A. Discourse analysis

1. What is discourse?

If we (rather arbitrarily) divide the linguistic study of language into three layers, we will find at the lowest level the study of phonetics and phonology, at the next level, the study of morphology (or grammar), and at the third level, the study of syntax.

Semantics is usually treated as a fourth level, but we can show that meaning exists before language by looking at a child’s prelinguistic behavior. If he stretches out his hand to point at a lollipop and says *u, u, u*, we see that he knows what a lollipop is. He just doesn’t yet have the word *lollipop* in his vocabulary, nor does he have the linguistic competence to say, ‘May I have a lollipop?’ Therefore we may treat semantics as a field of *meanings* (which are usually expressed in speech acts).

Discourse is what we get when language is used in communication between people. Usually we do not consider communication that does not involve competent linguistic speech as discourse, even if the communication is successful. If a child stamps his foot and starts crying when he is told to come in for supper, the meaning *I don’t want to* may be inferred, but it has not yet been expressed in discourse. However, sign language is also discourse and so are text messages.

Discourse then consists of larger linguistic units than those dealt with in traditional linguistic analysis, and involves issues of linguistic performance and sociolinguistics. By communicating in linguistically competent speech, the speaker places himself in a particular society with its cultural norms, values and symbols.

Topics usually considered under discourse analysis include: appropriateness, cohesiveness, rhetorical force, topic/subtopic structure, differences between written and spoken speech, register, metaphor and so on.

2. Differences between written and spoken speech

Both spoken and written records can be treated as discourse, but spoken
language is usually quite different from written language. Three major differences are:

(i) spoken language contains many incomplete sentences, or sequences of phrases,

(ii) spoken language contains very little subordination (leddsetninger),

(iii) active declarative verbs are normally used in preference to passives. In English statements beginning with *it* are less frequent in spoken English, although *det*-ledd statements are common in spoken Norwegian. Relative words which link clauses (*who, which*) are infrequent. Brown and Yule provide the following written and spoken descriptions of a rainbow.

(Example 1 on handout from Brown and Yule p. 18)

We see that we are dealing with very different notions of what a sentence consists of. One of the challenges in transcribing oral speech into written speech is to decide where to punctuate, and in Example 1, short and long junctures are written with plus signs and double plus signs.

Highly formal oral speech is often similar to written speech. Here we are talking about a difference in register. We may compare a museum guide’s lecture, or a sermon in church, with an informal conversation in the kantine.

3. Context

Much discourse refers to information which can only be interpreted by reference to context. Take the following instructions (Example 2): “Det kan komme varm damp opp når du åpner døren. Unngå brannskader ved å åpne døren forsikligt.” How much sense do these instructions make if one does not know which user’s manual they are taken from?

In interpreting discourse we also infer contextual information which is part of knowledge about the world or a particular culture. If one of my Pakistani women students tells me (Example 3), “Jeg kan ikke komme til timen fordi jeg må passe på barnet,” I can infer that (a) she is married, (b) has a child. It would also be possible that (c) she is baby-sitting, but what I know about Pakistan tells me that (a) and (b) are the correct inferences.
This shows us that context is about the relationship between two speakers, or between the writer of a text and its audience, and both belong to a specific time and place. Hymes lists the following features of context which contribute to identifying a speech event:

(a) **addressor** and **addressee**. We can see that the producer of the dishwasher is the addressor of the information about the hot steam. The user is the addressee. Information about these roles may be encoded linguistically. In South Asian languages, the relative *rank* of these two roles is encoded, and even the vocabulary may be different:

**Example 4**

**Addressor:** *kyā āp dāvat mē taśrīf lā sakte hai?* ‘Can you come to the party?’

**Addressee:** *jī hā inśā allāh maĩ aũ gā*, ‘Yes, I’ll come, God willing.’

The addressor uses the polite phrase *taśrīf lānā*, ‘to bring one’s honorable self’, but the addressee responds simply, ‘I will come’.

In most communications between addressor and addressee, we need to look at issues of **power** and **solidarity**. Power is an issue when the relationships are assymetrical, for example in a communication between a teacher and a student, where the teacher marks the student’s work, but the student has only a limited opportunity to mark the teacher’s work. Solidarity has to do with shared membership in social groups. If all the students in IKOS hold a meeting, they are acting in solidarity, but if at that meeting they elect one representative to the instittuttstyre, they are negotiating power.

