



Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

Zentrum für Nordamerika – Forschung (ZENAF)
Center for North American Studies

**ZENAF Arbeits- und Forschungsberichte
(ZAF)**

Nr. 2 / 2003

Raimund Schieß / Gerda Lauerbach

**The Florida Recount on CNN International –
(two) discourse analytic studies.**

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Lauerbach

Zentrum für Nordamerika-Forschung
Center for North American Studies

Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität
Robert-Mayer-Strasse 1
60054 Frankfurt / Main

Tel.: (069) 798 28521 / 22
e-mail: zenafdir@em.uni-frankfurt.de
homepage: <http://www.uni-frankfurt.de/zenaf>
Federal Republic of Germany

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Introduction

Gerda Lauerbach

The two papers in this edition of ZAF were originally read at the 29th International LAUD Symposium on the language of political and social ideologies, which was held at the University of Koblenz-Landau in March 2002.

Both papers report on work in progress from ZENAF's research project „Politics on TV“, which is funded by the German Science Council and directed by the author. The project has two parts: (1) A comparative analysis of election nights in the United States, Great Britain and Germany. (2) The US Post-Election 2000, commonly known as the *Florida Recount*, as a global media event. The goal of the first part of the project is the intercultural analysis of discursive practices in the reporting of politics by US-American, British, German and international television channels like CNN International and BBC World. The second part of the project is a monocultural case study of the manner in which CNN Domestic and CNN International reported on the aftermath of the US Presidential Election 2000. In this five week-long media event covering the dispute over the American Presidency in the State of Florida, the features of American political culture and commercial television are emphatically enacted and highly visible.

Both papers focus on events fairly early in the five week-period of *The Florida Recount*. Both employ the methods of Critical Discourse Analysis, a discipline that evolved out of Critical Linguistics and related fields and that aims at making explicit submerged meanings as well as implicit practices of exercising power and control through linguistic, extra-linguistic and other semiotic, e.g. visual, means.

Proceeding chronologically in terms of the events covered, Raimund Schieß in his paper „*Too close to call: CNN's politics of captions in the coverage of the Florida Recount*“ focusses on Nov. 11, 2000, when the Bush campaign applied to Miami Federal Court to stop the manual recount of ballots which had been started in some counties. The paper studies the discursive practices employed by the CNN journalists to construct a particular version of the events, focussing on captions, i.e. the lines of text inserted at the bottom of the tv screen, and on the way in which they interact with the other verbal and visual components of the television text. Raimund Schieß concludes that captions, far beyond providing mere details of a speech event (who is talking to whom about what, where and when), are used to select, to highlight and hide, and thus to invite a preferred interpretation of the event. He is also able to show that captions are often employed to exploit a story's potential for drama and sensation. His detailed micro-analysis of the verbal and visual dimensions of the television text is supported by careful documentation of the data, either through screen shots or via transcriptions of the stretches of broadcast discussed.

While Raimund Schieß analyzes the discursive practices of the media, Gerda Lauerbach, in her paper „*Statements to the Press: Ideology in Argumentative Strategies and Rhetorical Stance*“, focusses on the comparative analysis of the discursive practices

employed by the politicians involved in the struggle. Her data are two press statements by spokespersons of the opposing camps on Nov. 13, the day when the Miami Judge rejected the Bush campaign's Nov. 11 application for an order to block the manual recounts. One statement is by Karen Hughes speaking for Texas Governor George W. Bush, the other by Warren Christopher speaking for Vice President Al Gore.

The paper departs from the assumption that party ideology will manifest itself not only in the ways in which events are represented, but significantly also in the discursive practices with which identities and relations are constructed. Supplementing the methods of critical discourse analysis with those of modern rhetoric and argumentation theory, Gerda Lauerbach shows in detail how linguistic micro-mechanisms interact with rhetorical and argumentative schemes to construct two different kinds of discourse. These discourses implicate different kinds of self-identities for the speakers and their political parties, as well as different identities for and interpersonal relations with, the political opponent, the television audience, the electorate and the American people.

The results presented in these papers enable us to formulate more precise hypotheses as work on the project proceeds. Eventually we aim at reaching valid generalizations about the discourse of the politicians that were involved in the *Florida Recount*, about the discourse of the media, and about the way in which the two interacted. A final, most interesting question that arises from these analyses is whether, in that decisive issue, the discursive practices of the then leading 24-hour commercial news channel in the United States resonated more intimately with the discursive practices of one of the major political forces in that country than with those of the other.

“Too close to call”: CNN's politics of captions in the coverage of the Florida Recount*

Raimund Schieß

0. Introduction

Chad – *hanging chad*, *dimpled chad*, *pregnant chad* – *butterfly ballot*, *Floridians*, *Volusia County*, *light test* – these are some linguistic reminders of what has come to be called the Florida Recount, i.e., those 36 days that it took to determine the winner of the US presidential election of November 7, 2000.¹ The Florida Recount was a historic, unprecedented event and attracted enormous attention at the time, and not just in the United States. It has since been eclipsed by the events of September 11, 2001, but many of us will remember the atmosphere of that November–December 2000, the uncertainty, the excitement, the disbelief at what was going on.

Each and every little detail of the Florida Recount was covered and brought to television viewers around the world by CNN (Cable News Network), the US-based 24-hour news channel belonging to the AOL Time Warner Group. CNN is actually a network of different channels, each catering to a different regional audience. Thus, in the United States, viewers get to see the domestic version of CNN (“CNN-USA”), while viewers in other parts of the world watch CNN International. For much of the coverage of the Florida Recount, however, CNN International joined its “sister-network” CNN-USA, thus transmitting a program produced primarily for a US audience.

