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# War and the Media

*Essays on News Reporting,  
Propaganda and  
Popular Culture*

*Edited by*

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“NEW MEXICO’S  
ALWAYS BEEN PATRIOTIC  
AND LOYAL TO THE COUNTRY”:  
UNCRITICAL JOURNALISTIC  
PATRIOTISM IN WARTIME

*David Weiss*

In this chapter, I use the theory and methods of critical linguistics (Fowler, 1991; Fowler & Kress, 1979; Hodge & Kress, 1993) to analyze “N. M. [New Mexico] Plays a Large Role in Iraqi Engagement” (Linthicum & Romo, 2003), a pro-war feature story that ran on the front page of the *Albuquerque Journal* on March 30, 2003, the twelfth day of U.S. combat operations in Iraq. The story’s tone of uncritical patriotism offered a sharp contrast to the daily protests, bumper stickers, “No War” yard signs, and other highly visible expressions of anti-war sentiment on abundant display in the Albuquerque community — outcries that were not merely visible but practically inescapable, and yet virtually ignored by the local media.

I was attracted to the Linthicum and Romo piece precisely because of its apparent innocence. The article did not state a position on the war, nor did it report on developments in the conflict. On its surface, it was merely a human-interest feature story: an unassuming survey of New Mexicans’ participation in and attitudes, unanimously positive, toward war efforts past and present. As I dug into the specific lexical and grammatical choices made by its authors, the article struck me as more powerful and revealing, in its own way, than many of the hard news reports and opinion pieces on offer during the Iraq War’s early days. Here was a piece of journalistic writing whose very subtlety was, paradoxically, the source of its power: an easily dismissible “local

color” puff piece, and thus precisely the sort of reportage that normalized and naturalized both war and pro-war sentiment even as it declined to offer an explicit argument or point of view. As such, it seemed to me, “N. M. Plays” practically screamed out for critical attention and, in particular, for the sort of micro-level analysis offered by critical linguistics, a methodological framework developed specifically to reveal and critique ideological bias and other manifestations of imbalances of power encoded, whether consciously or unconsciously, in the very nuts and bolts of grammar: word choice, tense, voice, and sentence structure.

### Criticizing the Press’s War Coverage

While few writers to date have undertaken linguistic analyses of the U.S. media coverage of the war, there has certainly been no shortage of criticism. Indeed, within weeks of the launch of combat operations in Iraq, cultural and social critics began offering their assessments not only of the government’s and military’s actions, but also of the press’s coverage. The critical consensus that emerged — at least, after the “honeymoon” period, which included the fall of Baghdad and the president’s tragically inaccurate May 2003 “Mission Accomplished” declaration — was consistent and clear. Observers from all corners excoriated the U.S. mainstream media for their failures to serve as “watch-dogs”: their inability or unwillingness to provide truly independent reporting, their reluctance to scrutinize or even express skepticism regarding Bush Administration claims about the war’s necessity and inevitability, and their homogeneously pro-war (or, at least, pro-Administration and anti-dissent) coverage of the issues.

During the years since the U.S. began its war in Iraq, the publication of books criticizing the press’s complicity with White House’s pro-war communications has turned into a cottage industry, spawning various bestsellers (e.g., Boehlert, 2006; Katovsky & Carlson, 2003; Massing, 2004; Miller, 2004; Rampton & Stauber, 2003; Rich, 2006; Schechter, 2003; Solomon & Erlich, 2003; Thomas, 2006), monographs and edited collections (e.g., Allan & Zelizer, 2004; Artz & Kamalipour, 2005; Dudge, 2006; Hoskins, 2005; Kamalipour & Snow, 2004; Kuypers, 2006; Mirzoeff, 2005; Rutherford, 2004), and academic journal articles and book chapters critically analyzing (and in most cases, skewering) the practices and performances of the press (e.g., Dardis, 2006; Edwards & Cromwell, 2004; Kull, Ramsay, & Lewis, 2003–04; Mermin, 2004; Mooney, 2004; Porpora & Nikolaev, 2008; Ravi, 2005; Ryan, 2006; Seib, 2005; Snow & Taylor, 2006; White, 2005; Williams, 2004).

To varying degrees and in varying ways, all these scholarly books and

articles, like the more commercial publications, argued that “the American media failed to ask the tough questions of an Administration that seemed determined to go to war” (Dudge, 2006, p. 1). And while most of the academic critics were somewhat more measured (or, at least, slightly less rabid) in tone than the commercial writers, their arguments and findings were no less troubling. Indeed, it would be fair to say that the scholarly inquiry was united in its charge that mainstream press coverage in the United States, at the very least, “suffer[ed] from a lack of balance and context required for comprehension of the most serious of political issues, [leaving] Americans confused about the reasons for invading Iraq and unable to offer informed consent in response to the current occupation” (Fralely, 2007, p. 434).

In retrospect, such failures should not be entirely surprising. Even if the producers and disseminators of news in the United States do not necessarily have an overt political agenda, they do not operate in a vacuum. The national media “are influenced by the overall political environment in which they exist [and are] inextricably linked to the broader sociopolitical environment in which they operate [thus reflecting] the position of dominant national actors and institutions” (Dimitrova, Kaid, Williams, & Trammell, 2005, p. 35). Such “environmental” influence on the press is particularly strong during times of war. Newspapers, especially, are “rooted firmly in a national ethos,” so they are susceptible to being caught up in the tension “between patriotism and the professional practices of truth telling, sensitivity, fairness in presenting different sides of the story, and critical examination of official accounts” (Ravi, 2005, pp. 45–46). As Ravi observed in his examination of the “flawed journalistic practices” that characterized U.S. coverage of the war and the Administration’s justifications for it, “this is a time when the press is under close scrutiny from critics who are dissatisfied either that the press is not patriotic enough or that there is too much of a home-side type of reporting and not enough questioning of official sources” (p. 46).