Suppose the addressee is not a person, but a group of people, perhaps all the television viewers of a particular channel at a particular moment. Then we have an **audience**, which can also contribute to the specification of the speech event. For example, when reporting on the siege in 2004 by American troops of the Iraqi town of Falluja, the BBC and CNN used a different choice of vocabulary to communicate to different audiences:

**Example 5**

Fallujah is *sealed off* (BBC anchor)

Fallujah is *locked down* (CNN anchor)
‘Locked down’ is an Americanism which does not yet appear in the Oxford English Dictionary. The only other example of the use of lock with the preposition down, which I have been able to identify, is the termination of a prison revolt by locking the prisoners in their cells (a lock-down). The prisoners have been locked down. However this term seems to be spreading, as I also collected:

The embassy is locked down (CNN anchor)

This would appear to mean that the embassy is protected by barriers against truck bombs and by security checks. This usage points to CNN’s primarily American audience, whereas the BBC with a more global audience uses the more common (and neutral) term seal off. CNN’s usage may also be a feature of staging, which we shall come to later.

(b) topic. This deserves a section of its own, which we will take up next.

(c) setting. Where and when the discourse takes place, and the posture, gestures and facial expressions of the participants.

(d) channel. Speech, writing, signing and so on.

(e) code. Language, dialect, register of language.

(f) message-form. Chat, debate, sermon, interview, negotiation, speech, love-letter etc.

(g) event. Chat in a pub, debate in a classroom, sermon in a church, speech at a formal dinner etc.

4. Topic and content

Topic is what is being talked about in discourse. It is easier to informally describe a topic of discourse than to make a theoretical analysis of it. What is the topic of the following conversation in the kantine of Niels Treschows hus?

Example 6

Addressor: Kan du gjøre meg en liten tjeneste...? (Holds up a cracked raw egg)

Addressee: (Looks at the egg with some confusion)

Addressor: Ved en feil har jeg kommet med et ukokt egg i dag. Kan du legge det i kokende vann i et par minutter?
Addressee: (Thinks for a few seconds, then smiles) Vi kan gi deg et kokt egg, og så ta ditt og bruke det senere. Vi har det travelt...
Addressor: Tusen takk, det var hyggelig!
Addressee: Vi prøver å gjøre det hyggelig for våre gjester.

Here it is relatively easy to identify the boundaries of the discourse, which begin with my asking the staff for a favor, and end with their acknowledging my thanks. The topic, at first glance, seems to be the raw egg and what to do with it, but when we look more closely, it is also about the kantine staff doing me a favor. If replacing raw eggs were a routine activity, there would be no need for the extra politeness. It is also about how busy the staff are, and how they nevertheless try to help their customers. It may also be observed that the topic differs slightly according to the viewpoint of the speaker: my topic is asking for help (with a cracked egg), the kantine staff’s topic is finding a way to help a customer.

**Topic framework** can also be stated here: Conversation between Participant R (60+ years, American, female), and Participant K (40+ years, female, Norwegian, in location P (Niels Treschows kantine) at time T (19 April 2004).

Some writers suggest that it is easier to identify **topic-shift** than to identify topic itself, because when we find the markers of topic-shift, we find a structural basis for dividing up discourse into series of smaller units. It has been suggested that paragraph breaks mark topic shifts, but as we see from the egg example, paragraph breaks do not help at all here. The topic subtly shifts throughout the conversation as the speakers react to each other.

Furthermore topic shift is often employed as a device by speakers, to make a point (vi har det travelt), to introduce new information (vi har et egg som allerede er kokt), or simply to play with language. Consider the following:

**Example 7** (from NRK 1, Frokost TV 20.4.04, following the weather forecast):
Anne Grosvold: Været er halvvårlig. (Topic: weather)
Øystein Bakke: Halvlorig? … (joking)
Anne Grosvold: Ikke alvorlig vær! Halv-vårlig, halv-vårlig.
(Topic: language)
5. Thematisation and Staging

These have to do with how the speaker introduces his topic. His first sentence, or possibly a title, influences the interpretation of everything that follows. A good example of how thematization foregrounds certain issues in discourse, and influences the entire content of a debate can be seen in the BBC talk show *Hard Talk* (Example 8).

In Tim Sebastian’s interview of Syed Shahabuddin, the leader of the main umbrella organization for Muslim groups in India, on 14 April 2004, he began the interview by saying, *You have labelled the ruling BJP party as the enemy. If that’s true, the enemy of Muslims, why are Muslims so badly organized in this country, against the [indistinct]?* Sebastian has claimed a priori several points: the thematized referent is “the Indian Muslims”, that Shahabuddin sees the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as their enemy, and that the Muslims are poorly organized as a voting bloc. By this aggressive thematisation Sebastian puts Shahabuddin in a defensive position, from which he struggles to escape throughout the interview. Shahabuddin must first refute Sebastian’s leading question:

*I never said that the BJP was the enemy of the Muslims! I have said the BJP ideology is anti-national, and anti-Muslim, and anti-poor.*

Sebastian repeats his thematisation: *You have said, on March the 18th, and you were quoted on the Indo-Asian News Service as saying, “Consider the vote as a stone in your hand, and the BJP as your enemy.*

*Shahabuddin: Ha ha ha! That’s a way of putting a case, and you have to use your vote to defeat, defeat the BJP. But that’s a simile. You don’t take that as a personal declaration of enmity*

Sebastian continues his leading questions, until Shahabuddin manages to assert his own point:

*Sebastian: Mr. Shahabuddin, the fact is that if Muslims did vote in large numbers for the BJP, they would have a huge effect on its policies, so why not?  
Shahabuddin: No sir, you’re completely wrong, the BJP is not just a political party. The BJP is an ideological front of an organization called the*
RSS, and the RSS has a fixed ideology. They have [indistinct] on that ideology for the last eighty years.

Sebastian has accomplished staging: “Staging is a dimension of prose structure which identifies the relative prominence given to various segments of prose discourse. The definition of staging permits the inclusion of rhetorical devices like lexical selection, rhyme, alliteration, repetition, use of metaphor, and markers of emphasis” (Brown and Yule: 134).

In his introduction, Sebastian refers to the Indian elections, names his guest and asks “…why is he telling everyone to vote for the opposition?” This functions as a sort of title or starting point for the debate, which we expect to be about Indian Muslim voters in the current Indian election. We do not expect the debate to be about the history of Indian Muslims during the past 50 years, even though Shahabuddin tries to take the debate in that direction by appealing to the powerful symbol of the Muslim statesman, nationalist and scholar Abul Kalam Azad:

Sebastian: The problem is, that you have 150 million Muslims in this country, no proper organization, no political party to stand up for them, you simply have your rhetoric and nothing else.

Shahabuddin: The Muslims intentionally decided, on the advice of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in 1947, not to have a political party.

Sebastian is unimpressed: Why?

Shahabuddin: Because they know that the political party led to the separation, led to the partition of India. It was the greatest tragedy in my opinion, that ever happened to the Muslims of the subcontinent.

Sebastian resists this attempt at thematisation: But that was more than 50 years ago! If you want to have representation, you have to have a political party!

We also do not expect that the debate will be about the BJP, although Shahabuddin attempts to bring this topic to prominence, responding to an opening provided by Sebastian:

Sebastian: Why do you dismiss Muslims who vote for the BJP? ...
Shahabuddin: I only ...caution them, look what BJP stands for. What BJP has done or has not done for you. The BJP was responsible for the demolition of the Babri Masjid. The BJP was responsible for this genocide in Gujarat. The BJP is responsible for the virtual communalization of the state ...

Shahabuddin also manages to thematise himself, as a leader of Muslim Indians, by introducing a sort of “royal I”, as a thematised referent, assuming the role of spokesman for all Indian Muslims: All I want is equality and justice and dignity. I don’t want separateness ... I work in the same field, work in the same factory, work in the same army, work in the same police force. We are all one. He repeats this thematised referent again later, while discussing the Babri Masjid: There are a half a million masjids in this country, and surely my place and dignity is not associated only with the fate of the Babri Masjid. I lost ten thousand masjids during the partition days. So what?

In political debate, the American linguist George Lakoff defined this kind of staging – the assigning of relative prominence to some segments of discourse – as framing. Framing is the construction of cognitive structures, that is ideas represented in vocabulary, that define public debate. If for example, one political party succeeds in getting the public to call tax cuts “tax relief”, they have succeeded in associating tax cuts with a rescue story in which there is a hero (the reliever), a victim (the person afflicted by taxes), a crime (the affliction and a rescue (the relief). It’s not possible to think about “relief” without thinking (at some level) about a reliever, an affliction, or a rescue. There’s no logical need to call tax cuts “tax relief”. We could equally well call them “reduction of social expenses” because taxes are used to pay for benefits society needs, such as highways, schools, pensions and medical care. But if the words tax and relief are regularly paired in the media, the debate has been staged and opponents of tax cuts have trouble arguing their case. In the USA, even the Democrats talk about tax relief, although in effect it forces them to argue that victims should not be rescued. The only response that works, according to Lakoff, is to reframe – redefine the thematized referent and stage the debate afresh. This concept has now come into general use, because in a
debate between Wolf Blitzer and two politicians on CNN last October, all of them used the term *framing* to refer to their choice of vocabulary.