One striking feature of CNN's Recount coverage was the prolific use of captions. Captions in this case are short stretches of written text that appear at the bottom of the television screen and contain selected pieces of information from the ongoing program.² Captions are characteristic of news channels and are especially common on US television, which generally has a strong tendency to visualize information (cf. Ludes 1993). Yet even in the United States, the extensive use of captions during the Florida Recount attracted attention, as the following extract, written by a media columnist, illustrates:

“It's Day Six,” [late-night talk show host] Jay Leno complained back on Nov. 13 [2000]. “Can we drop the ‘Breaking News’ logo?”

Like a guardrail on a narrow highway, that strip has run across the bottom of television screens since the inconclusive Election Day of Nov. 7.

MSNBC is alternating “Breaking News” with “Decision 2000.” The Fox News Channels scream, in big bright letters: “Election Alert.” CNN's captions are only a little more sparing.

* This paper is part of the project “Television Discourse”, supported by the German Science Council and directed by Gerda Lauerbach. The goal of the project is a comparative discourse analysis of election night (and, in the case of the US presidential election of 2000, post-election night) television coverage in the United States, Great Britain and Germany. I am grateful to Gerda Lauerbach, Bettina Migge and an anonymous reviewer for valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

¹ *Chad* refers to the tiny piece of paper that is punched out of a paper ballot in order to record a vote. If the chad is only partially detached, it may be *hanging*, *dimpled* (indented) or *pregnant* (bulged out) – the exact type may be determined by performing a *light test*, i.e., by holding the ballot up to the light.

² For an analysis of captions in British newscasts from 1975, see Glasgow University Media Group (1976, 286–292; 1980, 365–374). For similarities between captions in newscasts and subtitling in film, cf. de Linde & Kay (1999).

At one point, a Fox anchorwoman looked positively imprisoned, surrounded by captions to her left saying “Fox News” and “Live,” by a box on her right tagged “Fox Facts” that gave additional details of a Florida court case and by a series of layered captions below that involved the elections and the nation's financial markets. The TV screen looked like a hyperactive Web site. (Folkenflik 2000)

This excerpt suggests that the ample use of captions was an important, highly noticeable element of the Recount coverage.

The aim of the present paper is to show how captions represent an additional layer of meaning that interacts with the other elements of a television newscast (soundtrack, images). I am treating newscasts as multimodal texts that co-deploy different semiotic modes, such as moving images, graphics, spoken language, and written language. CNN uses a wide variety of captions, but I focus only on those that appear during or after news conferences and selectively represent politicians' discourse.³ In so doing, these captions frame and guide viewers' interpretation of what was said and provide a “subtext”, as it were, both literally and metaphorically. The frameworks that I will be drawing on are Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g., Fairclough 1995), Systemic Functional Linguistics (e.g., Halliday 1994) and Multimodal Analysis (e.g., Kress & van Leeuwen 2001).

For the purposes of this paper, I will illustrate CNN's use of captions by looking at three extracts from the channel's coverage of November 11, 2000, i.e., from 4 days after election day.⁴ In section 1, I analyze a live news report in order to point out some general features of captions and caption design on CNN. In section 2, attention turns to two news conferences and the intertextual analysis of captions.

1. Caption structure and design

What was going on in Florida on that Saturday, November 11, 2000? The machine recount of ballots had been completed, and according to unofficial results, Texas Governor George W. Bush was leading Vice President Al Gore by 327 votes. At issue now was the hand recount of ballots in four Florida counties, and this hand recount (requested by the Gore campaign) was about to begin on November 11. At that point, the Bush campaign filed a lawsuit to block the manual recount – in legal terms, they asked for an injunction. Thus, the impending hand recount and the lawsuit trying to stop it were the two big issues dominating the news on that day.

As a first, introductory example, I discuss an extract from a report that was broadcasted on November 11 shortly after noon. CNN correspondent John Zarrella is reporting live from West Palm Beach, one of the four Florida counties where the hand recount is about to begin. A transcript can be found in the appendix. The transcript records visual information, including captions, in column 1 and spoken language in column 2.⁵

³ See Lauerbach, this volume, for another, discourse analytic study of news conferences held during the Florida Recount.

⁴ These extracts have been selected from the Frankfurt corpus on the Florida Recount. It consists of video recordings (each between 4 and 6 hours long) of CNN International's coverage of each day of the post-election period (Nov. 8 to Dec. 13, 2000).

⁵ A particularly rich account of how to transcribe the different semiotic modes of television can be found in Thibault (2000)

The screen design and the graphic aspects of the captions merit a detailed analysis on their own, which is beyond the scope of the present paper.⁶ Here, I just like to point to the fact that the captions and the surrounding graphic elements take up about 23–25 % of the screen – a rather large portion of precious screen space (see Figure 1). Besides their size, a visual effect (unfortunately not visible in the screenshot) adds to the captions' salience: the area behind the phrase “Race too close to call” is an animated, electronic image of the US flag – a cultural symbol that increases the captions' visual weight.



Fig. 1: CNN live report from West Palm Beach, Florida (Nov. 11, 2000; ~12:10 pm ET)

The caption has several layers. Going from top to bottom, we first read “Election2000”. This is the logo that CNN had already been using in the coverage of the election campaign and that was supposed to disappear after the election night. It expresses the macro-topic of the current report and can be compared with section headings in newspapers. The second line, “Race too close to call”, is a typical phrase from the discourse of election coverage, from those few hours during election night when results are coming in, but are not yet sufficient to declare a winner. To read that phrase four days after the election is highly unusual and intriguing, and a constant reminder to the audience of these extraordinary events. It resembles newspaper headlines not only in its elliptic structure but also in that it provides a catchy gist of what has been going on; it gives a detail on the macro-topic, but is still rather general.

These first two layers remain constant, only the one at the very bottom of the screen changes in the course of the program, e.g from “John Zarrella, West Palm Beach” to “Florida Recount Battle”. It is this layer that I concentrate on in the following analysis because here, we encounter a variety of captions in terms of linguistic structure and function. Some CNN captions indicate phone numbers that viewers can call to voice their opinion, others contain programming notes – yet the majority of captions are short sentences and give a summary of recent events or background information on the current report.