Some media scholars representing the “too much of a home-side” argument took particularly strong, often controversial positions. Consider, for example, Herman’s (2004) summary of the situation in his essay “Normalizing Godfatherly Aggression”:

The U.S. propaganda system has normalized and even put a very good face on its government’s straightforward aggression against — and conquest and colonial occupation of — a small distant country.... In the case of the 2003 Iraq invasion and conquest ... the media cooperated beautifully in pushing these propaganda themes [and] collaborated fully in these various charades ... conform[ing] to the party line [pp. 176, 180].

Even so, much of the scholarship on the mainstream media’s Iraq coverage avoided leveling such serious charges and in many cases steered clear of the

term "propaganda" entirely, opting instead to dissect the media's performance in terms of agenda-setting theory (Christie, 2006; Lee, Maslog, & Kim, 2006) or constructs such as "spiral of silence" that focus on the muting or marginalizing of dissent (e.g., Artz, 2005; Couldry & Downey, 2004; Jensen, 2005; Porpora & Nikolaev, 2008; Ravi, 2005; Reese, 2004).

Another important stream of academic Iraq War media criticism took as its foundation the theoretical notion of framing, a continually hot topic in mass communication scholarship. For better or worse, framing is itself a contested concept. Indeed, virtually all of the scholars analyzing the media's framing of the Iraq War<sup>1</sup> note that there is no single accepted definition of the term. Still, many took as their foundation Entman's (1993) popular definition: to frame is to "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (p. 52). A good deal of the extensive Entman-inspired work on Iraq War media framing was conducted by Dimitrova and her colleagues. Building on Entman's (1993) general concept and applying it to war coverage specifically, Dimitrova, et al. (2005) pointed out that "in a case of war, the media can select to focus on the destruction of war as opposed to freedom or tyranny, can frame the event as an invasion versus attack, can emphasize the victims versus invaders, and can highlight a positive versus negative attitude toward the war" (p. 26). Guided by this general insight, Dimitrova and her colleagues developed over the course of several articles a list of the specific frames found in the media's Iraq War coverage. Chief among them were the *military conflict frame* (stories that place emphasis on military involvement, conflict, or action in Iraq, focusing on troops), the *violence-of-war frame* (emphasis on the destruction caused by war), and the *human-interest frame* (emphasis on the personal stories of the human participants in the war, with more "soft news" focus on the plight of involved parties).<sup>2</sup>

Dimitrova (2006) and her colleagues (Dimitrova & Stromback, 2005; Dimitrova, et al., 2005) applied their framing taxonomy in a series of quantitative content analyses that determined which frames were used at various times, by various media outlets, and in various countries. They found, for example, that U.S.-based Internet news sites "focused more heavily on the military conflict, human interest, and media self-coverage [frames] while the responsibility frame was more common for international sites" (Dimitrova, et al., 2005, p. 22); that the frames used on the *New York Times's* web site varied over time (Dimitrova, 2006); and that Swedish newspapers used the responsibility frames and anti-war protest frames more frequently than U.S. newspapers, which relied more heavily on the military conflict frame (Dimitrova & Stromback, 2005). In a similar study, Carpenter (2007) applied the

Dimitrova taxonomy and found that "elite" U.S. newspapers used the military conflict and violence of war frames more than "non-elite" U.S. newspapers, whose Iraq stories focused more on human interest coverage.

Such studies provided a macro-level understanding of the media coverage of the Iraq War as they identified framing trends and patterns across time and place. However, as a result of the nature of such scholarship, the tendency of which was to sort and content-analyze massive numbers of news stories in terms of competing framing categories, almost no insight was gained into what *constitutes* the frames. As pointed out by Wolfe, Swanson, and Wrona (2008), who conducted a rare, in-depth semiotic analysis of Iraq War news articles: "While it seems unfalsifiable to say that "media frames" help journalists construct news texts and help audiences comprehend them, content analysis does not and cannot explain how news words and images, considered both separately and in tandem, fashion the frames that frame theorists claim to be so influential" (p. 42).

Put another way, surprisingly little scholarship published to date has journeyed *inside* the frames, analyzed *how* they are constructed, or focused on their specific textual and visual contents. In fact, other than the Wolfe, et al. (2008) investigation, which analyzed the words and photographs used in two news stories posted on MSNBC's web site during February 2005, the only other micro-level analysis of Iraq War journalistic content I have found is Lule's (2004) study of the metaphors used on NBC's *Nightly News* broadcasts during the six weeks immediately preceding U.S. operations in Iraq (February 5–March 19, 2003) to describe the "march toward war."