Framing is a propaganda technique. In addition to the definition phase, it relies on two techniques: (1) frequent repetition of heavy words (words with intertextual associations), and (2) exclusion from discourse of dissonant information (any news that makes one question the frame). George W. Bush’s acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention in August 2004 contains examples of these techniques:

**Example 9**

“And we are working to advance liberty in the broader Middle East, because freedom will bring a future of hope, and the peace we all want. And we will prevail.

“…Free societies in the Middle East will be hopeful societies, which no longer feed resentments and breed violence for export. Free governments in the Middle East will fight terrorists instead of harboring them, and that helps us keep the peace.

“…The terrorists are fighting freedom with all their cunning and cruelty because freedom is their greatest fear and they should be afraid, because freedom is on the march.

The claim was that the societies in both Iraq and Afghanistan had become free, or inevitably soon would be. There was no mention of the continued fighting in Iraq, or of Taliban-sponsored bombings and kidnappings in Afghanistan, because this news would be dissonant – it would question the *staging* of the speech. Note also that words which contrast with the framing are paired with words which have negative associations: “*terrorists* are fighting freedom with all their *cunning* and *cruelty*”, *unfree* societies *harbor* terrorists and *breed* violence. Note also the rhyme: *feed* and *breed*, and the alliteration: *freedom, future, fight, feed, fear*.

Staging can also be done by invoking heavy symbols, as we see in a Pakistani political poster. The text below the candidate’s photograph is a two-line verse in the *ghazal* form:
Example 10

\[\text{jab gulistān par khizān āī to khūn ham ne diyā} \]
\[\text{jab bahār āī to kahte haĩ terā kām nahī} \]

When autumn fell on the garden, it was we who shed blood
When spring came, they said, This is none of your business

Autumn coming to the rose garden is a well-known metaphor for hard times. Shedding one’s own blood is a metaphor for making a sacrifice. The candidate is saying: “when the country had bad days, we made sacrifices to keep it alive | when things improved, they say ‘get lost’.” These symbols, and the ghazal form itself, belong to the high Urdu culture in Pakistan: Pakistani national identity, Islam, and values inherited from Mughal culture. However the candidate is a tribal from Kohistan, a remote mountain valley where high Urdu culture never had much influence.

By choosing to present his views in ghazal form and with ghazal symbolism, the politician has foregrounded the values traditionally associated with Pakistani national identity: high Urdu culture, Islam, and values inherited from Mughal culture, and staged himself not as a tribal candidate from Kohistan, but as a Pakistani, a Muslim, and an educated inheritor of Mughal culture.

This text is also an example of *intertextuality*. The great poets of Urdu (who are still quoted by politicians) used the symbols *rose garden, autumn, spring*. Politicians borrow such heavy symbols as discourse strategies because they are already meaningful in Pakistani culture.

With the tools of thematization, staging and framing at hand, we can return to Example 5 (the CNN broadcast) and ask whether the anchor has intentionally staged a biased account of the siege in Falluja by using to describe it a term hitherto been reserved for describing a prison riot. We can’t prove that this is the case, but we certainly have a *lexical* basis for asking the question.

The structure of discourse, both the structure of the *content*, and the *thematic organization* of the text, can also be analyzed. At this level, the topic can be more clearly identified and the coherence (or lack of coherence) of the
text can be accounted for. (As we saw with the egg, this is difficult to do with conversational discourse, in which the speakers keep reacting to each other. We also saw in the *Hard Talk* interview, that the speakers kept trying to thematise different points, and so the interview had a rather loose structure.) We look now at the way information is structured in newspaper texts, where nobody is interrupting.

6. Information structure

This topic focuses on the smallest units of discourse structure. How is information packaged in such small structures? What resources are available to speakers and writers for indicating the status of information they introduce? A great deal of theoretical discussion has gone into trying to determine how different types of information are marked in discourse. Despite the obvious fact that many languages use indefinite and definite articles, as well as deictic pronouns, to mark the difference between new information, and information which has already been given or which may be inferred, no theory is able to predict this reliably from the evidence provided only by linguistic clues.

Nevertheless, let’s take a look at an article from VG to see how new information and old information (i.e., information which has already been given or may be inferred), is marked by indefinite/definite articles in Norwegian and by pronouns.

**Example 11, article from VG (22.4.04, p. 16)**

New information (*et flertall, et rimelig streikegrunnlag, en meningsmåling, blant nordmenn*) is introduced by an indefinite article, or no article. Information which may be inferred – including some cases where only one such entity exists (*befolkningen, Transportarbeiderforbundet, resultatet, arbeidsgiversiden*), is introduced with a definite article, as is information which has already been given (*meningsmålingen, konflikten*). A noun representing “old” information may also be replaced by deictics: *dette* refers back to (is **anaphoric** to) *et eget tillegg for fagorganiserte*, and *de spurte* refers back to the inferred respondents.
Some linguists claim that intonational prominence is associated with new information. If this is true, then when the article is read aloud, information in items which are preceded by indefinite articles should have a more prominent pitch and more loudness than information preceded by a definite article. We can try to find out whether this works for Norwegian if one of the members of the class would like to read the first paragraph of the article aloud. Everyone listen, please to see which words have the most prominent pitch and are loudest.