I have chosen Zarrella's report as an example because its captions construe the Recount as a battle, i.e., through a metaphor of war, which is common for describing

⁶ See van Leeuwen & Jewitt (2001) for a survey of different approaches to visual analysis.

politics. As Fiske (1987: 291) notes: “Making sense of politics by metaphors of war [...] constructs politics as a conflict between parties and not as a public sphere serving the good of the nation.” Military metaphors are of course also found in spoken language. Zarrella, for instance, uses the phrase “duelling camps” in his report (line 2). Such phrases, in the oral mode, are easy to miss or to forget. In contrast, the caption “Florida Recount Battle” stays on screen for a longer period of time (1 min 50 sec) and is therefore more noticeable and more likely to stick in our minds. Thus, it is more powerful than the same or a similar metaphor uttered orally and just once

But do we actually witness a (metaphorical) “battle” in this report? What is the relation between the caption and what we see and hear? Much of the report could be in fact classified as a form of what Gerda Lauerbach (p.c.) has called “waiting talk” – talk designed merely to bridge the gap and kill time in anticipation of an important event: “we’re waiting here in Palm Beach County” (line 15), “waiting for the recount to start in Miami, waiting to see what a federal judge will do...” (lines 48–49). At one point (lines 20–23), the caption is superimposed over live pictures of a basically empty room, with no-one inside – not exactly a battle. Thus, there is a contrast between the content of the caption and the report itself. In the absence of interesting developments and spectacular images, the caption adds some excitement, some drama to Zarrella’s waiting talk. Interestingly, no caption is used to identify the piece of paper that we see (lines 15–18), and we have to guess that it is a copy of the injunction.

2. Intertextual analysis

I am now turning to the intertextual analysis of captions – to captions that mediate participants’ speech. Which elements of a spoken text appear in the captions, and how are those elements transformed in the process? I analyze two short extracts from November 11 – one covering the Bush campaign and one covering the Gore campaign.

The first extract is taken from a statement made by George W. Bush and his running mate Dick Cheney on Bush’s ranch in Texas. Remember that on November 11, the big news of the day was the court action taken by the Bush campaign. The statement promises to bring the first comments from Bush himself on that lawsuit. CNN treats the event as “Breaking News” and interrupts its current programming to broadcast the statement, which had been videotaped earlier. A transcript with excerpts from the 10-minute segment is given in the appendix.

The extract begins with a short statement from Bush (lines 14–22), followed by a statement by Cheney (lines 23–41), and then turns into an informal press conference, with questions from several journalists (lines 42–73).

During the two initial statements and at the beginning of the question-and-answer session (lines 12–43), captions are used to indicate the current speaker’s name, function and location. Starting on line 46, CNN International joins CNN-USA, the domestic network, causing a change in the overall graphic design of the captions and the introduction of the permanently visible macro-topic “Election 2000, Florida Recount”. Underneath, at the very bottom of the screen, the caption: “Bush campaign has filed court challenge to manual recounts” indicates the main news topic of the day; it had already been shown repeatedly earlier in the coverage that day. On line 47, this caption changes to “Bush team making transition plans” (see Figure 2). This is a condensed

version of what Cheney said some two minutes earlier. The caption stays on screen for the remainder of the press conference and is replaced only once, for about ten seconds, with the caption “Crawford, Texas”. “Bush team making transition plans” is visible for a total of almost four minutes.

Thus, from the ten minutes that the segment lasts and from the various topics addressed, one single element is selected for the caption, foregrounding it to a considerable degree. Comparing the caption “Bush team making transition plans” with Cheney's original statement (lines 30–41), we notice a number of transformations:

CHENEY: [...] and uh (.5) we're uh (.5) say we're not in a position clearly to be able to **begin** the transition at this point until the (.5) situation is resolved but we **can** do some **planning**. =We didn't have much time during the campaign (.5) to do a lot of transition planning although some work **was** done by uh [... Jonathon] ((Bush: Right!)) And uh this is really the first opportunity this week we've had to sit down and spend much time thinking about uhm um putting an administration together, so we **are** doing some of that preliminary planning (.5) uh (.5) this week, Andy, the governor and myself.

The caption reduces Cheney's complex sentences to one single, simple clause. His first sentence (lines 30–33) contains the connective “but”, which contrasts the two conjuncts: the inability to begin the transition vs. the ability to plan the transition. This contrast is also signalled through intonation, by means of the contrastive stress on “beginning” and “planning” (indicated in the transcript through bold face). This contrast is lost in the caption as it represents the content of the subordinate clause only. An alternative caption, one that focuses on the main clause, could have been for instance “Bush team unable to begin transition”, which of course would have defined and evaluated the situation quite differently.



Fig. 2: CNN's coverage of the Bush-Cheney press conference in Crawford, Texas (Nov 11, 2000; ~2:10 pm ET)

There are two other transformations worth pointing out. Cheney qualifies the amount and type of planning through the words “some” and “preliminary” – this downplaying of the planning is lost in the caption. Cheney uses the phrase “to do some planning”. The word “planning”, although it functions as a nominal, refers to an

activity. Planning is a process, a mental process. The caption, however, uses the further nominalized form “plans”, which represents the process as a product – plans can be written down, for instance, or put into action. As a result of these transformations, Cheney's cautious remarks come across more strongly than in the original.

The following account of my own reaction when first watching the tape may serve to illustrate what effect this selective caption, with the transformation of Cheney's sentence, can have on the way television viewers process the news:

After the press conference, anchor Gene Randall takes over and starts talking to correspondent John King (lines 81–86):

John, you talked yesterday about the Gore camp pulling back on the rhetoric about legal challenges. Did you hear today what Dick Cheney said to be a pull-back from the rhetoric of transition, he said ‘We are not in a position to continue the transition at this point.’

