale guiding the action gets news attention. The script structure of this story faithfully reflects this dilemma.

Several rhetorical devices used in the news article can also be interpreted as consistent with the confrontational frame. One such device is the use of quantitative terms in representing the rally, the protests, and the arrests. Quan-

tification helps enhance the empirical quality of the news story. It may also be interpreted to marginalize or magnify the antiabortion groups by readers with different conceptual orientations concerning the abortion issue.

Two other rhetorical devices appear in this article, both coming from sources. One is a depiction of abortion ("money-grubbing forceps") by Pat Robertson and the other is a metaphor for abortion ("the crucifixion of Jesus") by Bishop Eugene Gerber. These devices represent powerful framing for anti-abortion activists because they may resonate with their prior beliefs about abortion. However, when used in the context of this article, these devices may be read by abortion-rights activists as evidence that the abortion opponents are radical, marginal, and fanatic.

This exercise illustrates that it is possible to empirically identify the key signifying devices of news texts using the four structural dimensions. There are two points to this. One is a conceptual point. This style of framing analysis does not uncover the meanings of the story to be conveyed to audiences. Rather, it generates a data matrix of signifying elements that might result in different interpretations (Hall, 1980). However, the linkages between them are not presumed; rather, additional data on audiences and their social contexts should be gathered, and the functional linkages between the signifying elements and audiences' orientations should be empirically investigated. The second point is more methodological. These structural dimensions may help us analyze a large number of news stories concerning one event or issue and aggregate observations to a higher level. Such aggregation may be carried out either temporally to describe the evolution and trend of the news discourse concerning an issue or cross-sectionally to examine diversity of news discourse on the issue.

### Concluding Remarks

The main focus of this article is the conceptualization of news texts as a form of discourse. The theoretical framework is a version of constructivism—news discourse is an integral part of the process of framing public policy issues and plays an important role in shaping public debate concerning these issues (Gamson, 1988). We conceive news texts as consisting of four structural dimensions: syntactical, script, thematic, and rhetorical. Our main concern is to stipulate a conceptual model of news texts that is operationalizable in a systematic empirical analysis. Furthermore, we want the model to be logically consistent with a much larger framework of news discourse that involves not only the cognitive activities of the players in the process but also the social and cultural contexts in which these players operate.

Thus, framing analysis places the analysis of news text in a theoretical framework built on the point of convergence between the sociological and cognitive formulations of the frame concept. It avoids some of the unrealistic assumptions in the traditional content analysis approach. Such a conceptual effort is urgently needed in the field of political communication, considering the call to examine political communication in a coherent framework of the processes involving news texts, their production, audience processing, (McLeod et al., 1991; Neuman, 1989) and the applications of computer technology in content analysis (e.g., Franzosi, 1989; Hart, Jerome, & McComb, 1984).



Framing analysis is a conceptual model that responds to the call and can potentially, if the operational procedures are fully developed, take advantage of computer technology.

Framing analysis as an approach to analyzing news discourse mainly deals with how public discourse about public policy issues is constructed and negotiated. It is based on the recognition that in the American political process, the participants are increasingly pressed to use symbolic devices to gain legitimacy, form political alignments, strive toward consensus, and organize collective or policy actions (Gamson, 1988; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). It shares with agenda-setting research a focus on the public policy issues in the news and in voters' minds. However, it expands beyond what people talk or think about by examining how they think and talk. It also goes beyond the agenda-setting literature, characterized by collections of empirical generalizations without theories (Shaw, 1992), to build a more solid theoretical basis of news discourse processes. The crucial advance from the agenda-setting research is that framing analysis examines the diversity and fluidity in how issues are conceptualized and consequently allows for more fruitful analysis of the conceptual evolution of policy issues.

Framing analysis pays close attention to the systematic study of political language, the coin of the realm in political communication that is often ignored or only dealt with in a highly abstract manner. Framing ought to sensitize researchers to examine political language as used at various stages of the political communication process: statements from policymakers, media content, and representations in audiences' minds as well as the operation of the political system. Choices of words and their organization into news stories are not trivial matters. They hold great power in setting the context for debate, defining issues under consideration, summoning a variety of mental representations, and providing the basic tools to discuss the issues at hand.