(Experiment)

7. Reference and coherence
The features which I have identified above are one of the principles of connectivity which bind a text together and give it coherence. We assume that in order for discourse to be identified as a text, it must have cohesion – everything in the text develops the topic in a meaningful way. The links between items of information are marked in the text by definite articles, deictic pronouns, and so on.

There are other ways that connectivity in texts is marked. One is conjunctive markers, such as and, but, so, then and their synonyms. If we look at another article on the transport strike in VG (Example 12), we see that the third and sixth paragraphs are connected to the preceding ones by conjunctions: men, dermed. Lexical replacement of new information by words which (in the context of the text) have the same meaning is another device by which texts are connected: In the sixth paragraph, det gamle kooperativet replaces Coop-butikkene in the second. In the tenth, de streikerammede matkjedene replaces Ica Norge, Norgesgruppen og Rema 1000 in the fourth.

Deictic pronouns of course also link information and bind a text together: In the seventh paragraph, de refers back to kundene. We can observe the following co-referential chains and chains of lexical collocation:

Coop-butikkene — det gamle kooperativet — Coop-kjeden — vi, de streiken — konflikten — den aktuelle situasjonen
Is coherence necessary for discourse to be a text? We can point to written discourse in which important elements of cohesiveness are missing, but which we would still like to regard as texts. The opening paragraphs of many thriller novels often leave out information that we need to interpret a text, such as who is experiencing the events described, where the events are taking place, why they are taking place, and so on. The writer deliberately leaves out referents in order to create suspense – he wants us to read on in order to find out what has happened.

See also the following texts, which are little more than lists:

**Example 13 (Advertisement in Aftenposten)**

1. U. etg: Entré/gang, nyere kjøkken med spiseplass, spisestue/stue med utgang til storegen hage med sol fra kl. 10:30 til den går ned om kvelden, delevis flislagt bad/wc, soverom med skaplass, innvendig bod.
   Fellesvaskeri (ikke nødvendig å bruke da det er mulighet på bad)

**Example 14 (Horoscope)**

— However to the interested reader they are not random assortments of unrelated information, but meaningful texts, despite having few cohesive ties. This shows that reader interpretation is also an important criterion in defining texts. Texts are discourse which readers or hearers treat as texts, and the reader or hearer supply contextual information, such as the fact that the sun rises in the morning and sets at night, that a fellesvaskeri is a facility for washing clothes, or that *Jomfru* is a sign of the zodiac. These texts illustrate three aspects of interpreting meaning in discourse:

a) the communicative function (how the message is construed, here: this is an advertisement)

b) socio-cultural knowledge (what is a fellesvaskeri?)

c) determining the inferences to be made.

Labov argues that there are rules of interpretation which relate what is said to what is done. Thus an appropriate response to the advertisement in Aftenposten is to find out how much the rent is, or when there is a visning. An inappropriate
response would be to email Aftenposten to complain that delvis is misspelled. Anyone who moves to a new country knows that it can take years to learn the rules of interpretation. For example, the first time one goes into a tea shop in Peshawar Bazaar, one might be surprised to find carpets rather than tables and chairs. The placement of discourse in a particular society with its cultural norms and knowledge has to be taken into account. This information allows us to fill in the gaps in some types of discourse:

“Can you answer the telephone?”
“I’m in the loo.”

The fact that the sun rises and sets is more general knowledge, which we may call **knowledge of the world**. But a reader new to Norway might not know that the time the sun starts shining on the garden varies greatly according to the season. Researchers in artificial intelligence have spent a great deal of effort on trying to determine how this background knowledge is stored and accessed, and on formulating models for this process.

**Inferences** are what we make when we make the connection between two spoken utterances or two sentences in a text. Researchers have studied how long it takes for readers to make this connection when the referent is mentioned in the first sentence, and when it is substituted.