My own analysis journeys inside the frame, the human-interest frame, with its emphasis on "soft" news and personal stories used at the very beginning of the war, a time when mainstream media coverage was virtually uniformly supportive (or, at least, uncritical) of the Bush Administration's actions in Iraq. Although not a semiotic analysis per se, my investigation ultimately shares some of semiotic theory's goals: "to describe the meanings texts make by asking such questions as 'What are the observable signifiers in the chosen texts?' and 'What are the signifieds that these signifiers suggest?'" (Wolfe, et al., 2008, p. 43). By exploring and analyzing in highly specific terms the textual content (signifiers) of a human-interest article published by an organ of what Boehlert (2006) would call the "lapdog press," I clarify how a war story's news frame was constructed *and* how its ideological make-up was enacted. I reveal how this construction and enactment served to guide readers toward a preferred position on the war and Americans' participation in it: one of uncritical patriotism.

### Context and Synopsis

“N. M. Plays a Large Role in Iraqi Engagement,” written by *Albuquerque Journal* staff writers Leslie Linthicum and Rene Romo, appeared on Sunday, March 30, 2003. During this early period of the war, national and global attention were firmly fixed on events in Iraq; moreover, tensions between the proponents and opponents of the war were fiercely pronounced, even if those tensions were not always reflected in the mainstream media’s coverage (Boehler, 2006; Dudge, 2006; Rutherford, 2004). Reflecting—and, arguably, reinforcing—*Journal* readers’ interest in the war, the article begins on the paper’s front page (p. A1), where it is accompanied by three other war-related pieces: “Iraq: ‘We Will Use Any Means,’” “4 Killed in Suicide Bombing,” and “U.S. Troops Get First Mail Call on Front.”

Although placed on the front page of the newspaper, “N. M. Plays” is a feature story rather than a so-called “hard” news story.<sup>3</sup> Rather than providing breaking bulletins from the battlefield, the article supplements the hard news to which it is adjacent by recounting a series of anecdotes about New Mexicans and New Mexico-based institutions involved in war efforts past and present. Among other topics, “N. M. Plays” discusses the provenance of the F-117A Nighthawks used to bomb Baghdad (New Mexico’s Holloman Air Force Base), the home of the F-16 pilots that attacked Iraqi tanks (New Mexico’s Cannon Air Force Base), the testing location of the Patriot missiles used in Iraq (New Mexico’s White Sands Missile Range), and the number of New Mexicans enrolled in the National Guard. At the same time, the article also puts 21st-century military-supportive New Mexico in historical context. It includes a conversation with an 83-year-old New Mexican veteran of World War II (“New Mexico’s always been patriotic and loyal to the country,” the Albuquerque resident is quoted as saying), mentions the number of New Mexicans who died in Japanese prison camps during World War II, and quotes a former state historian who lauded New Mexicans’ ready participation in both the Mexican-American and Spanish-American Wars. Given these foci, “N. M. Plays” also exemplifies what Dimitrova (2006) categorizes as the journalistic human-interest frame, in which emphasis is placed “on the personal stories of the human participants in the war” (p. 80).

Additionally, “N. M. Plays” serves as an example of “non-elite newspaper” journalism, a category that has received relatively little attention by scholars of Iraq War media coverage, despite non-elite papers’ large aggregate reach (Carpenter, 2007). Whereas elite newspapers serve a national geographic area, non-elite publications such as the *Albuquerque Journal* concentrate on state-wide coverage and have circulations well below that of their elite counterparts.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the *Journal*—and, by extension, the “N. M. Plays” article—

manifests other, more important characteristics of non-elite newspapers. While elite newspapers have been found to present more balanced coverage of controversial issues (Lacy, Fico, & Simon, 1991), non-elite newspapers “cover local issues to set themselves apart from elite newspapers [and therefore] promote the status quo by producing stories that reflect the United States’ viewpoints” (Carpenter, 2007, p. 763). Non-elite newspapers are more likely to rely on local sources at the state level as well as non-official sources, and such limited access “may affect the accuracy and diversity of reports stemming from non-elite papers” (Carpenter, p. 765). In addition to the use of non-official sources typical of non-elite newspapers’ articles, “N. M. Plays” *does* include quotes from players on the national political stage, including Governor Bill Richardson (D-N.M.), U.S. Representative Heather Wilson (R-N.M.), and the commander of the New Mexico National Guard. Even so, “N.M. Plays” serves as a representative non-elite, human-interest feature story published during wartime and as an opportunity to explore in depth how such a story promoted and contributed to a particular, elite-preferred point of view about a controversial war, a world event with local as well as national and international ramifications.

However, as is true of any newspaper story, in “N. M. Plays,” it is not merely the article’s topics and themes that convey its ideological standpoint, an uncritically pro-U.S., pro-war position. The standpoint is also communicated via the *way* those topics and themes are developed grammatically, syntactically, and lexically—in the very guts, so to speak, of the article’s content. Considering simultaneously both the form and the content of the article allows for a critical reading that can bring us inside a journalistic frame and allow us to see how, precisely, a piece of pro-war journalism works to encourage and contribute to the more generalized, and often unreflexive, patriotism that is preferred by government elites during wartime.

### Critical Linguistics

In my analysis of the *Albuquerque Journal* article “N. M. Plays,” I use the tools of critical linguistics, the theoretical and methodological framework originally developed by Fowler and Kress (1979) to which more recent forms of critical discourse analysis are indebted. The purpose of all critical discourse scholarship, including critical linguistics (henceforth “CL”), is to reveal and critique ideologically biased points of view and other instantiations of power imbalances that might otherwise remain hidden, particularly in those discourses in which power is encoded only covertly, if at all (Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Meyer, 2001; van Dijk, 1997; van Leeuwen, 2005, 2008; Wodak, 2001). The distinguishing operating assumption of CL, spe-



cifically, is that “features of the grammatical form of a text are seen as meaningful choices from within the possibilities available in grammatical systems” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 263), choices that are both reflective and constitutive of ideological bias.