When I first heard this question, I was confused: I could not recall the part that Randall quotes, and I did not understand how he could be talking about a pull-back on the part of the Bush campaign – because for the past four minutes, I had been reading “Bush team making transition plans”. To solve this puzzle, I had to rewind the tape and listen to Cheney' statement once again, this time trying not to be influenced by the captions. This examples points to further similarities between captions and newspaper headlines. In his analysis of the press coverage of ethnic minorities, van Dijk (1991: 50) calls attention to the cognitive function of headlines:

[T]hey [headlines] are usually read first and the information expressed in the headline is strategically used by the reader during the process of understanding in order to construct the overall meaning, or the main topics, of the rest of the text before the text itself is even read. Indeed, often readers do not read more than the headline of a news report.

In the same context, van Dijk also discusses the ideological import of headlines:

Since they [headlines] express the most important information about a news event, they may bias the understanding process: they summarize what, according to the journalist, is the most important aspect, and such a summary necessarily implies an opinion or a specific perspective on the events. [...] In other words, headlines are a subjective definition of the situation, which influences the interpretation made by the readers. [...] Generally speaking, the information in the headline is also the information in the headline is also the information that is best recalled by the readers. (van Dijk 1991: 51)

Although produced for a different medium and under different constraints (e.g. time constraints), many captions seem to share the cognitive and ideological aspects of headlines.

What the above example, with the inconsistency of the caption and the anchor's commentary, also makes quite clear is that the anchor and the producer of the captions are two distinct people. Each interpreted Cheney's statement in a different way, with a different focus, and represented the statement accordingly (neither one gets the whole story right, each selects and foregrounds just a part). As a result, in this particular instance, the caption is at odds with the anchor's commentary. Captions can be thus seen as further differentiating CNN's institutional voices, and in some cases, these voices

may clash. Again, there are parallels between captions and newspaper headlines: quite often, the author of an article and the person who words the headline are not identical (cf. Bell 1994: 186, van Dijk 1991: 51).

Extract 3 is another example of captions that represent politician's discourse (see transcript in the appendix). It is taken from a press conference that Warren Christopher, the Gore campaign observer, and William Daley, the Democratic campaign chairman, held in response to the lawsuit filed by the Bush campaign. The press conference was broadcasted live about 2.5 hours after the Bush–Cheney statement discussed above. The press conference starts with a statement read out by Warren Christopher (lines 9–45), followed by a long question and answer period (46–129).

There are three basic types of caption used. There are those captions that indicate the current speaker's name and function, such as “Warren Christopher, Gore Campaign Observer” (line 12). Then there is the caption “Republicans respond to Democrats on Recounts” (line 29), which is a description of the current speech event, informing viewers who have just tuned into the program about what they are seeing. This particular caption comes in another, slightly different version, which is used later on during the press conference, after CNN International has switched over to CNN-USA (line 92).⁷ The caption from CNN-USA reads “Gore campaign response to Bush court action”. It also describes the current speech event, but in some more detail. It mentions not just the Recount in general, but makes reference to the court action that is at issue on that day. This caption seems to have been designed for an American audience, who can be expected to have greater background knowledge about events surrounding the Recount.

The third type of caption summarizes and represents selected elements from the press conference. The first such caption is “Gore campaign says hand recount more reliable” (line 115). At the point where it occurs, it fits right in with Daley's remark, who is discussing the counting procedure. The caption formulates what Christopher said in his statement at the beginning of the conference (lines 19–28):

CHRISTOPHER: [...] Let us understand why Florida law calls for a hand count in situations like this. When doubts have arisen, the hand count is seen as the best way to ascertain the true views of the voters. This is common procedure around the nation. Machines can sometimes misread or fail to detect the way ballots were punched, particularly if there is a design flaw in the ballots themselves. In fact the state of Flo/ the state of Texas recently [...] enacted a law signed by Governor Bush providing for a hand count as the best way to reach a accurate result in certain disputed situations. [...]

The caption uses indirect speech and strongly transforms what Christopher actually said. At no point does he say “The hand recount is more reliable than the machine recount”. What he does say is, for instance, “When doubts have arisen, the hand count is seen as the best way to ascertain the true views of the voters.” This statement, with the agentless passive “is seen”, is framed by references to Florida law – in Christopher's view, it's the law that sees the hand count as the best way to ascertain the true views of the voters. In

⁷ This switch is noticeable only through the change in caption design (e.g. the addition of the layer “Election2000, Florida Recount”) and by the fact that anchor Shihab Rattansi, from CNN International, who introduced the press conference (lines 3–8), does not reappear afterwards but is replaced with anchor Stephen Frazier, who is located in a different studio (lines 130–146).

a similar vein, Christopher mentions Texas law as providing a positive judgment of hand counts. Neither Christopher nor the Gore campaign appear here. The caption, however, attributes the valuation of the hand counts directly and explicitly to the Gore campaign. It reduces Christopher's elaborate statement and legal references to a simple "Gore campaign says hand recount more reliable", presenting it as a simple matter of opinion, without any reasons specified.



Fig. 3: CNN's coverage of the Christopher-Daley press conference in Washington DC (Nov. 11, 2000; ~4:45 pm ET)

This caption is soon replaced with yet another caption that represents something that Christopher said. Starting on line 123 and continuing well into the report that follows the press conference (lines 130–142; 160–166), we read “Gore campaign calls Bush campaign action ‘surprising’” (cf. Figure 3) – this is, more or less, what Christopher said earlier: “... we discussed at some length this (.5) **rather surprising** uh action taken by uh the/ Governor Bush's group...” (line 55–57).

A number of transformations have taken place. In the original sentence, “surprising” is part of a definite noun phrase: it premodifies “action” and is preceded by the adverb of degree “rather” and the determiner “this”. The sentence thus presupposes that the action is surprising, it is something that Christopher takes for granted.⁸

The caption takes the adjective “surprising” out of the original noun phrase and integrates it as direct quote into a new sentence where it appears in final position and forms the information focus. Thus, the caption makes explicit and foregrounds the claim that was implicit in Christopher's statement. In addition, the caption represents the Gore campaign as an active agent that directs a verbal process at the Bush campaign action, the target. This transitivity structure polarizes the two sides to a much larger degree than the original statement.

