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The Politics of Recontextualization: Discursive Competition over Claims of Iranian Involvement in Iraq

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ABSTRACT The representation of issues, especially those that are highly contested or ambiguous, is an ongoing process always subject to challenge and new *re-presentations*. This article explores the discursive competition between journalists and White House officials over the recontextualization of words spoken by General Peter Pace, which seemingly cast doubt on White House claims of Iranian involvement in Iraq. Pace's words, along with those spoken by White House Press Secretary Tony Snow and President George W. Bush in their appearances before the press, enter into a web of intertextual connections involved in the contestation over the 'truth' of the matter. The analysis explores this intertextual web and the discursive moves employed by journalists and administration officials to differently represent the issue at hand. I argue that the effective study of political discourse, especially as it relates to larger forms of sociocultural knowledge, requires an analytic emphasis on intertextuality.

KEY WORDS: *intertextuality, iterability, political press conferences, politics of representation, recontextualization, speech chain, war on terror*

Introduction

Discourse, as Bakhtin (1981: 279) notes, 'cannot fail to be oriented toward the "already uttered"'. Given the ubiquitous practice in social life of citing, iterating and reformulating previously spoken words, the concept of intertextuality has received significant attention from sociocultural linguists and discourse scholars (Agha and Wortham, 2005; Bauman and Briggs, 1990; Becker, 1995; Blommaert, 2005; Fairclough, 1992a, 1992b; Hanks, 1986, 1989; Phillips, 1996; Silverstein and Urban, 1996). Research has examined the intertextual connections across everyday interactions (Gordon, 2006; Tannen, 2006; Tovaes, 2005, 2006) and particular attention has been given to reported speech (Álvarez-Cáccamo, 1996; Briggs, 1992; Buttny, 1997, 1998; Buttny and Williams, 2000; Holt, 1996, 2000; Matoesian, 2000; Tannen, 1989).

In politics, the 'already uttered' frequently enters into contests over how best to represent those previously spoken words. That is, prior discourse becomes recontextualized in new discursive encounters 'with varying degrees of precision and impartiality (or more precisely, partiality)' (Bakhtin, 1981: 339). In this way, intertextual links across speech events figure prominently in how political issues may be interpreted and reinterpreted according to the different interested perspectives involved in discussions and debates. A prime site of interactional data in the study of political discourse – the political press conference – has received much attention from discourse analysts (Bhatia, 2006; Jiang, 2006), especially with regard to question–answer strategies (Clayman, 1993; Clayman and Heritage, 2002); however, the specific application of intertextuality has yet to be integrated.

The goal of this article is to examine how prior words enter into and are reshaped in press conference interactions. In particular, I explore the discursive competition between journalists and White House officials over the recontextualization of prior words whose meaning becomes highly contested. Political discourse is effectively a struggle over the control of entextualization. It is a struggle over whose preferred reading of prior discourse will be accepted as more valid (cf. Blommaert, 2005: 47). Importantly, the result of this struggle has consequences for shared understandings of the world. Thus, the analysis of 'intertextuality in action' (Tannen, 2006; Tovaes, 2005) provides an important starting point for understanding how forms of sociocultural knowledge (e.g. truth claims, narratives, accounts that justify war) come into being and may be reproduced, resisted or challenged.

At issue in two White House press briefings given by spokesperson Tony Snow (on 12 and 13 February 2007) and a White House press conference given by President George W. Bush (on 14 February 2007) is the nature and extent of alleged Iranian involvement in Iraq. Immediately prior to these press appearances, on 11 February 2007, the US military gave a press briefing in Baghdad where unnamed officials detailed evidence implicating Iran in supplying explosively formed projectiles (EFPs) to Iraqi insurgents. The evidence supported previous claims made by the White House. However, a day after the Baghdad briefing, General Peter Pace, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made comments in an interview that apparently contradicted the White House's position on the issue. Pace said of the EFPs entering Iraq, 'I would not say by what I know that the Iranian government clearly knows or is complicit'. These words, along with those spoken by Snow and Bush in their appearances before the press, enter into a web of intertextual connections involved in the contestation over the 'truth' of the matter. The purpose of the analysis is to examine the way intertextual connections factor into the micro-level interaction of the press conference. Particular attention is given to the discursive moves employed by journalists and administration officials to differently represent the contested views of General Pace and the ambiguous issue of Iranian involvement in Iraq.

Theoretical background

Political discourse is marked by the struggle over the representation of ambiguous issues. ‘This competition over the meaning of ambiguous events, people, and objects in the world has been called the “politics of representation” (Holquist, 1983; Mehan and Wills, 1988; Shapiro, 1987)’ (Mehan, 1996: 253). Discourse is central to the politics of representation since it is through discursive interaction that we ascribe meanings to issues and events. More pointedly, it is through multiple, overlapping discursive encounters that the social practice of meaning making occurs. The representation of issues, especially those that are highly contested or ambiguous, is an ongoing process always subject to challenge and new *re-presentations*. Discursive competition takes place at multiple sites of interaction, and these different contexts are connected to each other by intertextual links that join discourse events together into chains of communication.

INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF PRIOR DISCOURSE

The notion of intertextuality – a term coined by Kristeva (1980) in articulating aspects of Bakhtin’s (1981, 1986) *dialogism* – is useful for the analysis of political discourse because it emphasizes the connections across multiple discursive encounters where issues are contested. Intertextual relations are implicated in a process whereby a given piece of discourse is lifted from one setting, i.e. decontextualized, and brought into another discursive encounter, i.e. recontextualized (Bauman and Briggs, 1990). Entextualization, the act of turning a piece of discourse into a text and moving it from one context to another, allows social actors to bring with the text varying degrees of the earlier context while also transforming the text in the new setting (cf. Gal, 2006: 178).