In their foundational essay “Critical Linguistics,” Fowler and Kress (1979) made these bold theoretical claims about their new approach to the analysis of discourse:

Syntax can code a world-view without any conscious choice on the part of a writer or speaker. We argue that the world-view comes to language-users from their relation to the institutions and the socio-economic structure of their society. It is facilitated and confirmed for them by a language use which has society's ideological impress. Similarly, ideology is linguistically mediated and habitual for an acquiescent, uncritical reader who has already been socialized into sensitivity to the significance of patterns of language. Any text, then, embodies interpretations of its subject, and evaluations based on the relationship between source and addressee.... To generalize further, there are social meanings in a natural language which are precisely distinguished in its lexical and syntactic structure and which are articulated when we write or speak. There is no discourse which does not embody such meanings [p. 185].

Further, CL's founders argued, social and/or ideological content of written and spoken discourse is not exclusive to, or isolable from, specific utterances. Rather, in a coherent discourse, we systematically exercise options from sets of linguistics alternatives, such that “the total and interacting effect of these [options] carries a meaning over and above that of the items and processes in isolation” (Fowler & Kress, 1979, p. 186). As a critical and political scholarly approach, CL is concerned primarily with understanding the components and processes of speech that produce and reproduce power relationships at both the personal and institutional level and is thus often used to analyze legal and governmental documents as well as mass-mediated texts. In these forms, particularly, language is often used “to manipulate people, to establish and maintain them in economically convenient roles and statuses, to maintain the power of state agencies, corporations, and other institutions” (Fowler & Kress, p. 190). Wartime journalism, as exemplified by the *Albuquerque Journal's* “N. M. Plays” article, represents a particularly insidious use of language to manipulate people and maintain institutional power. Consequently, I find the theoretical and methodological orientations of critical linguistics particularly helpful in elucidating the workings of such manipulation and power maintenance.

### Content Analysis

The methodology of critical linguistics involves painstaking examinations of individual elements of speech: sentences, phrases, words, and even

parts of words, such as suffixes. As Fowler and Kress (1979) argued, “It is only when we acknowledge the meaning carried by the items themselves that linguistic form can be demonstrated to be a realization of social (and other) meaning” (p. 188). To make the application of their theory pragmatically useful Fowler and Kress provided the “aspirant in critical linguistics” a methodology in the form of a checklist. On the checklist are those grammatical structures that “are particularly likely to be revealing” ideologically (p. 197). The checklist items of greatest relevance to my analysis of the “N.M. Plays” article are:

1. “Transitivity”: the types of predicates that occur in a text as well as the types of entities that perform actions.
2. “Modality”: terms that express the writer's attitude toward his or her subject matter.
3. “Transformations”: lexico-syntactic derivations that allow a writer to shift the reader's focus in the direction desired by the writer. (p. 198)

Along with their checklist, however, Fowler and Kress also offered a caveat: “There is no predictable one-to-one association between any one linguistic form and any specific social meaning.... Different features and processes must be related to one another” (p. 198). Bearing this caution in mind, I analyze “N. M. Plays” in terms of its individual linguistic structures as well as the relationships among them. In so doing, I hope to make clear how, precisely, the micro-level linguistic choices made by the article's authors reveal, constitute, and promote a particular ideological orientation toward the Iraq War *and* to military operations in general.

### *The Grammar of Transitivity*

In traditional linguistics, *transitivity* refers to the distinction between transitive and intransitive verbs: between those that can take a direct object (e.g., **assassinate**, **destroy**, **prefer**) and those that can not (e.g., **smile**, **fall**, **elapse**) (Trask, 1993). In the critical linguistics framework, however, transitivity is far more value-laden, referring to the elements of a sentence that reveal the speaker's or writer's point of view regarding the agency of the person or entity performing an action, experiencing a state, or going through a process (Barker & Galasinski, 2001; Fowler & Kress, 1979; Halliday & Hasan, 1985). The syntactic unit that encodes this information is the predicate, typically a verb or adjective, which serves as the “action” component of a sentence. Critical linguistics considers how predicates are structured and used, and asks the following: “Who, if anyone, benefits from the action?”; “What other circumstances attend on the event and how are they connected to it?”; and especially “What *kinds* of entities perform actions?” (Fowler & Kress, 1979, p. 199). When inanimate entities, abstractions, or organizations are

attributed agency by a speaker or writer, such attribution relieves actual individual humans of responsibility for their actions, and this act of relief reveals and stakes out an ideological position. Bearing this in mind, consider the following textual elements from "N. M. Plays":

*Inanimate subjects (agents).* Inanimate subjects occur with great regularity in the article, beginning with the lead sentence: "The **opening salvos** in the war against Iraq came from **F-117A Nighthawks** streaking through the night sky...."<sup>5</sup> As is the case in the opening sentence, most of the article's inanimate subjects are weapons or other military equipment: "The **F-16s** that are flying over infantry troops and taking out enemy tanks"; "the so-called '**stealth fighters**' mission ... almost devastated Saddam Hussein"; "the **PAC-3** has performed better than its predecessor"; "the **Patriot** later targeted a U.S. F-16, but the **fighter** destroyed its radar dish"; and "PAC-3 **batteries** ... have shot down eight of 10 Iraqi Scud missiles." What is striking about such constructions is the overall impression they create: that of an exciting world in which jets and missiles and missions "streak," "destroy," "devastate," "drop bombs," and "shoot down" things of their own accord, conveniently relieving living, breathing military members, and, specifically, members of the *United States* military, of the responsibility for these actions. This deflection of human agency, and thus of responsibility, is particularly notable in the rare sentence in which Linthicum and Romo bring up a topic of embarrassment for the U.S. war management team: "The military, however, is investigating why the **PAC-3** recently targeted two friendly aircraft — including the accidental downing last Sunday of a British Royal Air Force Tornado GR-4 aircraft."