Why did CNN select this particular detail for the caption? The news conference lasted some 13 minutes and addressed a variety of important topics that could have been turned into a caption, e.g. “Gore campaign calls on Bush campaign to withdraw court action” (based on lines 42–44), or perhaps even “Gore team ready for transition” (based

⁸ See Levinson (1983: 181–185) for an analysis of definite descriptions and other “presupposition triggers”.

on lines 73–80). There are many possible options, but the viewer gets “Gore campaign calls Bush campaign court action ‘surprising’”.⁹ What makes this particular element from Christopher’s statement worth reporting is the fact that it expresses an interpersonal involvement on Christopher’s part, it indicates how he evaluates the court action, how he reacts to it. The adjective “surprising” does not have a clear polarity, it can be positive or negative. Christopher is being indirect, as he usually is, and leaves it up to his audience to infer that for the Democrats of course, the Bush campaign court action is not exactly a pleasant surprise. By foregrounding this interpersonal assessment, the caption is in line with the media’s tendency to focus on the personal, the emotional. This can be seen in many talk shows, for instance, where a standard question is “How did you feel?”, or “How did that make you feel?”. Talk shows typically use captions that attribute opinions and positions to their guests (cf. Seifried 1999). Here, this tendency has spilled over into the news genre.

3. Concluding remarks

The data presented here suggest that the captions employed by CNN fulfill a number of different functions and relate to events unfolding in the main section of the screen in different ways. Some captions help orient viewers by situating the current news event, indicating, for instance, who is speaking, in what function, where and on what occasion. The captions that my analysis has focused on go well beyond providing the setting. They transform and foreground, in the written mode, selected elements from participants’ discourse. In so doing, some captions filter out nuances and modalizations, producing statements that are more explicit, more definite and categorical than the original. Like newspaper headlines, they often condense complex issues down to short, simple phrases. Besides interpreting a news event for the viewer, many captions play up a story’s potential for drama and sensation. Further research is necessary to explore in depth the cognitive and ideological implications that many captions have.

Faced with an intense competition for ratings, the use of captions is a convenient strategy for CNN to hook viewers to the television screens. Viewers may of course respond to captions in different ways, some may overlook them, yet others may come to rely on captions as a resource that seems to helpfully explain what’s going on. From that perspective, my data suggest that many captions construct viewers not as active, critical citizens, but as consumers of easily digestible information, fast-food style.

⁹ Interestingly, in an article published the following day, the New York Times quotes the exact same phrase from Christopher’s speech – a rather surprising coincidence (cf. Correspondents of the New York Times, 2002)! The phrase of course also lends itself to being singled out because Christopher puts emphatic stress on it.

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Appendix

Transcription conventions:

column 1: visual image – basic description of shots, captions

column 2: soundtrack / spoken language

Horizontal lines mark a *cut*, i.e., the change from one shot to another (horizontal lines also unavoidably occur at page breaks; thus, if no shot description is given at the top of a page, this implies that the shot from the previous page continues).

"#", at the start of a line, in column 2, marks the point where a caption changes; the new caption is given in column 1, on the same line.

For the transcription of spoken language, the following transcription conventions have been employed:

/	truncation, as in self-corrections or searching for words
boldface	emphatic stress
=	latching, i.e., no break in flow of talk
//	beginning of overlap
[...]	indistinguishable talk or uncertain transcription
(.)	noticeable pause, less than half a second
(1.5)	pause measured in steps of half-seconds
((yawns))	description of non-verbal behavior

For easy reference, the lines of column 2 have been numbered (left-hand margin).

Extract 1: CNN International, November 11, 2000, 12:07–12:10 p.m. Eastern Time
“CNN Saturday”: Correspondent John Zarrella reporting live from West
Palm Beach, Florida
(transcribed by the author; tape US2000/CNN6, counter 0:10:28 –0:13:20)

	<i>shot description</i>	<i>soundtrack / spoken language</i>
1	Screen with two frames, super-imposed over animated image of US flag: Anchor Gene Randall, CNN Center (left); correspondent John Zarrella, West Palm Beach (right); captions: lower left corner: <i>The Florida Recount</i> ; lower right corner: <i>CNN Live</i> (throughout report)	JOHN ZARRELLA: Gene, we are/ we/ we're
5	Medium close shot (MCU) of Zarrella; reporters / photographers in background captions: <i>Election2000, Race too close to call</i> (throughout report) <i>John Zarrella</i> <i>West Palm Beach, Florida</i> <i>Florida Recount Battle</i>	<p>talking about the/ the duelling camps back and forth.</p> <p># We've been duelling back and forth on where exactly the Republican filed for</p> <p># this injunction. Initially we thought it was in Broward County, Florida uh and/ and partially because of the fact that Broward County is expected to have a hand count on Monday. Uh but now we are being told that they actually did file in/ in/ uh in Miami, in southern district of Florida, in the federal court in Miami.=Still trying to straighten all of that out.= Where exactly the Republicans filed, what they are asking for is for a judge to halt the hand counting of ballots in the four counties that are planning on holding or are holding the/ the hand count.</p>
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15	fade to unidentified piece of paper / written document, over blue background	Right now we're waiting here in Palm Beach County, the room behind me, for the hand count of what is now four precincts, or one percent, of the/ the ballots here. That has not
	fade to MCU Zarrella, <i>Election2000, Race too close to call</i> <i>Florida Recount Battle</i>	started yet. Our understanding is/ is that those ballots
20	fade to long shot of large room with tables, otherwise empty; people visible outside, through windows <i>Election2000, Race too close to call</i> <i>Florida Recount Battle</i>	are still down in Delray Beach. Our producer Tracy [Sayba] was telling us just a little while ago here our understanding is ballots haven't left Delray Beach yet to come back here. A Republican representative, democratic representative