The ‘diachronic repetition’ (Tannen, 1989) of texts across discursive encounters inevitably involves the reshaping of those texts to some degree. As expressed by Becker (1995), any use of language, or what he calls *linguaging*, consists of ‘taking old language (*jarwa*) and pushing (*dhosok*) it into new contexts’ (p. 185). In this process, prior text is not just repeated but reworked. The reshaping of prior text may occur with varying degrees of fidelity to its meaning in the ‘original’ context.¹ As Kristeva (1980) points out, imitation may be done ‘seriously, claiming and appropriating it [prior text] without relativizing it’ or the process of recontextualization may introduce ‘a signification opposed to that of the other’s word’ (p. 73). In its extreme, resignification may move into the realm of parody (Bakhtin, 1981: 340; cf. Álvarez-Cáccamo, 1996: 38).

Tannen (2006) breaks down the notion of intertextuality in her examination of the ‘natural history’ (Silverstein and Urban, 1996) of family conversations as they evolve over several days. She refers to the general repetition of topics across space and time as ‘recycling’. Drawing from Goffman (1974), she distinguishes the recycling of topics from their ‘reframing’ and ‘rekeying’, which may be achieved through various linguistic and discursive strategies. As family members reshape their discourse over the course of a week, they attempt to negotiate ongoing conflicts by changing the meaning of the recurring texts

(i.e. reframing) and the tone or tenor of the interactions (i.e. rekeying). In this way, the intertextual connections in everyday interactions work to achieve familial harmony. Gordon (2006) provides a similar look at family interaction to demonstrate how prior texts are reshaped across encounters to create different interactional alignments and hence different situational identities among family members. Both Tannen (2006) and Gordon (2006) provide glimpses of the way 'intertextuality in action' (Tovares, 2005) occurs in everyday encounters not only to reshape prior texts, but to shape social relations.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF DISCOURSE IN REPORTED SPEECH

Bauman and Briggs (1990) remark that to 'decontextualize and recontextualize a text is thus an act of control' (p. 76). Control over the process of entextualization is frequently achieved through the use of reported speech. Voloshinov (1973) provides a significant discussion on the topic where he characterizes reported speech as 'speech within speech, utterance within utterance, and at the same time also *speech about speech, utterance about utterance*' (p. 115; italics in original). Voloshinov's comments highlight the capacity of reported speech not just to represent pieces of previously uttered discourse, but to *re-present* what has been said elsewhere by others – that is, to effectively recontextualize a prior utterance with different shades of meaning. Voloshinov (1973) explains that the use of reported speech 'imposes upon the reported utterance its own accents, which collide and interfere with the accents in the reported utterance' (p. 154). Bakhtin (1981) articulates this idea in his concept of *double-voiced discourse*, which 'serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author' (p. 324; cf. Irvine, 1996: 135–6).

Discourse analysts have given much attention to the way reported 'utterances can be repeated with varying degrees of reinterpretation' (Bakhtin, 1986: 91). Buttny (1998) and Holt (2000), for example, take heed of Voloshinov's (1971) call to pay attention to the reporting context since cited words never really carry the same connotations once reinserted into another setting (see Duranti and Goodwin, 1992 for more on contextualization). In Holt's (2000) analysis of conversations among friends, she shows how speakers use directly reported speech in a manner that allows them to implicitly comment on the utterance. The implicit cues embedded within the reported speech frame are then used by the reporter's conversation partner to articulate an explicit assessment. In turn, the reporter follows the receiver's first assessment with a second one in a layered process that, in addition to involving the receiver in the story (Tannen, 1989), works toward achieving agreement and common ground. In this way, we see how the process of recontextualization is a joint endeavor.

The evaluative component of reported speech is explored by Buttny (1997) and Buttny and Williams (2000) in their analysis of the way college students use reported speech in discussing interracial relations. When participants in their studies report the words of others, they do so to construct representations of those they quote. Reported speech allows reporters to provide evidence

(Hill and Irvine, 1993) and to hold others accountable or responsible for actions. More broadly, it allows speakers to build representations of problematic events as they critically assess what took place. 'Reporting speech,' as Buttny (1997) explains, 'is not a neutral, disinterested activity. Persons report speech along with assessing or evaluating it' (Buttny, 1997: 484).

Reporting the words of others is often done to challenge those words or to highlight implicit meanings they carry. In his field work in Warao society, an indigenous community in eastern Venezuela, Briggs (1992) examines the use of reported speech in the laments (*sana* or *ona*) performed by women. Women often use reported speech to reanimate the discourse of men in their performances. The recontextualization of prior words within the laments explicitly reveals the presuppositions of men's discourse. 'The original speakers' accounts of the motives that lie behind their speech and actions are thus displaced by the singers' own interpretations' (Briggs, 1992: 352).

Given the reshaping of prior words within reported speech frames, Tannen (1989) prefers the term 'constructed dialogue'. Reported speech or 'constructed dialogue' often supposes historical accuracy. However, the framework of reported speech is frequently used to convey 'typifying' speech (Irvine, 1996; Parmentier, 1993) or 'hoped-for speech' (Buttny, 1997: 486). That is, words are quoted as typical representations of what might have been said by a particular character or should have been said in a particular situation. Yet the conventions of reported speech tie in to a strong language ideology of literality which entails accuracy. From these ideas about language derive much of the power of reported speech to construct an air of credibility and give the reporter legitimacy in their representation of issues.

Linguistic ideology factors into Matoesian's (2000) analysis of courtroom discourse, where an ideology that privileges the referential function of language (Silverstein, 1976, 1979) views reported speech as the transparent conveyor of prior words' meaning. In Calsamiglia and López Ferrero's (2003) study of the media's use of reported speech to represent scientific voices, the same ideology can be seen to operate among journalists as they attempt to accurately quote scientists. Despite journalists' resolve to remain faithful to the original sense and intention of quoted words, Calsamiglia and López Ferrero (2003) show how those texts are nevertheless reshaped when inserted into press reportage. In his look at code displacement in reported speech, Álvarez-Cáccamo (1996) illustrates how speakers create a representation of another's prior words in a believable way even though it is likely or highly probable that the language used to represent those words (e.g. Spanish) is not isomorphic with the one used in the model context (e.g. Galician). Álvarez-Cáccamo (1996) argues that the lack of resistance by the collocutors in the interactions he studied points to receivers' acceptance of the verisimilitude of the reported speech; and this ultimately rests on their 'shared linguistic ideologies and sociolinguistic knowledge that sustain interpretation' (p. 55). In sum, the 'ideology of a fixed text' (Blommaert, 2005), which assumes there is a 'true', transparent meaning that should be evident to everyone, often underlies the recontextualization of quoted words.