Indeed, it is certainly more palatable, and pro-American, in such a situation to find a missile, not a person, in the U.S. armed forces to blame for "targeting" and "downing" an allied jet (and the unidentified, unmentioned humans inside it). Such attribution of agency to inanimate objects reaches unparalleled heights in this pair of sentences: "The **F-16s** that are flying over infantry troops and taking out enemy tanks? Many of **their** pilots live and train in Clovis." In "N. M. Plays," then, Linthicum and Romo have created a narrative world in which jets not only have agency but in which "*their* pilots" are mere objects that are possessed, and not (subjective) people who do the possessing.

Although Fowler and Kress (1979) discuss only inanimate sentential *subjects*, I found two sentences in "N. M. Plays" in which the reporters use inanimate sentential or clausal *objects*. The referents of these objects are (equipment operated by) Iraqis, but not Americans: "F-16s ... flying over infantry troops and taking out **enemy tanks**" and "bombs dropped by F-117A Nighthawks on **targets**." Presumably the *Albuquerque Journal's* readers find it less offen-

sive to visualize F-16s (but not "their" pilots) "taking out" *tanks* than to imagine them "taking out" the soldiers inside them. It is certainly less graphic to drop bombs on "targets" than on the people there situated, and such a method of framing these military events certainly discourages a critical or anti-patriotic stance on the part of the article's readers.

*Abstract subjects (agents).* Even more frequent than sentences headed by inanimate subjects in "N. M. Plays" and, arguably even more powerful in their contribution to the article's overarching tone of uncritical patriotism, are those headed by abstract subjects, including the headline, "N.M. Plays a Large Role in Iraqi Engagement." Among the many sentences in "N. M. Plays" in which abstract subjects are ascribed agency are the following: "Through accident and design, **New Mexico** has played a premier role in the first week and a half of fighting the war in Iraq"; "**Both tradition and economy** have converged to bring New Mexicans into the military in numbers disproportionate to the population"; "**the successes and hardships of battle in this war** unfold live on television"; "**Military tradition** here dates back to before New Mexico became a state. **That tradition** ... [has] given military service a badge of heroism and a family tradition to follow..."; "**Having several Air Force bases and national laboratories that develop weapons** puts military careers in young people's minds or attracts soldiers to New Mexico"; and "**the incident** showed that ... the maintenance company may be in harm's way." The net effect of this overuse of abstract subjects is the creation of a discursive world in which (American, New Mexican) people are relieved of causal agency in acts of war. In their places mere abstractions take up the responsibility. How can anyone oppose a war not enacted by agentic humans?

Linthicum and Romo also use abstract nouns in their story's subheads to powerful effect. "Badge of **Heroism**," "Family **Tradition**," and "**Help** from Home" are the phrases that head the various sections of the article. These abstractions, perhaps more than any of those used in the article's sentences, paint a particularly positive picture of New Mexican military-related attitudes and practices. They are subheads, and thus unanchored to any named agent even as they are set apart from the article's text and made more prominent through the use of larger, bolder type. They contribute powerfully to the overall pro-military tone of the article.

*Organizations as subjects.* This final item in the transitivity section of Fowler and Kress's (1979) checklist is also abundantly represented in "N. M. Plays." Among the more representative examples: "**their** [New Mexico's reserves] **units** are playing key roles"; "**the military**, Wilson said, 'has been one of the most egalitarian organizations'; and "**the base** [White Sands Missile Range] has made important contributions to the effort through the testing of many of the weapons used by the Army, Navy, and Air Force."

Unlike those sentences headed by inanimate subjects (most of which conveniently divert responsibility for violence from unnamed human agents), these sentences with organizational and other collective subjects all celebrate their accomplishments, attributing, in other words, a sort of generalized or diffused group agency even while masking the identities of the groups' members, for good or bad. If "the military" is portrayed as an "egalitarian organization," then the anti-egalitarian actions of (some) specific individuals in the military are rendered unimportant or non-existent. If "the base" is credited with making "important contributions," then the actual people responsible lose the opportunity to be credited, while those base members who did not "contribute" get to bask in the reflected glory of those who actually did something. In any case, the use of U.S. organizations as subjects dehumanizes (or, possibly, super-humanizes) those persons truly responsible for the actions described and, in so doing, renders them immune from criticism or judgment, thus foreclosing the possibility of reader reaction that is anything but pro-war or patriotic.

#### *The Grammar of Modality*

In the CL framework, constructions that convey *modality* "express speakers' and writers' attitudes toward themselves, toward their interlocutors, and toward their subject-matter, their social and economic relationships with the people they address, and the actions which are performed via language" (Fowler & Kress, 1979, p. 200). A news article's modality markers, then, are among the most important components of its framing. Among the linguistic manifestations of modality on the CL checklist most revealing of the ideological bias in "N. M. Plays" is the use of personal pronouns, particularly a first-person plural pronoun.