25	fade to MCU Zarrella <i>Election2000, Race too close to call</i> <i>Florida Recount Battle</i>	and the sheriff's office is supposed to be uh bringing those ballots in those locked boxes back here, so that's why they haven't started yet uh here in West Palm Beach to count the uh forty-three to forty-six hundred votes, now, in those counties, there were a very large number of undercounts , in other words, there were no/ there was no vote at all for president on many, many ballots.=In fact, there are ten thousand ballots here in Palm Beach County where no presidential candidate was punched. And in these particular/
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35	<i>Hand recount in Palm Beach County not underway yet</i>	# in these particular precincts the Democrats believe there are a high number of these undercounts. So that may be why, we are told, that they sought to go to these particular precincts uh to take a close look. Now, if they find there were discrepancies and by a hand count uh they do see that there were major discrepancies, they could then come back and ask for a full hand count of all of the ballots in Palm Beach County. Haven't gotten to that point yet. Haven't even gotten to the point of starting this hand count which could/ could take ten, twelve, fourteen hours as they set them up in ten/ in twelve different piles. Ten piles, one for each of the different presidential candidates, two piles, one for the undercount and one for an overcount , where people actually punched out more than one hole (.) for a presidential candidate.= So, still a great deal going on here in south Florida, in Palm Beach County, waiting for the recount to start in Miami, waiting to see what a federal judge uh will do with the injunction that is being requested by the Republican Party. Gene?
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	screen with two frames: Randall, Zarrella, as above	RANDALL: And John, bottom line, they're poised to begin once they get those ballots in hand? ZARRELLA: That is our understanding, because the/
55	MCU Zarrella <i>Election2000, Race too close to call</i> <i>Florida Recount Battle</i>	the judge has not acted on that injunction.=Now, if the judge obviously acts and halts everything, then they would stop .=At this point, the plan is to (.) go on (.) with the count once the ballots arrive here until they get some word on what action a federal judge has taken. Gene? ...

Extract 2: CNN International, November 11, 2000, 2:05–2:10 p.m. Eastern Time
 Breaking News: Release of Bush-Cheney statement / pre-recorded press
 conference (transcribed by the author; tape US2000/CNN6, counter
 1:50:10–2:00:03)

	<i>shot description</i>	<i>soundtrack / spoken language</i>
1	"Breaking News", in large capital letters, at center screen, over revolving globe	((<i>instrumental music / fanfare</i>)) Voice-over: This is CNN breaking news.
5	fade to medium close shot (MCS) of anchor Jim Clancy in CNN studio; captions: <i>Jim Clancy</i> <i>CNN Center</i>	JIM CLANCY: I'm Jim Clancy at the CNN center, there are developments that are coming out of the Republican Party camp (.5)
10	screen with two frames: small frame at lower left showing anchor Jim Clancy, larger frame at upper right showing Bush and Cheney. captions: <i>World News;</i> the CNN International logo [throughout report]	uh George Bush and Dick Cheney in uh Crawford, Texas now, are going to issue a statement, this was recorded earlier on videotape, this will be about their uh moves by the uh Cheney uh Bush campaign to block Democratic efforts for a further hand recount of ballots in south Florida, this could be important developments these men are going to be
15	fade to medium shot of Bush (l) and Cheney (r) outside ranch, walking toward camera captions: <i>Crawford, Texas</i>	explaining exactly why they're taking these moves now, let's listen in. GEORGE W. BUSH: I'm pleased to welcome the Cheneys and Andrew Carr here, and (.5) uh we're just gonna continue our discussions about um about the future, and uh as I said yesterday I think it's responsible
20	<i>George W. Bush</i> <i>Republican Pres. Candidate</i>	# that Dick and I and (.) others (.5) contemplate a potential administration and so they've come and we're gonna spend the day here today, First Lady Bush will be arriving here soon, it's nice to be out here in the country. [50sec omitted from transcript]
25	<i>Crawford, Texas</i>	DICK CHENEY: Yeah, # we uh- Lynn and I came down to Austin uh (1.0) planning to spend one night in the hotel and then going up to Washington Wednesday.=We've sorta moved in now to the uh hotel there in Austin for the duration. It's nice to get up here for the/ for the weekend, it's kind of the governor and Laura to invite us to come spend the/ some time here
30	<i>Dick Cheney</i> <i>Republican VP Candidate</i>	# on the ranch, and uh (.5) we're uh (.5) say we're not in a position clearly to be able to begin the transition at this point until the (.5) situation is resolved but we can do some planning .=We didn't have much time during the campaign (.5)
35	<i>Crawford, Texas</i>	# to do a lot of transition planning although some work was done by uh [... Jonathon] ((Bush: Right!)) And uh this is really the first opportunity this week we've had to sit down and spend much time thinking about uhm um putting an administration together, so we are doing some of that pre-