INTERTEXTUAL CONNECTIONS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIOPOLITICAL REALITY

The process of entextualization is a political act in that lifting words and voices out of a prior context and recontextualizing them in a new setting imbues them with different shades of meaning. As a result, recontextualization links to larger sociopolitical concerns. Intertextual connections across micro-level discursive encounters may be used to reinforce existing cultural understandings or work to challenge previous understandings and create new ones. As emphasized earlier, the representation of highly contested or ambiguous issues is never complete after one discursive interaction, but occurs across overlapping encounters. In this way, intertextuality is central to understanding the way micro-level discursive interaction is dialectically positioned in relation to macro-level sociocultural knowledge. Put another way, intertextual connections are part of the ongoing process that connects, in Gee's (1996) terms, 'little d' discourse with 'big D' discourse.

Phillips (1996) provides a useful case study of the way in which the micro- and macro-level notions of discourse come together. She examines the way key words and formulaic phrases – linked together in intertextual series across political speeches and media reportage – reproduce, transform and resist the macro-level discourse of Thatcherism. While speakers may reiterate key words in ways that further reify this macro-level discourse, speakers also recontextualize prior words and phrases in ways that challenge and work to transform their larger social meaning. The recontextualization of prior discourse inevitably reshapes that discourse to some degree. For this reason, Inoue (2006: 32) suggests that any piece of discourse exists 'on moving discursive ground'. This is particularly true in the discursive competition over contested representations, as with the case I move to now.

Data and method

My primary data come from a White House press briefing given by Press Secretary Tony Snow on 13 February 2007. These data are examined against the backdrop of Snow's press briefing on 12 February, as well as a press conference given by President George W. Bush on 14 February. For each of these press appearances, I isolated and transcribed segments that involved exchanges on Iran.

In addition to transcriptions of these press appearances, I consulted press reports from the 'papers of record' in the USA, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, along with news reports from the BBC and Voice of America websites. This allowed me to gain an understanding of how the media were treating the issue of White House claims of Iranian involvement in Iraq, as well as how they were quoting the words spoken by General Peter Pace that became central to the press briefing on 13 February.

THE POLITICAL PRESS CONFERENCE

As Bhatia (2006) points out, the political press conference is a sub-genre of the more general concept of the news, or press conference. Related to interview

formats, interaction in political press conferences is primarily question-driven (Heritage and Roth, 1995; cf. Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Clayman et al., 2007) apart from any prepared remarks made by the government official at the outset (Jiang, 2006). Thus, the generic roles and expectations are that the journalists formulate their utterances as recognizable questions and the government official provides spontaneous answers (Greatbatch, 1988: 405; Jiang, 2006: 239). For their part, the government official on the answering end often provides 'evasive and ambiguous answers to avoid saying anything that could possibly be exaggerated to cause a controversy in the media' (Bhatia, 2006: 180). Bhatia (2006) notes that evasion is often used to 'lessen the crisis-element of certain events', to 'minimize negative reactions', and to 'assert control over laymen and journalists' (p. 191). As seen in the later analysis, Snow and Bush employ discursive strategies to abate controversy surrounding contradictory statements made by Pace and the White House, to minimize the negative fallout of Pace's words, and to assert control over the media's representation of those words by instilling the administration's preferred reading of them.

ANALYTIC FOCUS

The data analysis is informed by three intersecting traditions in the study of discourse as social practice: critical discourse analysis (CDA), action implicative discourse analysis (AIDA), and American linguistic anthropology. With CDA, I share an interest in analyzing influential political and media texts in an effort to examine the micro-level use of language in light of macro-level social concerns (Blommaert, 2005; Fairclough, 1992a). I adopt AIDA's focus on the dilemmas that participants face in interactions and the rhetorical moves they use to manage those interactional problems. As Tracy (2005) describes, social life is fundamentally dilemmatic. 'People very frequently pursue aims that partially or strongly are in tension with each other. Discursive action is all about navigating these competing commitments and concerns' (Tracy, 2005: 304; cf. Billig et al., 1988). Moreover, I draw from lines of research within linguistic anthropology that have focused on the 'natural histories of discourse' (Silverstein and Urban, 1996); that is, issues of intertextuality, recontextualization (Briggs and Bauman, 1992) and the social circulation of discourse (Spitulnik, 1996). The aim of the analysis is to highlight the discursive moves made by journalists and government officials as they interact with each other to recontextualize previously spoken words and represent the issue. The result is a micro-level snapshot of intertextuality in action in the political arena.

Overview of events

On 11 February 2007, the US military gave a briefing to journalists in Baghdad 'on background'. Background briefings are intended to educate journalists on an issue without disclosing the source of the information. In the Baghdad briefing, three anonymous officials described evidence that was said to implicate Iran in supplying weapons to insurgents within Iraq. Specifically, the officials

claimed that parts for sophisticated roadside bombs known as explosively formed penetrators, or EFPs, could be traced back to Iran. More importantly, as reported by the BBC, 'The assessment of the senior defense analyst was that the orders to do so came from the highest levels of the Iranian government' (Peel, 2007).