"We" appears with great frequency in the article's numerous quotations. It conveys the values of the speakers interviewed by Linthicum and Romo and, by extension, those of the reporters, who decide which sources are interviewed in the first place and which quotations are included in an article. According to Fowler and Kress (1979), while the referent of *I* is almost always unambiguously the speaker of an utterance, "the plural form *we* displays the added complexity that the source claims to speak of and for himself and on behalf of someone other than himself" (p. 201). Using *we*, then, can allow a speaker or writer to be deliberately vague about who is included or excluded from reference (Lakoff, 1990; Marmaridou, 2000).

In many "N. M. Plays" quotations, *we* (or *us*) is inclusive, "implicat[ing] the addressee in the content of the discourse and ... therefore, ostensibly, more intimate and solidary" (Fowler & Kress, 1979, p. 202). Consider the following: "New Mexico's always been patriotic and loyal to the country," said

Agapito Silva, an 83-year-old World War II veteran living in Albuquerque. 'Any time there's a war, we've got a lot of people there'; "'We serve,' Wilson said"; and "'We have more guardsmen here than Arizona, which has a much higher population,' Horn said. 'We have a high ratio of folks in the National Guard....'" Each of these quoted speakers uses *we* to speak for himself or herself *and* presumably all New Mexicans, a use that creates the "superficial impression of solidarity and involvement" with not only the immediate addressees (the reporters) but by extension, all New Mexican readers of the *Journal*. If "we" (that is, all New Mexicans, or all readers of the article) share in the experience of "serving" and sending "our" citizens to any war, then presumably "we" are also implicated in the pro-war sentiments described in the article. Again, the implicature of "we" subtly — and repeatedly — contributes to the foreclosing of any standpoint that might perceive of marching off to war as something other than "patriotic and loyal."

#### *Transformations*

One of CL's most powerful tools is its analysis of "transformations." Borrowing a central idea from traditional generative grammar (Chomsky, 1957, 1965), CL argues that a sentence's so-called surface structure (i.e., the syntax of an actual spoken or written utterance) is in fact a "transformation" or derivation of its so-called deep structure, its putative underlying form.<sup>6</sup> The specific syntactic transformations Fowler and Kress (1979) considered to be "particularly rewarding" in CL analysis are *nominalization* and *passivization* (p. 207). "N. M. Plays" abounds with such "transformed" structures. These are among the most important contributors to the article's promotion of an uncritically patriotic standpoint toward the U.S. military operations in Iraq.

*Nominalizations.* A nominalization is a noun or noun phrase that has been transformed or derived from an underlying verb or adjective; e.g., "leadership" from the verb "to lead." As Fowler and Kress (1979) point out, nominalizations create the impression of impersonality and detachment because they delete references to participants; often, both subject and object are invisible and thus incapable of taking responsibility or of being objects of critical scrutiny. Consider these participant-, modality-, tense-, and/or attitude-obscuring nominalizations and resulting objectifications in Linthicum and Romo: "N. M. plays a large role in Iraqi **engagement**" (headline); "People like Silva, watching the **successes** and hardships of **battle** in this war unfold live on television..."; "White Sands Missile Range personnel are not involved in **combat** or support missions in Iraq, but the base has made important **contributions** to the effort through the **testing** of many of the weapons...; "The effectiveness of 1-ton 'bunker buster' bombs ... in the war's opening **attack** on Baghdad was tested..."; "the accidental **downing** ... of a British [jet]"; serv-

ice members from Fort Bliss “might not expect to see heavy **action** in wartime”; an American group was “caught in an **ambush**”; and “The incident showed that in a **conflict** ... the maintenance company may be in **harm**’s way.”

By using nominalizations such as **engagement**, **testing**, **downing**, and **ambush**, any suggestion of agentive subjects doing something is removed — and with it, the possibility of critical evaluation. The same effect is achieved through the use of other nouns that, while not nominalizations of verbs, are also the names of actions, such as **war**, **mission**, **salvo**, and **effort**. If **war** is merely some *thing* that exists independently in the world or some natural *state of being*, then killing is transformed from an acted (and therefore agent-requiring) process into a static (and therefore agentless) object — and, as a result, violence and war are naturalized (Boaz, 2005).

*Passivizations.* A passive construction is one in which “an intrinsically transitive verb is construed in such a way that its underlying object appears as a surface subject, its underlying subject being either absent or expressed as an oblique noun phrase” (Trask, 1993, p. 201).<sup>7</sup> Critical linguists note that passivizations allow a writer to “emphasize ... thematic priorities, to emphasize what a text is ‘about’ even when the [subject is], strictly speaking, semantically subordinate. [With passivization], chunks of the utterance are moved about so as to focus our attention, and to direct our perception, in certain ... complex ways.” (Fowler & Kress, 1979, pp. 209–210). Passive structures in which the underlying subject is absent are particularly problematic, and revealing of a writer’s ideological intention, because agency is either re-assigned or stripped away completely.