This effort toward understanding political discourse also has a more realistic basis in the practices of American politics. Journalists, campaign professionals, and the publics as well as campaign scholars have shown increasing interest in the use of code words, photo opportunities, and sound bites to give an emerging issue a favorable spin or to attack the character of political opponents (Ansolabehere, Behr, & Iyengar, 1991). These practices are designed to renew and resonate certain elements of American culture loaded with emotions for the purpose of creating a political atmosphere favorable to one candidate and ideological orientation. With a few noticeable exceptions (e.g., Jamieson, 1992), the academic community has been slow to develop testable theories of discourse construction and processing that are directly tied to political practices. It is our contention that framing analysis offers one approach.

Although it will be obvious to many who have read this far, we must emphasize that the conceptual framework proposed here is still at an early stage of development. Many elements in the framework have not been worked out, partly because doing so demands mastering the literature from diverse areas such as semiotics, cognitive psychology, sociology, journalism, and so on. However, it is our belief that framing analysis placed in the framework of constructivism and on the ground of empirical analysis of news discourse offers a fruitful area of research. Theoretical development in this area presents the potential of integrating research on news production, news discourse, and

news comprehension and effects. It is this much larger and longer range goal that has inspired the analysis presented in this article.

## Notes

1. Our discussion focuses primarily on news discourse as verbal texts. This is, of course, a major limitation of our conceptual analysis. We must acknowledge that very little conceptual analysis of visual language and its relations with verbal languages is available in the literature. We are deterred by this vast unknown territory. At the same time, we are also encouraged by the limited amount of work related to this issue that suggests great commonalities between visual and verbal languages in terms of the internal structural relations of each language's elements and their signification functions (Hartley, 1982; Livingstone, 1990).

2. For example, a public official is invited to address the graduation ceremony of a major university. He chooses to talk about affirmative action. In his address, he argues that many practices under the name of affirmative action lead to quotas in school admission and job hiring. In this case, affirmative action is the topic of his address and quota system the frame he uses to characterize affirmative action practices. This distinction marks a major difference between our approach and van Dijk's (1988).

3. The concept "framing devices" comes from Gamson (see Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). They are part of what is called "symbolic devices" or "signature elements" (Gamson & Lasch, 1983). In our usage, framing devices include Gamson's framing devices as one of the four types.

4. Other types of news story structures are used by journalists (e.g., the multiple-element structure, the trend-story structure, and the Wall Street Journal formula) (see McIntyre, 1991). We may need to differentiate different types of news stories each of which has its stable macrostructure. Here, we only discuss the inverted pyramid structure as an example because it is the most familiar and simple type.

5. Iyengar (1991) refers to these two types of stories as using two different frames: episodic versus thematic.

6. A proposition operationalized in our study differs from that in Chomsky's (1965) syntactical level analysis. Chomsky in his analysis parses each sentence into units that fit into grammatical categories (e.g.,  $S = NP + VP$ ;  $NP = T + N$ ;  $VP = V + NP$ , etc., in which NP refers to a noun proposition, VP refers to a verb proposition, T refers to an article, and N and V refer to a noun and a verb, respectively). For our purposes, his unitization might be too micro. We looked for ways of identifying the elements that are easily identifiable by a trained coder, possible basic units in a reader's cognitive processing, and constituents on which macrorules may be operating. Obviously, with these three general principles, there could be many different ways of unitizing a text. Ours is only one of them. Theoretically, this potential flexibility indicates the possibilities of varying interpretations of a text by readers with different knowledge representations and life experiences.

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### Appendix

Full text of the *Los Angeles Times* Story, Monday, August 26, 1991\*

By: Eric Harrison—Times Staff Writer

#### **25,000 Abortion Opponents Cap Wichita Protests Rally: Speakers Call on Residents to Continue Their Opposition. Operation Rescue is Leaving the City.**

Wichita, Kan.—Militant anti-abortion activists from around this nation capped six weeks of protests Sunday with a gigantic rally at which speaker after speaker exhorted Wichitans to continue to oppose abortion, even after the out-of-towners leave.