The conclusion that the Iranian government was aiding and abetting Shia elements inside Iraq was widely reported by the press in the USA following the Baghdad briefing. The evidence presented in Baghdad followed in the wake of similar claims that had been made by the White House in recent months. Notably, in his 10 January 2007 address to the nation on the situation in Iraq, President Bush stated:

Iran is providing material support for attacks on American troops. We will disrupt the attacks on our forces. We'll interrupt the flow of support from Iran and Syria. And we will seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq.

The Baghdad briefing on 11 February apparently provided evidence to support these claims.

While the press reported the findings, they also questioned the strength of the evidence implicating high-level Iranian officials. In light of the 'intelligence failures' (or 'misuse of intelligence' depending upon how one frames the issue) in the lead-up to the Iraq war, many journalists as well as critics of the Bush administration treated the claims made in the Baghdad briefing with skepticism. An article in the *New York Times* the day after the briefing reported the following:

In a news briefing held under strict security, the officials spread out on two small tables an E.F.P. and an array of mortar shells and rocket-propelled grenades with visible serial numbers that the officials said link the weapons directly to Iranian arms factories. The officials also asserted, without providing direct evidence, that Iranian leaders had authorized smuggling those weapons into Iraq for use against the Americans. The officials said such an assertion was an inference based on general intelligence assessments. That inference, and the anonymity of the officials who made it, seemed likely to generate skepticism among those suspicious that the Bush administration is trying to find a scapegoat for its problems in Iraq, and perhaps even trying to lay the groundwork for war with Iran. (Glanz, 2007)

During the White House press briefing on 12 February, reporters questioned Snow about the strength of the evidence presented in Baghdad. Later that day, while speaking to reporters in Australia, General Pace seemed to contradict White House claims that the Iranian government was directly involved in Iraq. As reported on the Voice of America website and repeated by other media outlets, Pace stated:

We know that the explosively formed projectiles are manufactured in Iran. What I would not say is that the Iranian government, per se, knows about this. It is clear that Iranians are involved, and it's clear that materials from Iran are involved, but I would not say by what I know that the Iranian government clearly knows or is complicit. (Pessin, 2007)

Pace's words became a central issue at the next day's White House press briefing with Tony Snow. Reporters and Snow entered into a discursive competition over the words' meaning in light of the Baghdad briefing and White House claims. Both reporters and Snow drew from Pace's remarks in an attempt to read them in a light favorable to their respective positions. The analysis of their exchanges follows in the next section; a timeline of the events under scrutiny is summarized in Table 1.

Analysis

At issue in this analysis is the intertextual web of words that treat the issue of Iranian involvement in Iraq. Not only are Pace's words recontextualized within Snow's press briefing on 13 February, but journalists also recontextualize words spoken by Snow at the previous day's briefing. In addition, utterances made by Snow in his exchanges with the press are part of a speech chain that carries forward to Bush's press conference on 14 February.

This analysis aims to elucidate the discursive moves employed by Snow, Bush and the journalists as they interact across these intersecting contexts. A large part of my focus below centers on Snow's 13 February briefing. For his part, Snow is faced with the challenge of upholding the credibility of White House claims of Iranian government involvement in Iraq. For their part, journalists attempt to probe the validity of these claims. How are these competing concerns discursively managed?

RECONTEXTUALIZING PACE'S WORDS

Pace's remarks complicate the White House position that the Iranian government is directly involved in supplying EFPs to Iraqi insurgents. The excerpt below is

TABLE 1. *Timeline of events and press briefings/conference*

Sunday, 11 February 2007

- US military press briefing in Baghdad lays out evidence implicating Iran in supplying explosively formed projectiles (EFPs) to Iraqi insurgents

Monday, 12 February 2007

- White House press briefing by Tony Snow where issue of Iranian involvement in Iraq is discussed
- General Peter Pace, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, makes remarks that apparently contradict White House claims

Tuesday, 13 February 2007

- White House press briefing by Tony Snow where reporters probe the apparent discrepancy between the Bush administration and General Peter Pace's comments

Wednesday, 14 February 2007

- White House press conference given by President George W. Bush where further questions on administration claims of Iranian involvement in Iraq are probed
-

part of an exchange between Snow and a journalist (J1) over the nature of the administration's evidence in light of Pace's remarks.

Excerpt 1 (13 February 2007: press briefing with Tony Snow)

- J1: Okay, but isn't it really a question about whether or not you have strong evidence? When the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff seems to be saying something different than the White House, does that raise questions about how solid this evidence is?
- SNOW: No, because you've got a- y- you've got (.) You have uh uh explosively formed penetrators. He says they exist, correct?
- J1: I didn't see that in this particular quote, but I=
- SNOW: =Well no- no- He said that there's- there are weapons [coming from Iran]
- J1: [He says that] there are projectiles manufactured [in Iran. Yes, yes.]
- SNOW: [Okay, all right-] Okay, so there's no doubt about that, [correct?]
- J1: [Right.]
- SNOW: There are Iranians in Iraq. There's no question about that, [correct?]
- J1: [Sure.]
- SNOW: All right, so where's the credibility problem in terms of- Are you saying=

Reported speech frames allow speakers to incorporate the voice of 'experts' as corroboration for a position they stake out. In the first turn, the journalist cites Pace to question the strength of the evidence: 'the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff seems to be saying'. The journalist uses the words of Pace, a respected authority in the Washington establishment, to legitimize his question 'about whether or not you [i.e. the White House] have strong evidence' over Iranian government involvement. In his response, Snow works to shift the focus from that question to another – namely, evidence over the very existence of the projectiles.

In his work on the reformulation of questions in press conferences, Clayman (1993) notes that 'topics can change in a gradual or "stepwise" manner, through a series of small incremental moves (Sacks, 1971, 1972; Jefferson, 1984; Heritage, 1991)' (p. 177). Snow achieves this incremental shift of focus as he temporarily adopts the role of questioner and places the journalist in the role of responder. This gives Snow a certain amount of control over the direction of the talk. Importantly, Snow formulates his questions as yes/no interrogatives. As pointed out by Raymond (2006), yes/no interrogatives generally produce 'type-conforming responses'. That is, either a 'yes' or 'no' is expected to follow as a result of the procedural consequentiality of this type of adjacency pair. This allows the questioner to maneuver the responder into a reiteration of points he or she wishes to stress.