Virtually all of the passivizations in “N. M. Plays” elide the underlying subject. Among the most important are the following: “A high ratio of folks in the National Guard ... **are being deployed**”; “The effectiveness of 1-ton ‘bunker buster’ bombs ... **was tested** at White Sands”; “The bombs, which explode at a **desired** depth ... **are used** against heavily fortified targets”; “The PAC-3, the **much-publicized** defensive weapon **deployed** around command centers ... **was also tested** at White Sands”; “Some of the batteries **have been reported** to be moving with troops toward the front lines”; “Eight [members of the 507th Maintenance Company] **were unaccounted for**”; and “The F-16s ... **were used** to attack airfields, military production facilities and Scud missile sites.” Such passives make it difficult for the reader to visualize, and even more difficult to critically evaluate, the violent and otherwise troubling military actions described because they fail to provide information about the *persons* performing (or even observing) them. A critical linguist must ask: *Who* deployed these troops? *Who* tested the “bunker buster” bombs? *Who* uses them against heavily fortified targets? *Who* reported that the missile batteries

are moving toward the front lines? And most important, *who* used F-16s to attack airfields? The obvious answers (specific individuals in the U.S. military) are conveniently left unstated, allowing Linthicum and Romo to create, and invite readers to enter, a narrative world in which people are deployed by no one in particular, bombs are dropped of their own accord, and no actual (U.S. military) humans are held morally accountable. The article’s one passive construction in which the agent is specified, “the effectiveness of the ‘bunker buster’ bombs **dropped by F-117A Nighthawks**,” uses an *inanimate* agent. Even when the bomb droppers are identified, they are jets and not persons (who might be subject to scrutiny). Human actors are syntactically invisible and thus relieved of responsibility.

## Discussion

I entered the frame used to structure a specific artifact of early Iraq War journalism, explored how its human-nature frame was lexically and syntactically constructed, and uncovered those ideological components of the article that reinforce the status quo and guide readers toward a preferred view of (the) war and its participants. I applied the theories and methods of critical linguistics precisely because “N. M. Plays” does *not* overtly advocate a position on the war in Iraq or offer an explicit argument in support of the Administration’s military actions. Rather, the article instantiates a more insidious form of ideological persuasion, as its authors work within the human-interest frame rather than the military conflict frame (Dimitrova, 2006) and therefore focus primarily on the actions and opinions of individual citizens who have professional and emotional ties to the military and its causes. Moreover, in their interviews with ordinary citizens and elected officials, Linthicum and Romo avoid raising sensitive issues or asking hard questions about the costs of war. They choose, instead, to elicit ostensibly neutral or positive evaluations of military involvement, and they syntactically structure their observations in ways that naturalize those evaluations. CL, uniquely, provides tools that allow a discourse analyst to tease out precisely how such naturalization is accomplished.

Media are not and can never be neutral. If indeed the media “work ideologically by disseminating the ideas and world-views of the ruling class” (McQuail, 2000, p. 76), as Marxist and neo-Marxist media critics have long claimed, then specific media texts are particularly useful, visible, and widely available windows into ruling-class ideological bias. As Hodge (1979), an early critical linguist and colleague of Fowler and Kress, observed, “newspapers inevitably give only a partial version of the world. They select, reorder, transform, distort, and suppress ... caus[ing] systematic bias of content” (p. 157).

These influences do not occur in a vacuum. As Hodge and Kress (1993) later noted, "meaning does not exist unless there are people who make it happen, in a process where those who *receive* texts (readers, listeners, viewers) engage in an activity which produces its own distinctive kinds of meaning, without which no text would have any social effect" (pp. 174–175). Further, as scholars of the press's framing of war have pointed out, any nation's media "are influenced by the overall political environment in which they exist [and reflect] ... the position of dominant national actors and institutions" (Dimitrova, et al., 2005, p. 35). Newspapers in particular, observed Ravi (2005) are "rooted firmly in a national ethos" (p. 45). The media, then, can not be held solely responsible for the ideological tendencies prevalent in a society at any given time. Still, as Boaz (2005) noted in her essay on war and public policy framing in international media, "public opinion on foreign policy and national security initiatives is directly related to the media's efficacy in naturalizing violence and creating the perception of national and global insecurity. As such, the type of media information to which ... citizens had access is directly linked to public support for war in Iraq" (p. 350).

I considered the "type of media information" available to the readers of a large, albeit "non-elite," American newspaper, and I analyzed the very phrases, words, and parts of words used in the construction and framing of that information, much of which (re)inforced the "naturalizing [of] violence" identified by Boaz (2005). Although the political/ideological bias of "N. M. Plays" might have been relatively easy to identify even without using the tools of critical linguistics, the micro-analysis that the CL framework provided made the slant inescapably clear. The breadth and depth of the pro-military, pro-war bias of the article's writers (and, by extension, the *Albuquerque Journal*) were illuminated, as was the successful construction of the human-interest frame through which the story's messages were filtered.

At the time of the article's publication (March 2003), public sentiment about America's involvement in the Iraq war was starkly, at times even violently, polarized. Yet the content and tone of "N. M. Plays" reflected none of the country's or the state's division of feelings about the issue, feelings that were observable from even the most cursory glance at the dueling bumper stickers in Albuquerque parking lots. Rather than bowing to journalistic objectivity, the piece revealed a pro-war stance that pandered to New Mexico's large military presence through its boasting about New Mexico's "contributions" to military efforts past and present.

