

“Democracy under attack”: viewpoint and doxa in the coverage of the Jan. 6th 2021 events at the US Capitol

Philippe Hambye, UCLouvain, Institut Langage et Communication

Samuel Vernet, Aix-Marseille Univ, CNRS, LPL, Aix-en-Provence

Abstract

This paper aims at addressing issues related to the expression of subjectivity in media discourse, and more specifically to highlight the presence of *doxa* among journalists' discourse. These issues will be addressed through an analysis of the transcript of the morning broadcast of two radio channels – the public radio channel in France, *France Inter*, and in French-speaking Belgium, *La Première* – covering the “attack” on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6th, 2021. Because it reports an event which was at the same time very politically loaded and unexpected, the journalistic account of this event helps to reveal and question the continuum between facts reporting and the expression of personal opinions, with all the nuances of clear and less clear sharing of subjective viewpoint in between. The paper shows that subjectivity is present under different guises, including attribution, evaluative statements and doxa. The paper then establishes the difference between the plurality of voices and the plurality of viewpoints – a key distinction in the production of information and in the journalistic habitus.

Keywords

Subjectivity, viewpoint, doxa, hard news report, radio morning broadcast

1. Introduction

This paper aims at addressing issues related to the expression of subjectivity in media discourse. We are interested in investigating how journalists deal with the presence of subjectivity in discourse and how they endeavor to conform with certain professional standards of neutrality and objectivity. More specifically, our aim is to analyze the forms through which subjectivity shows through in news discourse and to examine to what extent they allow room for a multiplicity of viewpoints and foster pluralism or on the contrary reduce the possibility that different subjectivities have the floor in hard news reports.

We apply this questioning to a quite specific piece of news discourse: indeed, we chose to analyze the transcripts of the morning broadcast of two radio channels – the public radio channel *France Inter* in France and its equivalent in French-speaking Belgium, *La Première* – covering

the events at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6th, 2021. Because it reports a genuine *event*, in its very factual nature, which was at the same time exceptional, astounding, and politically significant, the journalistic account of this event helps to reveal and problematize the continuum between facts reporting and the expression of personal opinions, with all the nuances of more and less subjective viewpoints in between.

In order to account for the various guises which subjectivity can take in discourse, we will draw on several critical approaches in discourse analysis and on critical sociology, and we will support the idea that the concept of *doxa* – defined as ways of perceiving and understanding social reality that are taken for granted and are undisputable – is interesting to bring into this discussion. Indeed, we will argue that it allows discourse analysts to reveal how subjective viewpoints can be conveyed in discourse, and especially at a very implicit level through ways which do not overtly and directly appear as subjective.

The paper is structured as follows. In the first section, we present how objectivity and subjectivity are understood in media discourse studies and how journalists are expected to deal with subjectivity according to contemporary social norms. We then introduce the concept of *doxa* and situate it within this discussion about subjectivity in journalist discourse. In the following section, we present the corpus we have analyzed and the analytical procedures we have followed. We then turn to the analysis itself. A first part of the analysis will aim to show that there are indeed subjective views of the events at the Capitol which are expressed through journalists' accounts of these events, and that some of these views are predominantly present, hence supporting the idea that media accounts do privilege certain views rather than others. At the same time, we will show that since they coexist with others, these views also appear as disputable. Our analysis will also show that on the contrary, particular understandings of reality are sometimes expressed in much more implicit and not contestable ways and that they are then much harder to question while they still seem to be subjective and disputable. Hence, we will argue that these *doxic* views can be even more problematic and raise tricky questions about the role of media as a means to foster democratic debate by giving space to a plurality of ideas, values, and worldviews.

2. State of the art

A lot of work in media studies or in discourse analysis have already addressed questions related to the supposed objectivity or neutrality of journalists' accounts and analyses of news and events.

Objectivity has long been regarded as the ideal aim of journalists in so-called “hard news” reports. Yet, nowadays, it is admitted that evaluative or attitudinal language always gets included in all news reports (Stenvall, 2008). While journalists usually avoid expressing *explicitly* their opinions and while they may succeed in their strategies to present their discourse as objective or neutral, there are many ways through which subjectivity can manifest itself in discourse – independently of the awareness of the author and the public. Indeed, subjectivity is present in media discourse in many different guises: through the bare selection of which facts are talked about or not, and given importance or not (Gauriat and Cuoq, 2016, p. 90; Maesele and Raeijmaekers, 2020), through the framing of events and especially the narratives provided (D'Angelo and Kuypers, 2010), through the choice of sources which are quoted, via more or

less explicit evaluative statements and linguistic forms (Martin and White, 2005; Verschueren, 2012), through the way questions are formulated in interviews (Montgomery, 2008), etc. Among others, the appraisal framework (see White, 2015 for a summary) helps analysts to consider the multiple forms through which evaluation and subjectivity can be manifested in discourse in general and in media discourse in particular.