Snow begins to steer the journalist toward providing type-conforming responses to highlight aspects of Pace's words: 'You have explosively formed penetrators. He says they exist, correct?' While the journalist initially fails to register a type-conforming response, Snow regains control of the questioning. The journalist provides the expected answer in elaborated form – 'He says that there are projectiles manufactured in Iran. Yes, yes' – and then conforms with one word responses to Snow's following yes/no interrogatives ('Right' and 'Sure'). With this line of questioning, Snow achieves the journalist's assent on two key points. The first point is that 'there are weapons coming from Iran'. The second point is that 'there are Iranians in Iraq'. Moreover, as both Snow and the journalist agree, 'there's no question about that'.

In this exchange, Snow effectively highlights aspects of Pace's words that are not contestable. Namely, as stated by Pace: 'We know that the explosively formed projectiles are manufactured in Iran,' and 'It is clear that Iranians are involved, and it's clear that materials from Iran are involved.' Conversely, Snow erases aspects detrimental to his case, i.e. the very aspects the journalist attempts to highlight. These include the following from Pace's remarks: 'What I would not say is that the Iranian government, per se, knows about this,' and 'I would not say by what I know that the Iranian government clearly knows or is complicit.'

The representation of prior words involves these dual processes of *focalization* and *erasure*. By focalization, I mean the selective highlighting of aspects of a prior utterance that the speaker engaged in recontextualization wishes to make conspicuous. This is part of the general evaluative component of reported speech (Buttny and Williams, 2000), whereby the reporter lays out for the receiver what aspects of a prior utterance are deemed most important, or worthy of recognition. The converse of focalization, i.e. defocalization, is best represented by Irvine and Gal's (2000) concept of erasure. Erasure is the process whereby '[f]acts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme either go unnoticed or get explained away' (Irvine and Gal, 2000: 38). Focalization and erasure work to strengthen the preferred reading a speaker wishes to give the prior utterance.

ESTABLISHING ACCEPTABLE PREMISES

The result of focalization and erasure is that the reported speech enters the reporting context in very different ways depending upon who does the reporting (Buttny, 1998; Voloshinov, 1971). The divergent contextual framing of these words illuminates the different interested positions involved in the interaction. In choosing his focus, Snow reframes the journalist's initial question as one about the existence of EFPs in Iraq rather than one about Iranian government's involvement in supplying them. Moreover, Snow's sequence of yes/no interrogatives works to introduce, step-by-step, two key premises that lead to the deduction forwarded elsewhere by Snow in the briefings. That is, Snow's questions provide two premises of a syllogism: (1) EFPs exist in Iraq, and (2) Iranians are in Iraq. The conclusion posits that (3) therefore, the Iranian government must be directly responsible for the existence of EFPs in Iraq. Throughout the briefing, the journalists challenge the leap from the two premises to the conclusion. Snow evades this challenge by focusing attention back on the premises.

Goodwin (2005) discusses the need for arguers to design 'good' premises, i.e. premises that are conspicuous and accepted by others. To do this, arguers often reach for premises that are 'beyond criticism' (Goodwin, 2005). Snow effectively does this in Excerpt 1. Through his questioning of the journalist, Snow adopts a tactic that forces the journalist to conspicuously accept his premises. As Goodwin (2005) describes, such a method may force 'opponents to make admissions that will then be used against them' (p. 109). Snow highlights the fact that journalists cannot deny the basic premises he forwards even if they challenge the deduction that follows, as seen in the continuation of Excerpt 1 below.

Excerpt 1 (continued)

- J1: =In terms of the Iranian government being behind it.
[That's not-]
- SNOW: [Again, that's- that's-]
- J1: Nobody's disputing whether it's manufactured in Iran. That's what- You keep changing what my question is=
- SNOW: =No, no, I'm trying to clarify your question because I think this is a=
- J1: =I don't need it clarified. I'm trying to tell you wh- I know what my question is (.) and basically he's saying that he doesn't see evidence that the Iranian government is clearly [behind it.]

As Clayman (1993) points out, question reformulations may serve as 'a kind of clarification' (p. 165). However, they may also allow a government official to evade the question by shifting the topical agenda. The transparency of this evasive move is made evident by the journalist's response. While the journalist reiterates acknowledgment of Snow's premises – 'Nobody's disputing whether it's [the EFPs] manufactured in Iran' – he challenges Snow's evasion and attempts to move Snow back to what the journalist deems as the main issue: 'that he [Pace] doesn't see evidence that the Iranian government is clearly behind it [i.e. the supplying of the EFPs to Iraqi insurgents]'. While journalists attempt to push Snow beyond the undisputed aspects of the issue, Snow's moves are part of a broader strategy that involves a general retreat to their shared common ground.

RETREAT TO COMMON GROUND

In any discursive interaction, participants draw upon common ground to make sense of the interaction (Clark, 1996). Put another way, even instances of highly contested political discourse rest upon shared knowledge. Throughout the briefings, Snow reiterates the shared, uncontested knowledge among the White House and journalists.

Excerpt 2 (13 February 2007: press briefing with Tony Snow)

- SNOW: Let's go back through what we understand. We understand that these weapons came from Iran. No dispute about that. We know that Quds forces

have been within Iraq. No dispute about that. We know that the Quds forces are in fact, uh, p- part of the Revolutionary Guard, they're an instrument of the Iranian government. Nobody doubts that. So the question there- fore becomes (.) who wrote the orders? I'm not gon- we're not going to be able to tell you who signed the orders. But we do know that the Iranian government at that level has been involved.