40		liminary planning (.5) uh (.5) this week, Andy, the governor and myself.
		UNIDENTIFIED MALE VOICE: Governor, why did you decide to go forward and seek the injunction in Florida?
45	[after switch to CNN-USA:] <i>Breaking News Election2000, Florida Recount, CNN [throughout report]; Bush campaign has filed court challenge to manual recounts</i>	[1min 45 sec of questions & answers omitted from transcript]
	<i>Bush team making transition plans</i>	BUSH: ... I'm uh/ you know I'm-
50		# I know we've got the best people on the ground in Florida, James A. Baker, people looking after our interests, and uh (1.0) I feel great, it's nice to be in the same bed two nights in a row!
		UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE VOICE: I know I know you mentioned uh the question should be referred to Mr. Baker but ((Bush: That's right)) do you feel that uh / I mean-
55		BUSH: I feel you oughta speak to Mr. Baker, we made/ he made a very strong statement this morning, it explains the rationale (.5) uh for our decision, and uh if you've got any further questions I'd really wish you'd refer to him.
		((some cross-talk))
60	<i>Crawford, Texas</i>	BUSH: Yes, Susan!
		UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE VOICE: [...]
		# are saying enough is enough
65	<i>Bush team making transition plans</i> (caption remains unchanged until end of press conference)	BUSH: Well I think (.) our/ our attitude is/ is there are still absentee ballots to be counted,
		# and this election will be determined after those absentee ballots have been counted. We've counted once, and we recounted in Florida, that everybody recounted, and uh we fully recognize there are some ballots outstanding from overseas fortunately and people oughta be included in the process and uh it seems like to us, once those ballots are counted, it'll be/ we'll be able to determine who/who the President will be.
70		[2 min 45 sec of questions and answers omitted from transcript]
75	camera has zoomed out, showing Bush playing with dog as he walks away	ANCHOR GENE RANDALL: At the Bush ranch near Waco, Texas,
80	MCU of Randall in studio caption: <i>CNN Live</i>	George W. Bush, his running mate Dick Cheney and Andy Carr, the former Transportation Secretary, there are speculations that in a Bush White House, Carr would be Chief of Staff, and also Spotty the dog. Let's go to Washington now and

85	screen with two frames, super-imposed over animated US flag: Randall, CNN Center (left), King, Washington (right) captions: <i>The Florida Recount</i> , CNN	John King who's covering the Gore side. John, you talked yesterday about the Gore camp pulling back on the rhetoric about legal challenges. Did you hear today what Dick Cheney said to be a pull-back from the rhetoric of transition, he said "We are not in a position to continue the transition at this point." JOHN KING: Yes, Gene, both sides being advised by (.)
90	MCU of King, in studio, in front of blue "Election 2000" background; captions: <i>John King,</i> <i>CNN Washington</i> <i>Bush campaign has filed court challenge to manual recounts</i>	the quote unquote grown-ups in their parties not to say anything that might offend the American people here. The Gore campaign alarmed many Democrats by saying we might rush into court, the Bush campaign # on the other hand alarmed some Republicans by talking about naming cabinet members when the Florida results have not been certified and indeed the Vice President is still ahead both in the popular vote and in the electoral college count. Now, a couple of quick developments to point out:
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Extract 3: CNN International, November 11, 2000, 4:41–4:46 p.m. Eastern Time
Breaking News: live coverage of the Christopher–Daley press conference

(transcribed by the author; tape US2000/CNN6, counter 4:40:11–4:54:50)

	<i>shot description</i>	<i>soundtrack / spoken language</i>
1	"Breaking News", large capital letters, at center screen, over revolving globe	((<i>music/fanfare</i>)) Voice-over: This is CNN breaking news.
5	medium close shot (MCS) of Rattansi; captions: <i>Shihab Rattansi, CNN Center</i> ; the CNN International logo (permanent)	ANCHOR SHIHAB RATTANSI: We're gonna interrupt our regular program here to bring you coverage of a news conference with
	screen with 2 frames: small frame in lower left corner showing Rattansi, larger frame showing Christopher and Daley, caption: <i>World News</i>	William Daley and Warren Christopher, representing the campaign of Democratic // presidential candidate (.) Al Gore. Let's listen in.
10	fade to medium shot of Daley and Christopher, behind microphones; camera zooms in to MCS of Christopher; caption: BREAKING NEWS, CNN LIVE <i>Washington</i> <i>Warren Christopher</i> <i>Gore Campaign Observer</i>	CHRISTOPHER: // [...] fundamental principle. We want the votes, all the votes cast, to be accurately and fairly counted. (.5) # The will of the people expressed in accordance with our constitution (.5) should decide who our next President will be. Today the Bush campaign suddenly filed a motion in federal