Example 15

*Mary got some beer out of the car.*
*The beer was warm.*

*Mary got some picnic supplies out of the car.*
*The beer was warm.*

— In the second case, we need a little extra time to figure out that the beer is one of the picnic supplies: to make a **bridging assumption** which fills in a missing link. Similarly in the second VG article (Example 12), we must take a second or two to supply the information that *streiken rammer tre matkjeder som heter Ica Norge, Norgesgruppen og Rema 1000.*

Even more challenging, for someone who does not work in Urdu, is the inference that must be made in the following.
Example 16

*Do you have a Platts I can borrow?*

*Yes, it’s on the bottom shelf.*

Here the missing links are: *Platts is the author of a commonly-used Urdu dictionary. The dictionary is usually referred to by its author, rather than its title, and you may borrow it.* This shows that inference (a) depends on context (b) is specific to the text, and (c) is located in the individual reader or hearer. A strictly linguistic study of inference is not powerful enough to explain most texts that we typically process, which assume background knowledge the speaker or writer assume that his hearer or reader has

**B. Propaganda Analysis**

Both discourse and propaganda have roots in the study of *rhetoric* (meaning “the language of orators” in Greek), which began in ancient Athens around 500 B.C. Rhetoric is the art of using language to persuade an audience that one’s argument is correct. A politician running for office, or a courtroom lawyer trying to convince a jury, uses rhetorical techniques, such as solemn or stirring language, logical argument, logical or illogical metaphor, honour and flattery. (Example 9, George Bush’s speech, is an sample of rhetoric.)

Propaganda differs from ordinary discourse in that it is deliberate and systematic, and is designed to influence how we think and what we do. During World War II, for example, the film industries of both the Allies and the Axis made feature *films*, *documentaries* and *newsreels* which were intended to motivate citizens to be patriotic and support the war effort in various ways; and the U.S. War department spent more than $50 million on film production. Other means of propaganda are *speeches*, *pamphlets*, *posters* or *symbols* (for example, national flags, the crucifix, the Islamic crescent, the hammer and sickle, the swastika), *music* (national anthems, the opening bars of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, which match the Morse Code for the letter V; Sibelius’ Finlandia), the use of loaded or heavy words and *slogans* (‘freedom’, Arabic/Persian/Urdu *zulm* ‘oppression’; ‘liberté, égalité, fraternité’ (the slogan of the French
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Revolution), ‘power to the people’ (a socialist slogan). Even dress and hairstyles can send a message.

_Doublespeak_ is a term we associate with propaganda. Doublespeak is a new word, often a _euphemism_, meaning the same thing as an old word whose associations make it unsuited for framing discourse. For example, when an Al Qaeda team blew a hole in the ship U.S.S. Cole, the U.S. called it an ‘attack’, but when President Clinton subsequently ordered a cruise missile strike on Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, American spokesmen called it ‘retaliation’. The people in the camps called it an attack. If a country mistakenly bombs its own people during a war, they call it ‘collateral damage’, but the press calls it ‘friendly fire’. ‘Damage’ is a euphemism for injury and death.

‘Ethnic cleansing’ is another example of doublespeak, comparing the forced removal of a population through massacre of civilians and burning of dwellings, to a kind of purification. It has lost its euphemistic power, and governments now speak of “population transfer”. Governments and big corporations are particularly clever at inventing doublespeak.

Certain actions or deeds are also propaganda. When the Taliban publicly executed condemned prisoners, the Afghan public got the message that they should refrain from behavior that might result in executions. The image of an airliner striking one of the Twin Towers is a powerful propaganda tool, although it seems that different publics get different messages. After the lead singer of the Dixie Chicks said between songs at a concert, “Just so you know, we’re ashamed the President of the United States is from Texas,” the Texas company Clear Channel (friendly to Bush) encouraged former fans to bring their Dixie Chick CD’s to be crushed under a bulldozer. The company was conducting _propaganda by deed_ (sending a message that dissent would not be tolerated).

We distinguish between expression of opinion on one hand and propaganda on the other, as well as between propaganda and education. This is not always easy. For example, in 2003 the U.S. mounted a propaganda campaign through the media, speeches by politicians and officials, and _disinformation_, claiming
that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. But when an acquaintance assured me in 2004 that the weapons consist of germ cultures hidden in thermoses, and were still there under the desert, he was a private citizen expressing his own opinion.

Education is supposed to present information based on evidence and to discuss various sides of an issue, but education, particularly at the lower levels, is also used to socialize children, and governments often incorporate propaganda in textbooks. In Pakistan, when General Zia used the politics of Islamization to create nationalism and solidarity in the country, Islamic Studies was made obligatory for all children, not just for Muslims; and the schoolbooks were rewritten to glorify Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Islam, war and the military, as well as to foster hate for India and for Hindus. There are similar efforts aimed at banning the teaching of evolution in American schools, which is usually seen as advancing the agenda of the Christian right.