An estimated 25,000 people gathered at Cessna Stadium here for what was to be the culmination of Operation Rescue's so-called "Summer of Mercy" protests, which have polarized this city since mid-July and resulted in 2,600 arrests.

"The lesson of Wichita is that ordinary people can change history," said George Grant, an activist minister and author from Ft. Lauderdale. "The lesson of Wichita is that God is at work here."

Protest organizers renewed their promise to make Wichita "America's first abortion-free society," even as some of them made preparation to move on to Fargo, N.D., and other cities in the Midwest, which Operation Rescue views as fertile ground for its confrontational style of protest.

Spokesmen said that Sunday's rally marked a turning point in the anti-abortion fight in Wichita. Operation Rescue will pull out now, leaving local anti-abortion activists to lead the effort here. Their focus will be on education, legislative action and creation of a "support system" to counsel pregnant women, said spokeswoman Mary Wilkerson.

Their goal, she said, is to make abortion illegal in Wichita through a referendum.

Although the rally—which drew more than twice the number of people expected—was without incident, it was preceded by a protest at an abortion clinic that turned violent. A spokesman for the activists said that the Sunday morning encounter was the most confrontational since the first days of the protests when police rode into the crowd on horses and reportedly used Mace.

Although the spokesman, Bryan Brown, blamed police for the violence, the clinic director reportedly was shoved by two demonstrators as she arrived at a back entrance about 7:30 a.m. Police used Mace on some protesters who blocked the clinic door. Brown also claimed that police officers beat several of the 250 protesters.

He showed a videotape to reporters in which police officers used Mace on men who were locking arms to block the clinic door. A few minutes later, two police officers on the tape appeared to be repeatedly striking some men who had tumbled to the ground while being removed. The men fell behind a parked car where the blows police were striking could not be seen.

Sixty-one protesters were reported arrested.

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"I would find that level of violence to be inexcusable, no matter what the reason," Brown said. "These were police-state tactics." Police spokesmen could not be reached, but Associated Press quoted a police lieutenant as saying the Mace was used because the officers were surrounded by demonstrators and felt threatened. The videotape showed officers using Mace on demonstrators who were standing with locked arms in the doorway.

Operation Rescue, the radical group that started the Wichita protests July 15, was little in evidence Sunday.

With most of its leaders jailed or threatened with arrest, the organization has sought a lower profile. The rally Sunday officially was sponsored by the "Hope for the Heartland Committee," a coalition of 25 local organizations formed to take the baton when out-of-state organizers leave town.

Randall Terry, Operation Rescue's founder, did not attend. U.S. District Judge Patrick F. Kelly has threatened to have Terry arrested if he returns to Wichita. He is one of six Operation Rescue leaders named in a contempt-of-court warrant issued by Kelly for defying his injunction against blockading two local clinics. Three of the leaders named in the warrant have been jailed indefinitely by Kelly and have had heavy fines levied against them.

Keith Tucci, another Operation Rescue official, spoke to the rally via telephone hookup, exhorting the audience to "keep the faith, keep up the fight."

Pat Robertson, the Christian broadcaster and former presidential candidate, told the protesters that God is on their side and said those who have been arrested for the anti-abortion cause are heroes.

"Those who stand for life are trying in no way to interfere with a woman's reproductive rights or her sexual behavior," he said. "What we are trying to do is protect the lives of innocent human beings from the money-grubbing forceps of men who masquerade as men of medicine."

He predicted that the U.S. Supreme Court, when it reconvenes in October, will reverse its 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* decision that made abortion legal.

Bishop Eugene Gerber of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Wichita also condemned abortion, comparing it to the crucifixion of Jesus, but called upon anti-abortion activists to conduct civil disobedience with "dignity and without violence."

The rally took place on the day after national abortion rights leaders conducted their first large-scale demonstration here to counter Operation Rescue. An estimated 5,000 gathered to hear speakers such as Eleanor Smeal, a former president of the National Organization for Women.