

### **Who's speaking?: Evidentiality in US newspapers during the 2004 presidential campaign**

News reporting is a genre almost wholly concerned with conveying what others have said, as in (1)-(3).

- (1) Bush said that Kerry had sought to obfuscate his record as senator.
- (2) "We have to respond to this," Kerry said, according to a Democratic official.
- (3) Republicans are said to be thinking in terms of...

Journalists serve a specialized function: They mediate between sources of knowledge and the public. They are expected to specify their sources and convey information without distortion or undue interpretation. During political campaigns, questions are inevitably raised about their success in this role.

Linguistic studies of evidentiality—how we encode linguistically the sources of our knowledge—differentiate many such sources. Here we concentrate on Chafe's (1986) "hearsay evidentiality", the reporting of what we have heard from others. Many have observed (e.g. Lucy 1993) that the speaker's perspective often penetrates into reported speech, especially in indirect discourse.

Our study addresses these questions:

- What linguistic devices encode hearsay evidentiality in news reporting?
- To what extent is direct vs. indirect speech used?
- To what extent are sources referred to by name, obliquely, or anonymously?
- Do these factors vary across newspapers?

We assembled a 2-million-word database of articles concerning the 2004 election published in 12 high-circulation US newspapers during the 30 days before the election. We retrieved 40,000 tokens of "source attribution" using a list of 125 stems and their related forms. After analyzing these tokens automatically, we manually coded randomly-sampled subsets to confirm the results.

Results show that generally, indirect speech comprises 60% of attributions, direct speech under 40%, plus some cases of "revoicing" (e.g. see (2) above). Most sources (70%) were referred to by name; 15% appeared as indefinite NPs. "Say" encoded over 50% of attributions; preferences for other forms varied by newspaper. There was considerable variation across newspapers, with the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* exhibiting the highest proportion of both direct speech and attribution by name.

We will discuss our methodology, our results, these findings' general implications for news reporting, and their specific implications for the US election.

#### **References:**

- Chafe, Wallace. 1986. Evidentiality in English Conversation and Academic Writing. In Chafe & Nichols (eds.), *Evidentiality: The Linguistic Coding of Epistemology*. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.
- Lucy, John. 1993. Reflexive Language and the Human Disciplines. In Lucy, John (ed.), *Reflexive Language: Reported Speech and Metalinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.