As the above examples show, governments are in the best position to conduct propaganda campaigns, and we usually think of propaganda as a government activity. However corporations can, and do, also conduct propaganda campaigns through advertising, lobbying and funding of front organizations. For example, ExxonMobil (the oil company) funded (until very recently) 124 organizations that disagree with the scientific consensus about global warming, and promoted their publications on internet sites, in an effort to convince the public that global warming is either a myth (‘junk science’), or if it is happening, is actually beneficial to plants and animals. Some of the organizations funded include well-known conservative think tanks. Their reports are picked up around the world and dominate the media debate on climate change. This is a deliberate and systematic campaign to influence how the public thinks about climate change.

Philip Morris (the cigarette manufacturer) tried to discredit the US Environmental Protection Agency’s 1992 report on the harmful effects of passive smoking by hiring a public relations company, which set up a fake citizens’ group called The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition. The
purpose of this group’s public relations campaign was to demonstrate that tobacco lobby criticism of the passive smoking report was *sound science*, and the report itself was *junk science*. As a result, it took state and local governments years to ban indoor smoking in the U.S.

The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition also now denies that climate change is taking place, calling environmentalists ‘Nazis’, ‘terrorists’ and ‘communists’ in a typical propaganda ploy of associating one’s opponents with negative symbols. The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition has received large sums of money from both Exxon and Philip Morris, and the man who runs it, Steve Milloy, has set up two new organizations, the Free Enterprise Education Institute and the Free Enterprise Action Institute (‘free enterprise’ is doublespeak for ‘capitalism’), complete with advisory board, letterhead notepaper and all. Milloy writes a weekly column on ‘junk science’ for Fox News.\(^1\) When one bears in mind that many conservative think tanks have had a major impact on U.S. government policy in the past six years, and that (for example) President Bush took the U.S. out of the Kyoto agreement, it is clear that corporations effectively use propaganda to persuade not only private citizens, but governments as well.

Distinctions are made between the type of propaganda. In white propaganda, the propagandist and his backers are known, and we tend to accept it as true. Various speeches and reports by the U.S. Government after 9/11 can be considered white propaganda. For example, we are supposed to accept the 9/11 Commission Report as fact, but there are experts and scholars who claim that it contains omissions and distortions, that it is actually propaganda. Some would call it gray propaganda: distortion of the truth.

In black propaganda, the propagandist and his backers are secret or disguised. The propaganda of Exxon and Philip Morris is black propaganda, because they distanced themselves from the front organizations they set up to spread their message, funding them, but not taking credit for their publications.

\(^1\)George Monbiot in the *Guardian Weekly*, September 29-October 5 2006.
Other types of black propaganda include clandestine radio stations, or statements by editors, experts or politicians who have been bribed to make them. When the Americans aired atrocity stories about the Iraqis in Kuwait before the 1991 Gulf War, that was black propaganda. It was later revealed that the story about Iraqi troops snatching babies from incubators and leaving them to die was put out by the American public relations firm Hill and Knowlton, which was hired by the Kuwaiti government in exile. As long as Iraq was at war with America’s enemy Iran during the 1980’s, the Americans supported it, and even led Saddam Hussain to think that it would get Kuwait as a reward if it defeated Iran. The 1991 Gulf War was such a sudden switch in policy, that the US government needed to convince the American public that attacking Iraq was justified.

Psychological warfare is a kind of propaganda that is used to demoralize enemy troops and make them surrender, or demoralize enemy populations. When enemy groups take prisoners of war and put them on television to show how well (or badly) they are being treated, that is psychological warfare. Before the 1991 Gulf War, Saddam Hussain aired his opinions in live television broadcasts in which American prisoners of war were also shown. He not only got air time he wouldn’t otherwise have got, but projected a threatening image.

Censorship is also a form of propaganda. Governments can decide which information its citizens may or may not have, in the interests of national security. Although we in Norway do not experience much censorship, it’s worth noting that the European or American public does not have much access to videotapes by Osama bin Laden or Ayman Al Zawahiri. In the US, news media voluntarily agreed to limit public release of videotapes of bin Laden at Condoleezza Rice’s request. Even in Europe, only short excerpts are broadcast, and the reason usually given is that they may contain a coded message to planners of another attack. However if terrorists show western prisoners, their broadcasts usually are not censored (psychological warfare again).

The word “propaganda” has negative connotations, and we like to think that western democracies do not conduct propaganda. That is something done
by communist regimes or rogue states. Western democracies “shape public discourse” or “capture the rhetorical high ground”. I would like to finish by taking a case example of how the American government “shaped public discourse” to gain support for its global war on terror. This rhetoric was deliberate and systematic, and succeeded in getting the US Congress (if not the United Nations) to rubber stamp its policies, getting the press to spread its message, persuading most of the public to accept restrictions on civil liberties, and suppressing dissent. How did it accomplish all this? These communications focused on four main themes, which were repeated over and over again.