As Sun Tzu conveys in *The Art of War*, it is important to choose the ground upon which one battles. Likewise, when involved in discursive competition, a retreat to common ground allows a speaker to confront an issue on more favorable terms. In Excerpt 2, Snow takes the journalists back to this place of shared understanding. That is, he highlights what both he and the journalists agree upon: 'what we understand'. Snow moves through these common understandings as one would read through a checklist. The parallel syntactic structure of this list is better conveyed by displaying the discourse in a poetic format, as follows:

We understand that these weapons came from Iran.
 No dispute about that.
 We know that the Quds forces have been within Iraq.
 No dispute about that.
 We know that the Quds forces are in fact part of the Revolutionary Guard . . .
 Nobody doubts that.

As Van Dijk (1991) points out, parallelism works to effectively lay out argumentative steps. Here, Snow lines up his arguments and checks them off. A concise affirmation follows each of the three points he mentions: 'no dispute about that' or 'nobody doubts that'. The next excerpt further illustrates this rhetorical move.

Excerpt 3 (13 February 2007: press briefing with Tony Snow)

SNOW: The fact is we went public with the evidence, and y- you got the pictures- again, nobody d- denies the armaments, nobody denies where they come from, nobody denies the importance of- of protecting our guys.

Again, parallel structure introduces and underscores uncontested elements of the discourse. These elements are packaged as a group of three: 'nobody denies the armaments, nobody denies where they come from, nobody denies the importance of protecting our guys'.

Snow's retreat to common ground works to manage the fallout over Pace's words. If Snow can shift focus from the controversial aspects of Pace's remarks to their agreed upon aspects, then he gains influence over the words' re-presentation in the current encounter as well as (at least potentially) subsequent ones. This allows him to 'lessen the crisis-element' of the event, 'minimize negative reactions' over apparently contradictory claims within the administration, and 'assert control' over the way the public may ultimately view the strength of the administration's case against Iran (Bhatia, 2006: 191). Moreover, once his premises are firmly established and agreed upon, he can move to further deductions, as seen in Excerpt 4.

Excerpt 4 (13 February 2007: press briefing with Tony Snow)

SNOW: I spoke with General Pace a bit this morning as well. And there is a core of information that everybody agrees upon. Number one, the- there- there's weaponry (.) that is of Iranian manufacture, that's in Iraq killing Americans. There are Iranians involved. There are Iranians on the ground. Our intelligence indicates (.) that the explosively formed penetrators, the EFPs, uh (.) in fact, are uh (.) directly associated with Quds forces, which are part of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, which are part of the government. Uh the Quds force is in fact an official arm of the Iranian government, and as such, the government bears responsibility (.) uh and accountability for its actions as you would expect of any sovereign government. Uh, and I think that's pretty clear, I mean General Pace again, if you go through his-

With reiteration of the 'core of information that everybody agrees upon', Snow moves from that undisputed territory to conclusions drawn from a series of deductive steps. Namely, he implicates the Iranian government via intermediary links in a chain of connections that start with 'Iranians on the ground' and then moves on to the 'Quds forces', 'the Iranian Revolutionary Guards', and finally the 'Iranian government'. The juxtaposition of these entities is enhanced through a recursive grammatical structure that introduces the synecdochical relationship each holds to the other: 'Quds forces, which are part of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, which are part of the government'. By virtue of these recursive relationships that stretch from 'Iranians on the ground' and through the intermediaries, Snow makes the case that 'the government bears responsibility'.

REFRAMING 'THE CENTRAL FACT'

As Snow repeatedly stresses the agreed-upon information, he lays the groundwork for redefining the 'central' or 'key fact' at issue, as seen in Excerpt 5.

Excerpt 5 (13 February 2007: press briefing with Tony Snow)

SNOW: There is no doubt about the central fact here, that you have an explosive device that's being used to kill Americans. So what everybody is trying to figure out now is what General Pace meant- It- it- it's now being devolved into a process argument that overlooks the key fact, which is that weaponry made its way from Iran into Iraq and it's killing Americans and we're going to try to stop the killing of Americans.

In his press briefing the day before, Snow referred to the key issue as 'a force protection matter' rather than an issue of whether Iran was supplying EFPs to Iraqi insurgents. In Excerpt 5, he reiterates this characterization by turning the focus from Pace's apparent contradiction with White House claims to 'the killing of Americans'. The 'killing of Americans' is another aspect of shared common ground. All those present at the press briefing acknowledge that Americans are dying; and presumably, nobody present supports or wishes it to happen. Snow's focus on American deaths acts as a red herring, and works to shift the interaction to uncontested ground. It also allows him to disqualify

the journalists' line of questioning as 'now being devolved into a process argument'. This metadiscursive characterization of the journalists' questions acts as a refutation device, which invalidates their discourse – in particular, their interpretation of the importance behind Pace's comments – and implies they have lost sight of the 'central fact'.

Snow elsewhere labels the exchanges with journalists a 'semantic dispute'. To say something is 'just semantics' is to highlight a lack of substance behind the words being spoken. It is to characterize an exchange as merely a 'word dispute'. In their examination of word disputes, Tracy and Ashcraft (2001) note that they are often 'assessed as frustrating, inconsequential, a waste of time, nit picking, and so on' (p. 297). Snow orients to this theme in Excerpt 6.

Excerpt 6 (13 February 2007: press briefing with Tony Snow)

SNOW: Let me tell you what (.) I think a lot of people are trying to whomp up a fight here that doesn't exist.

Snow effectively characterizes the journalists' questioning as trying to make something out of nothing. As he states, 'I think a lot of people are trying to whomp up a fight here that doesn't exist'. By contrast, Snow positions his own framing of the issue as a move away from an inconsequential dispute over words and towards discussion of a 'real' issue with substance.

At the end of Excerpt 7, Snow again characterizes the 'central fact' as that of American deaths. He strengthens the focus on this issue with a rhetorical question, highlighted here in bold.