Punctuated by subheads such as "Badge of Heroism," "Family Tradition," and "Help from Home," Linthicum and Romo's article endorsed, and even glorified, New Mexico's and New Mexicans' military participation without raising the possibility that war might *not* be a force of unalloyed good. More-

over, the article never acknowledged the existence of people (in New Mexico or elsewhere) who opposed war in general or the Iraq War in particular. In its aim to reflect, and perhaps even magnify, the degree of pride that (some) New Mexicans had in their state's pro-military tradition, the article never allowed for the possibility that not all New Mexicans are proud of the high profile the military-industrial complex enjoys in their state. Linthicum and Romo did not acknowledge the visible and vocal anti-war movement which, at the time of publication, was daily making its presence known on the streets of Albuquerque and Santa Fe, and they did not express regret about lives lost in Iraq.

Applying CL theory and methods adds to the understanding of the ideology underlying and motivating "N. M. Plays" and to an appreciation of the construction and subtle power of human interest framing which naturalizes violence and war as it draws our attention to the following:

1. overuse of inanimate and abstract subjects, allowing us to see how the manipulation of transitivity contributed to a world-view in which (American military) humans are not accountable for violence and death;
2. skillful use of the ambiguous pronoun *we*, creating the impression of inclusion and solidarity necessary for successful recruitment of an audience to a speaker's or writer's cause;
3. overwhelming frequency of nominalizations, lexical transformations that discursively reduced aggressive military actions to abstract entities, states, or self-perpetuating events; and
4. tactical use of passivizations, which made the agents behind violent actions disappear from view, effectively relieving the unnamed actors of moral obligation or responsibility.

A CL-based analysis allows for clear and specific identification of the components of the news frame and, therefore, the components of the ideological position of an article representative of locally focused, imbalanced, pro-war, human-interest-driven, non-elite journalism prevalent during the early days of combat operations in Iraq (Carpenter, 2007; Dimitrova, et al., 2005), a type of journalism harshly judged by many commercial and scholarly critics in the years since. By specifically, mechanically, and systematically examining the details of the Linthicum and Romo article's linguistic structure, it was easy to see how the pro-war media bias, instantiated in language, contributed to the pervasive marginalizing of opposing views concerning the war (Edwards & Cromwell, 2004; Porpora & Nikolaev, 2008; Ravi, 2005).

Almost two decades before "framing" became a *sine qua non* of media criticism, CL's Fowler and Kress (1979) made an observation that anticipated many of the concerns of contemporary framing theorists. In written discourse, they argued,

Chunks of the utterance are moved about so as to focus our attention, and to direct our perception, in certain ways.... Our attention and the sequence in which we decode are here being directed, manipulated, in complex ways; and any analysis of discourse needs to be responsive to these processes [p. 210].

In the case of an article such as "N. M. Plays," casual readers were exposed to (and possibly persuaded by) the point of view of the article's writers and editors, a point of view that, not incidentally, happened to be similar to that of most of the nation's government and military elites at the time. "N. M. Plays," with its uncritical look at (some) New Mexicans' attitudes toward war, reinforced these dominant positions, accepting and presenting the Administration's pro-war message as not only beyond question but, in fact, the only possible stance.

During the spring of 2003, a time when anti-war sentiment was suppressed, condemned, or marginalized in both mediated and interpersonal discourse, such uncritically pro-war journalism further contributed to the bolstering of the status quo, a typical function of non-elite journalism, and thus the muting of dissent. Beyond the importance tacitly given to the article by the *Albuquerque Journal's* editorial decision to position it as front-page "news," the subtlety of its authors' linguistic structures made the mechanics of such muting nearly undetectable and therefore all the more insidious. Surely, "N. M. Plays" was not the only such article foisted upon American newspaper readers during the early days of U.S. military operations in Iraq.

#### NOTES

1. Representative studies of the framing of Iraq War coverage focus upon issues such as: types of frames, which were used, by whom, when, and why (Boaz, 2005; Christie, 2006; Dimitrova, 2006; Dimitrova, et al., 2005; Luther & Miller, 2005; Pfau, et al., 2004; Schwalbe, Keith, & Silcock, 2008); cross-cultural comparisons of news frames (Dardis, 2006; Dimitrova, et al., 2005; Dimitrova & Stromback, 2005; Herber & Filak, 2007; Lee, Maslog, & Kim, 2006; Lewis, 2004; Ravi, 2005; Willnat, et al., 2006); and the differences between frames used by elite U.S. media and those used by non-elite U.S. media (Carpenter, 2007).

2. My descriptions here paraphrase and consolidate the descriptions of the frames that appeared in Dimitrova (2006, p. 80), Dimitrova, et al. (2005, p. 32), and Dimitrova & Stromback (2005, p. 409).

3. As the Associated Press's *Guide to News Writing* points out, features "aim to give readers pleasure and entertainment along with information, ... supplement the straight news content in timely and topical ways, ... illuminate events, offer perspective, explanation, and interpretation, ... and tell people about people" (Cappon, 2000, p. 95).

4. The *Albuquerque Journal's* circulation of approximately 150,000 makes it New Mexico's largest newspaper, but places it only 84th in the United States (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2008). By contrast, each of the top three "elite" newspapers boasts a circulation in excess of 1,000,000.

5. In this section, when quoting from "N. M. Plays" I will **boldface** the words that are the focus of a given analysis.

6. For example, the surface-structure interrogative "*Is John here?*" would be analyzed as a transformation of the deep-structure declarative "*John is here.*"

7. In *Jane was fired*, the underlying subject is absent, but in *Jane was fired by Tom*, the underlying subject (Tom) is expressed as an oblique noun phrase (i.e., as neither the construction's subject nor direct object).

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