15		court to stop the hand counting of ballots in counties in Florida where serious problems with ballots had been identified. Officials in these three counties had decided the problems were sufficiently serious to warrant a hand count authorized under Florida law. Let us understand why Florida law
20		calls for a hand count in situations like this. When doubts have arisen, the hand count is seen as the best way to ascertain the true views of the voters. This is common procedure around the nation. Machines can sometimes misread or fail to detect the way ballots were punched, particularly if there is a design
25		flaw in the ballots themselves. In fact the state of Flo/ the state of Texas recently [...] enacted a law signed by Governor Bush providing for a hand count as the best way to reach a accurate result in certain disputed situations. (3.0)
30	MCS of Daley and Christopher, <i>BREAKING NEWS, CNN LIVE</i> <i>Democrats respond to</i> <i>Republicans on Recounts</i>	If Governor Bush truly believes that he has won the election in Florida, he should have no reason to doubt or to fear to have the machine count checked by a hand count. This procedure is authorized under Florida law, under Texas law and under the law of many other jurisdictions. The hand count
35		uh in these three counties, four counties that we've asked for as well, can be completed expeditiously and it should be. (1.0) Until today the Bush campaign has argued that every minute (.5) counts. (.5)
40	Warren Christopher <i>Gore Campaign Observer</i>	# We have consistently maintained, however, as we continue to do today, that every vote must count. (5.0) ((<i>tries to straighten the paper he is reading from</i>)) (It's pretty windy here (<i>mumbles</i>)). (1.0)
45	<i>Democrats respond to</i> <i>Republicans on Recounts</i>	# We call upon the Bush campaign to withdraw the litigation they have filed today and to allow a full and accurate count to be made of all uh the votes in the state of Florida. Thank you very much.
50		[5 min 15 sec of questions and answers omitted from transcript] QUESTION, unidentified female voice: "[You spent the] afternoon with the Vice President. Can you give us any sense of what his mood is, what his thinking is, what his priorities are at this point?
55		CHRISTOPHER: We spent the time both with the/ the Vice President and the Senator Lieberman who joined us, the Senator Lieberman walked over because this is still uh within (.) his Sabbath day, uh we discussed at some length this (.5) rather surprising uh action taken by uh the/ Governor Bush's group under Jim Baker's direction in Florida. Uh we had a good deal of discussion about getting orders to represent us in those proceedings so we would be able to make our positions well-known. Uh we discussed other aspects of the on-going process, so, what we really did today was, Secre/ chairman Daley and I (.) brought the Vice President and then Senator Lieberman who joined us up to date on all that's going on in Florida. As you know we got a number of different things going on in Florida at the present time and we hadn't been
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	face to face with them for about a week and we wanted to get back in touch.
	<i>[1 min 55 sec of questions and answers omitted from transcript]</i>
70	QUESTION, unidentified male voice: Has there been any discussion at all in recent days about transition matters that are still ongoing at some level?
75	DALEY: The Vice President, as we've stated uh repeatedly, uh has been prepared to transition on an emergency basis obviously for eight years (.5) into the Presidency. Uh this is only fours days since the election, uh work had been done prior to election uh transition, and uh that will be dealt with uh I assume shortly, but the/ the Vice President and his teams are well prepared uh as they have been for eight years (.) in case an emergency happens.
80	QUESTION, unidentified male voice: If the absentee ballots come back in on Friday and it clearly shows that Governor Bush has won Florida, will the Vice President concede the state and the election?
85	CHRISTOPHER: We've had a number of different forms of that question, haven't we, (.) and I'll answer it in the same way (.) by saying, you know, we're preceding down these tracks, we've considered other options, no decisions have been made on them and uh we'll certainly will let you know when that happens.
90	QUESTION, same voice as before: So the answer is you will not concede [...]
	# if [he] clearly shows the absentee ballots (.) show that Governor Bush carried the state of Florida?
95	CHRISTOPHER: Uh that decision has not been made at the present time. As we've mentioned before there are other (.) options that we have before us and we're gonna hold on to those options for the present time.
100	DALEY: [And we're gonna believe that] that the end of this process uh that Al Gore will be the/ the winner of the Florida vote.
105	QUESTION, unidentified male voice: Mr. Daley, can you briefly address the subject matter that Mr. Baker brought up this morning, that the manual count is less accurate/ less accurate, less fair and does ha:ve to weigh the intent of the voters, and therefore it can be manip/ manipulated. Can you talk about that?
110	DALEY: U/ under Florida law, this is allowed. And it is done I assume more often than/ than in this occasion. Uh and the (.) electors in an open/ uh the commission members of these in an open process, with both parties being represented at the same time, are there if there is a dispute, it has to be worked out between the parties at the table! I don't think one should assume (.) that
115	# in all occasions a machine uh is more guaranteed to give you the right result than humans, I don't/ I don't think that's the occasion.
	QUESTION, same voice as before: [What about the] interpretation of the ballot, did this person/ did the person

[switch from CNN-I to CNN-USA:]

BREAKING NEWS

ELECTION 2000, FLORIDA RECOUNT

Gore campaign response to Bush campaign court action

Gore campaign says hand recount more reliable

120		intent to mark this mark or the mark, // [...] DALEY: // I think they look/ they base that upon evidence (.5) that's there, # they don't just make that up, it's the judgment that they make [...]
125	<i>Gore campaign calls Bush campaign action "surprising"</i>	CHRISTOPHER: Thank you. ((both he and Daley turn around and start walking away from microphones)) QUESTION, unidentified female voice: Is Mr. Lieberman coming her tonight, Sir. DALEY: ((turning around briefly)) He's here.
130	complex screen: small frame, lower left, with MCS of anchor, larger frame on the right, with Christopher and Daley, walking away	ANCHOR STEPHEN FRAZIER: Alright, uh in a time when every vote counts, we also think that this is a time when every word counts when the words come from the Bush and the Gore campaigns. Leaving us now you see former secretary of state Warren Christopher on the right of your screen and Gore campaign manager William Daley on the left. They are going up the steps of the Naval Observatory in Washington after their comments, after their reaction of the
135	BREAKING NEWS ELECTION 2000, FLORIDA RECOUNT <i>Gore campaign calls Bush campaign action "surprising"</i>	
140	MCS of Frazier, in studio BREAKING NEWS ELECTION 2000, FLORIDA RECOUNT <i>Gore campaign calls Bush campaign action "surprising"</i>	Gore campaign to statements made by Governor Bush's representatives, especially uh former Secretary of State James Baker in Florida earlier today, actually uh calling for a halt to what's been going on in Florida all day. John King, I know from looking at my
145	screen with 2 frames: Frazier (l) and King (r); animated US flag in background, <i>The Florida Recount</i>	monitor you were listening closely to all of that, and perhaps uh perhaps the theme of that statement was, are you going to win this on a technicality? And the secretary said, no, winning the greater number of votes is no technicality. KING: Well at issue there the question is (.5) if
150	MCS of John King BREAKING NEWS ELECTION 2000, FLORIDA RECOUNT <i>John King CNN Washington</i>	the Gore campaign pulls ahead based on these recounts, assume the attempt for a federal injunction fails and you have the recount
155	<i>Bush campaign has filed court challenge to manual recounts</i>	# in these four counties and the Vice President pulls ahead, and even Republicans concede they would expect him to, because those four counties voted for Gore by sizeable margins.=If you recount the votes, almost universally there are more votes counted because of those difficulties: the piece of chad sticking, ballots sticking together. The vote tally goes up and the Vice President pulls ahead. The question was, well then, did Governor Bush not get a chance to ask for recounts in Republican counties? And the answer essentially was,
160	<i>Gore campaign calls Bush campaign action "surprising"</i>	# well, he had that chance and he actually still has that chance in ten more counties. There are sixty-seven counties in Florida, the deadline for requesting a hand recount was last night in any county that had been certified by the secretary of

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	state. ... [report continues, with same caption, for another 1 min 10 sec]
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