Excerpt 7 (13 February 2007: press briefing with Tony Snow)

SNOW: Let me- let me pose you with two possibilities. But first, the intelligence indicates, that the Quds forces which are part of the- the Iranian (.) Revolutionary Guard, are- are associated with this. Now let me- let me ask a second question to you. **I don't know what's more frightening (.) the fact that the Quds forces would be operating with the knowledge of senior officials or without the knowledge of senior officials.** What is (.) beyond dispute (.) and what is of (.) primary importance here, and General Pace hasn't disagreed with it, we don't disagree, and frankly again I think you'll find upon further conversation- He's going to be in the hour-air for about twenty-three hours so give him a day. Uh (.) that- that in fact, you're gonna find that we generally agree on- we agree on the basics of the situation here which is- There are armaments that have made their way from Iran into Iraq. There are Iranian forces in Iraq. These weapons are being used to kill Americans and we'll do everything we can to protect our people.

The dual possibilities posed by Snow work to make journalists' questioning irrelevant. As Snow suggests, 'I don't know what's more frightening, the fact that the Quds forces would be operating *with* the knowledge of senior officials or *without* the knowledge of senior officials.' The implication is that either possibility is equally disturbing. This implication works in tandem with the assertion that the key issue is about the deaths of Americans and not about

the validity of White House accusations against Iran. Snow's characterization of the matter works to position the journalist's line of questioning as off topic; that is, as immaterial to the 'key fact' as Snow defines it. As seen earlier, Snow moves from 'what is beyond dispute' to the reframing of 'what is of primary importance here'.

RE-PRESENTATION AND ITERABILITY

Thus far in the analysis, I have focused on the dispute over General Pace's words in the press briefing with Snow on 13 February. This constitutes one aspect of the intertextual web that stretches across the events adumbrated earlier in Table 1. As seen up to this point, Snow and the journalists jockey over the meaning of Pace's words as they are recontextualized and differently represented in the press briefing. However, as stated earlier, meaning construction is an ongoing process that takes place across multiple encounters. The discursive competition over Pace's words plays out in the press at large, where statements made in reportage add to the layers of intertextual links that feed into the broader struggle over social meaning.

In Excerpt 8, Snow brings in a statement made in a *New York Times* editorial over the Iranian issue. This allows him to directly confront their representation of the administration's stance.

Excerpt 8 (13 February 2007: press briefing with Tony Snow)

SNOW: Now, there are two things you need to understand. Number one, you guys have been constantly- I- I- I did see what may be the dumbest lead of an editorial I've seen in a long time today in The New York Times which is, "We need to declare ourselves on Iran." We've declared it over and over. We're not going to war with them. Okay? Let me make that clear. So anybody who is trying to use this as the ((shifts to mocking voice)) "administration trying t- t- to, you know, lay the predicate for a war with Iran." ((shifts back to regular voice)) No. We're committed to diplomacy with Iran. But we are also committed to protecting our forces.

Reported speech frames may be used to recontextualize prior speech with 'varying degrees of reinterpretation' (Bakhtin, 1986: 91). When speakers report the words stated by others, those words are often accompanied by a meta-pragmatic framework that allows the speaker to comment on their meaning. Here, Snow reports the lead of an editorial in that day's *New York Times*, which (in his representation) said, 'We [the Bush administration] need to declare ourselves on Iran.' As Blommaert (2005) points out, the movement of texts across discursive encounters is often 'accompanied by a particular metadiscourse which provides a sort of "preferred reading" for the discourse' (p. 47). Snow metapragmatically frames this reported statement in a way that imbues it with his preferred reading of how it should be understood. Namely, he notes, 'it may be the dumbest lead of an editorial I've seen in a long time'.

Snow further strengthens his characterization of the *New York Times*' representation of the issue by shifting into the voice of administration critics. Through the use of paralinguistic cues that shift his voice quality to that of a

mocking tone (Günther, 1999), he introduces a typifying quote to depict the gist of what critics against the Bush administration had been alleging – namely, that the administration was attempting to ‘lay the predicate for war with Iran’. The typifying speech makes explicit the underlying tension of the press briefing. It makes explicit the accusations made by the administration’s critics, which form the backdrop to the questioning by journalists. By first setting up these opposing arguments, Snow is then able to directly refute them and reiterate the administration’s representation of the issue. As iterated by Bush and other officials in previous media appearances, Snow underscores their stance: ‘We’re committed to diplomacy with Iran.’ In this way, Snow draws upon the voices of opponents in a manner that introduces, as Kristeva (1980) describes, ‘a signification opposed to that of the other’s word’ (p. 73). He recontextualizes those words in a manner that imbues them with a very different evaluation (Buttny, 1997, 1998).

As Bakhtin (1986) stresses, ‘we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate’ what has come before us. The use of reported speech to metapragmatically frame and overtly contest previously uttered words is just one dimension of intertextuality, related to what Derrida (1977) terms *citationality*. I now shift focus to the way Snow’s representation of Pace’s words in the 13 February press briefing enters into its own intertextual chain. This aspect of intertextuality is captured under Derrida’s (1977) notion of *iterability* whereby utterances are repeated across different settings but without overt attention drawn to them as repetitions.

As seen earlier, the rhetorical question posed by Snow in Excerpt 7 works to deflect the line of questioning by journalists over the Bush administration’s (lack of) evidence of Iranian involvement in Iraq. Later in the 13 February press briefing, Snow reiterates those remarks, as seen in Excerpt 9.

Excerpt 9 (13 February 2007: press briefing with Tony Snow)

SNOW: Let me just- Again, this is- this is- here’s your rhetorical question. Uh, what’s- what’s more frightening? The notion that they are freelancing or that they’re not.

J: So they might be?

SNOW: No. I’m just- I’m just posing a question for your consideration.

As Bakhtin (1986) notes, ‘the utterance is related not only to preceding, but also to subsequent links in the chain of speech communication’ (p. 94). A well-formulated argument or a pithy representation often enters into a speech chain (Agha, 2003) where it is taken up by others and recontextualized in different settings. Excerpts 10 and 11 are drawn from Bush’s press conference a day later on 14 February. Faced with similar questions as Snow, Bush reiterates the rhetorical argument previously seen.