Following this line, in the maximalist understanding of subjectivity we adopt here, it is not only discursively expressed in the linguistic forms which are meant to mark the presence of the author in its own discourse – e.g. expression of stance or explicit evaluative judgments – but it can be related with any feature of discourse that explicitly or implicitly produces meanings which convey a *particular* and *socially subjective* view of reality. This view must be regarded as *particular* as soon as we can find alternative views in the public debate and as *socially subjective* if this particularity is due to the characteristics of the subject and of the socio-cultural standpoint from which the journalist observes reality and the lenses through which he or she sees it. As a consequence, what we take into account when looking for the presence of subjectivity in discourse includes but goes beyond “the language of evaluation” (see White, 2015; see also Bednarek, 2010; Thompson and Hunston, 2000) as we consider that any form contributing to the production of a particular and subjective *representation* of reality (in both its descriptive and evaluative dimensions) also participates in the presence of subjectivity. For instance, in a sentence like “*For a few hours yesterday, did the American democracy, one of the oldest in the world, teeter?*” taken from our corpus, subjectivity is present, notably, in the use of the comment clause “one of the oldest in the world”. Indeed, to treat it as relevant, the audience is invited to consider that it is related to an implicature and to infer that the presence of this clause suggests the following: since it is particularly old, the American democracy is particularly stable and solid and hence it was particularly surprising that it had teetered for some hours. Obviously, that idea that old things are solid and stable, and that the American democracy is particularly solid or stable is *subjective* in the sense we defined above. Yet, it is worth underlining that not any mark of subjectivity is regarded as relevant in the critical perspective we adopt: actually, we are only interested in subjective representations which may have some ideological or political consequences which could be *critically questioned*, as they present realities as things that could or should be maintained as such or on the contrary modified in a way or another. In this sense, presenting the American democracy as solid and stable, and hence as a sort of *model* of democracy, may of course have ideological and political consequences.

Understood in such a broad way, subjectivity cannot be avoided in discourse. This does not mean that it is always welcomed. Many scholars and media professionals still consider that journalists should stay impartial – should not take sides for a given group in any public controversy – and should aim as much as possible towards (some form of) objectivity in their discourse and professional practice. In this sense, it is expected that journalists in hard news reports be committed to “neutrality” or “factuality” understood as a “quest for reporting facts” in a way free of subjective opinions (Stenvall, 2008, 2014; Thomson, *et al.*, 2008). According to White (2000, p. 383), the claim to objectivity in media discourse is achieved through compliance with three principles: *neutrality* which implies that “reporter refrains from expressing opinions about, passing judgement on, or responding emotionally to the material presented” and hence that “such explicitly subjective evaluations are confined to the quoted comments of attributed sources”; *balance* which implies the condition that “more than one point of view or version of events is provided” and *reliability* which requires that quoted sources “have appropriate knowledge, expertise, authority or social standing”.

In this vein, several scholars consider that objectivity should not be understood as a property of discourse itself but would be “better defined in terms of strategic choices that journalistic authors make in order to constrain and conceal their authorial subjectivity in the news” (Rantsudu and Bartlett, 2023, p. 4). In this sense, journalistic objectivity would not imply non-subjectivity from the linguistic point of view, but only some kind of control or regulation of the presence of the journalist’s own subjective voice – what White (2000) refers to as the “journalistic strategy of impersonalisation”. There would be no binary opposition between objective and subjective discourse, but only different ways of dealing with the presence of subjectivity in discourse (Steensen, 2017).

This conception may render objectivity a rather vague and problematic concept. Indeed, this discursive management of subjectivity could then appear as a purely formal and deceiving *strategy* to orchestrate a sham objectivity. On this note, White (2000, p. 396) interestingly proposes to “reconcile the media’s claims of objectivity with the ultimately ideological nature of all news reporting”. On the one hand, he supports this idea that several rhetorical strategies enable the media “to maintain belief in the notion of news as an ‘objective’ mode of representation, while nevertheless producing texts which convey particular social evaluations and which convey particular world views”. In this sense, he is clearly supporting “the view of the news report as ideological, as a value-laden story telling mode, by which key social values and cultural motifs are reproduced and ultimately naturalized” and so he assumes that objectivity is discursively enacted and performed, hence backgrounding and obscuring the presence of subjectivity. However, on the other hand, he also considers that this management of objectivity can be seen as a necessary professional norm ensuring that journalists maintain an endeavor to distinguish between their personal opinions and more objective facts and analyses. In this sense, purging media discourse of marks of subjectivity in hard news reports would be a way for journalists to fulfil a professional requirement.