1. *It construed events in terms of binary contrasts*, rather than a spectrum of complex realities. One of these binaries was good versus evil. Another was *security* versus *peril*. An example is Bush’s January 2002 State of the Union Address:

   “States like these and their terrorist allies, constitute an *axis of evil*, arming to *threaten the peace* of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing *danger*.

David Domke has analyzed the content of Bush’s communications over a period of 26 months, and presents the statistical results in his book *God Willing? Political Fundamentalism in the White House, the “War on Terror”, and the Echoing Press*. Example (17) on your handout shows what percent of paragraphs in Bush’s communications refer to *good* and *evil*, and to *security* and *peril*, before and after 9/11. The words themselves need not be mentioned; a synonym is just as effective; *threat* is a synonym of *peril*, and “American values” (freedom, liberty, democracy) count as *good*. Example (18) shows that the press picked up Bush’s message and communicated it to a wider audience (the rhetoric was effective).

   Binaries are simple and well-suited for a media environment. They also force the public to choose sides, and few wanted to risk being seen as in the terrorist camp.

2. *It repeatedly called for urgent action on one hand and a long-term commitment on the other*. On September 20, in a speech to Congress, Bush said
“In our grief and our anger, we have found our mission and our moment.” The rhetoric remained focused on time, always pushing for immediate action on proposed policies, claiming that every day lost was a day closer to another terrorist attack, and calling for enduring commitment. “The only path to safety is the path of action”, “[the] military … must be ready to strike at a moment’s notice”, “Americans [should] be ready for pre-emptive action’, and finally, preparing the public for a lengthy war on terrorism. Some of the Congressional decisions: passing the Patriot Act, establishing the Department of Homeland Security, were measures which needed careful deliberation, but with the president urging Congress to act quickly, democratic debate was circumvented.

3. It presented freedom and liberty as universal values for all mankind, and asserted that the United States had a responsibility to promote and defend them. They were even highlighted in the names of military campaigns: “Operation Enduring Freedom” (the war in Afghanistan in 2001) and “Operation Iraqi Freedom” (the war in Iraq which began in 2003).

Freedom and liberty are intertextual: words which Americans learn in their primary school textbooks, and so part of their core values. Bush described these as not merely American, but universal values, for example in his 2003 State of the Union address: “Americans are a free people, who know that freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation.” As Example (19) shows, the president doubled his emphasis on freedom and liberty during the war in Iraq, in his 17th March ultimatum to Saddam Hussain, the 19th March announcement of the start of military operations, and his May 1 victory address. Example (20) shows that newspaper editorials also spoke of freedom, liberties at risk, freedom-loving people everywhere, freedom’s power and so on. The rhetoric captured the press, and reinforced the first theme of good versus evil, ironically making the public reluctant to complain about new laws that allowed wiretaps, or permitted librarians to give borrowing records to the FBI. An actual reduction in liberty was accomplished in the name of liberty.

4. The White House repeatedly called for political unity, and when it met with public disagreement, condemned it as unpatriotic or aiding terrorists.
Pressures were brought on dissenters which amount to propaganda in deed. I have already mentioned how Clear Channel targeted the Dixie Chicks. Another well-known example is the case of Valerie Plame. Her husband, retired ambassador Joseph Wilson published an editorial in the *New York Times* in July 2003, entitled “What I Didn’t Find in Africa,” Wilson had been sent to Niger in 2002 to find out whether Iraq bought yellowcake (a raw ingredient for atomic bombs) from Niger. He found no evidence that it had, but his report was rewritten to say that it had. Wilson went public with his initial findings, accusing the White House of exaggerating the Iraqi threat in order to justify war. A columnist then disclosed that Wilson's wife worked for the CIA, which was an illegal act and destroyed her career. Members of the Bush administration have since been charged with leaking this information to the press. Such incidents convinced the public that there would be a price to pay for dissent.

Domke concludes that these four themes: a binary conception of reality, an obsession with time, a belief in universal norms, and an intolerance for dissent, are typical of religious conservatives, who see a religious foundation to the moral order, and believe they have a God-given mission to carry out their policies. As a propaganda campaign, the rhetoric was extraordinarily successful for four years. The president encountered little resistance to some radical policy changes and even enjoyed broad support for starting two wars in a year and a half. The rhetoric only began to lose its force in 2005, when there had been no further terrorist attack in the US, and the public began to realize that the wars have not been won. It will be interesting to see whether and how the rhetoric changes.

References
Britannica Online. “Propaganda”.