Excerpt 10 (14 February 2007: presidential press conference)

BUSH: What’s worse? (.) That the government knew? (.) Or that the government didn’t know? ((laughs)) (.) But the point I made in my initial speech uh in the- uh (.) in the White House (.) about Iraq was is that we know (.) they’re there (.) and we’re going to protect our troops.

Excerpt 11 (14 February 2007: presidential press conference)

BUSH: But m- my point is (.) what's worse? Them ordering it (.) and it happening? Or them (.) not ordering it and it's happening? ((laughs)) And uh and so we will continue to protect our troops.

Political discourse is filled with utterances that lend themselves to entextualization and reiteration. Slogans, sound bites and talking points are obvious examples of entextualized words that link to future contexts where they are taken up over and over to drive home a message. In a similar manner, a well-formulated argument may resurface again and again to emphasize a perspective in the struggle over the representation of an issue.

The intertextual linkage between Snow's press briefing and Bush's press conference establishes a type of speech chain whereby the rhetorical question is repeated by Bush with fidelity to the contextual meaning it held when previously used by Snow. In this way, as Kristeva (1980) describes, repetition takes 'what is imitated (repeated) seriously, claiming and appropriating it without relativizing it' (p. 73). The rhetorical question becomes a 'talking point' that works to position a particular representation of the issue as a widely accepted (or at least acceptable) truth claim. The result, therefore, is 'to formulate links across semi-otic events in ways that yield social formations' (Agha, 2005: 4). In this case, what is achieved is the furthering of a particular representation about the issue of Iranian involvement in Iraq.

Conclusion

As highlighted in this analysis, discursive competition over the representation of an issue necessarily connects words across multiple sites of interaction. The web of words involved in the construction of meaning weaves together various types of intertextual connections: from the overt contestation over prior claims made in the Baghdad briefing and previous words spoken by Pace to the press, and on to the way representations of these disputes are reiterated in subsequent press conferences and reportage. Discursive competition is an iterative process that stretches across multiple encounters and implicates various intersecting texts. In emphasizing the fact that any piece of discourse has a life beyond a singular, bounded context, I have focused on the way in which intertextual connections factor into the discursive interaction of the press conference. By examining the process of recontextualization in such encounters, we gain a glimpse of the way sociopolitical reality is negotiated on the micro-level of social interaction. Ultimately, it is by the cumulative traces laid down across intersecting speech events that particular representations of an issue gain sufficient inertia to become reality. In other words, it is through a series of interconnected discourse encounters that isolated truth claims or representations turn into larger narratives and shared cultural understandings.

In her examination of language and political economy, Irvine (1989) draws upon Putnam (1975) to introduce the notion of a *chain of authentication*, a type of

speech chain that imbues commodities, such as a gold ring, with value. In Irvine's explanation, an expert's attestation of that gold ring as authentic is replicated by others who relay that information in subsequent discursive encounters. In this way, a chain of authentication relies upon intertextual connections to reaffirm the value of an object. While Irvine (1989) primarily has in mind the value of material commodities, her concept is equally applicable to nonmaterial, verbal commodities such as the accounts and stories that come together to represent an issue or event from a particular perspective. The discursive competition over how to represent an issue draws upon and feeds into intersecting chains of authentication that work to recontextualize prior words 'without relativizing' them (Kristeva, 1980: 73) or to challenge those words by imbuing them 'with varying degrees of reinterpretation' (Bakhtin, 1986: 91). The result of the politics of recontextualization is to favorably position one representation of an issue over another – that is, to instill a given representation with cultural value so that it becomes shared or 'common sense' knowledge.

Therefore, the way in which the politics of recontextualization plays out impacts broader social understandings of the world. Is the Iranian government involved in supplying EFPs to Iraqi insurgents? Are such claims backed up by sufficient evidence? Do such claims constitute compelling justification for American military action against the nation of Iran? The answers to these questions and other related concerns depend upon the meanings that citizens and policy makers draw from the discursive competitions that take place across intersecting encounters such as those examined above. In order to understand the ultimate results of those competitions (i.e. the forms of knowledge that guide and support policy actions), one must look to instances of everyday interaction where representations are worked out. While this paper does not claim to provide analysis of the larger piece of this picture, its aim has been to provide a glimpse of the analytic starting point needed to ultimately understand the picture's smaller details.

Meaning making is an ongoing process that occurs across multiple contexts. Thus, the effective study of political discourse, especially as it relates to larger forms of sociocultural knowledge, requires an analytic emphasis on intertextuality. Political discourse is, like Bakhtin (1981) says of the novel, 'a *system* of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other' (p. 47). The effectiveness of rhetoric, therefore, comes from the interpretive web that it enters into.

NOTE

1. I place the word *original* in quotes because as evidenced in Becker's (1995) notion of *linguaging*, as well as pointed out by literary theorists (Barthes, 1977; Derrida, 1976; Kristeva, 1980), any text is always comprised of prior texts in an unbounded chain so that 'the intertextual dimensions of a text cannot be studied as mere "sources" or "influences"' (Allen, 2000: 36; cf. Derrida's 1978 notion of *différance*).

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APPENDIX

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

.	(period)	Falling intonation
?	(question mark)	Rising intonation
,	(comma)	Continuing intonation
-	(hyphen)	Marks an abrupt cut-off
<u>word</u>	(underlining)	Indicates stress/emphasis placed on word
[]	(brackets)	Simultaneous or overlapping speech
=	(equal sign)	Latching, or contiguous utterances
(.)	(period in parentheses)	Pause in flow of speech
()	(empty parentheses)	Unintelligible speech
((laughs))	(double parentheses)	Transcriber's comments/description of non-speech activity
bold	(words in bold)	Salient features discussed in the analysis