From this point of view, the main issue regarding objectivity and subjectivity in media discourse would be these cases where subjectivity gets ignored by its authors or does not appear as such for the audience, since then the latter cannot be aware of how it can be influenced and may not take care to look for several sources of information (Steensen, 2017). Hence, the main problem with subjectivity in media discourse emerges when viewpoints are “grounded in consensus and “common sense”, rather than being presented as “controversial, contested or undecided” (White, this volume). In other words, one could expect that journalist discourse relies rather on what Martin and White (2005, p. 102) call “dialogic expansion” – that is, actively making “allowances for dialogically alternative positions and voices”, rather than on “dialogic contraction” – acting to “challenge, fend off or restrict the scope of such [alternative positions]”. In the same vein, through the analytical framework of “agonistic media pluralism”, Maesele and Raeijmaekers (2020) look at the way discourse may “impedes or facilitates debate about the established social and political order” and consider that “we can only speak of media pluralism, when the relevant media outlets hold different preferences and ideological positions, *and also present them as such*” (p. 1605; we underline).

This is precisely why we think that the concept of *doxa* deserves to be brought into the discussion about objectivity and subjectivity in media discourse. In a broad understanding of the term, the *doxa* of a given community is the set of shared ideas (norms, values, beliefs,

opinions) which are so common that they *may be* taken for granted in daily interactions¹. In this understanding, *doxa* is just another word to talk about *common sense*, about the majority's opinion, or about the *most* widespread and accepted ideas (Nicolas, 2007, p. 88). Another quite usual definition of *doxa* associates it with the ideas and opinions of the dominant groups, or the elite, as they could be promoted by institutions like the media for instance and be imposed somehow to lay-citizens.

While this latter view is often related to the work of Bourdieu, we think that it loses sight of the most interesting aspects of his concept of *doxa*. Actually, Bourdieu's theory narrows down the above-mentioned definitions of *doxa* in two ways. For Bourdieu, *doxic* representations of reality are of course not ideologically neutral and they are indeed the product of power relationships where dominant groups act to have their views shared by society as a whole. Hence, even though they come from particular social groups, they are largely widespread and are not perceived as belonging to the elite. However, in Bourdieu's theory (see Bourdieu 1997, 2001), *doxa* does not just refer to ideas that are *shared* by a *large number* of people in society, but it points towards those ideas that are even not regarded as ideas, but rather just as the only appropriate way to consider reality: it is "an act of miscognition, implying the most absolute form of recognition of the social order" (Bourdieu 1984, p. 471). We are thus facing *doxa* when dominant groups have the possibility, because of their hegemony, to make their own vision of reality – for instance their vision of what is a *proper* language – appear as the only valuable, legitimate, and even as the only *possible* through its naturalization. In the many definitions he provided for this concept, Bourdieu insists on the idea that *doxa* is what cannot even be considered otherwise, what is not disputed or questioned not because the majority agrees on a specific answer, but because no one even thinks about raising a question²: *doxa* sets the boundary between what can be considered as reasonable, legitimate, understandable, and what is not and can barely be listened to; the "forbidden line of the discourse, its limitation" to use the terms of Nicolas (2007, p. 88; our translation from French). It is then a way to look for subjectivity in discourse, where it is the less likely to be perceived as such.

3. Data and analytical procedures

The corpus we analyzed for this research is made of the transcript of the morning broadcast of the main public information radio channels in France (*France Inter*) and French-speaking Belgium (*La Première*) on the day following the events of Jan 6th, 2021, at the Capitol in Washington, D.C. The broadcast lasts 2h for *France Inter* (from 7 am to 9 am, so it's called the "7/9") while for *La Première* (and is called "*Matin Première*"), it lasted 4h at this period in time. The morning broadcast is a strategic time slot: this is the time of day when there are the most listeners and therefore these can be considered the most influential programs on each station. On France Inter "Le 7/9" is the radio program with the largest audience in the country, attracting several million listeners every morning. As a result, these programs set the tone for the rest of

¹ For an extensive discussion of the different meaning of the concept of *doxa*, see Amossy, 2002, Nicolas, 2007, and Vernet, 2023.

² In this regard, Guilbert (2009) make a distinction between the "questioned obvious" (*l'évidence questionnée*) which results from critical discussion that led to some relatively stable consensus, and the unquestioned obvious" (*l'évidence non questionnée*) which correspond to Bourdieu's *doxa*.

the day, so that its subjects, its interviews, the words of its guests, will be extensively repeated and commented in the other media outlets.

Both programs follow the same format and consist of a series of news bulletins, press reviews, humor and music sequences, political commentary and, of course, political interviews. On the morning of 2021, 7th January, most of the programs were devoted to the events at the Capitol. Yet, only the parts of the broadcasts which are linked to the events at the Capitol (and not the other news evoked that morning) were transcribed and integrated in the corpus.

We felt that studying this particular discourse was relevant for several reasons. First, since much of work in media discourse analysis is applied to single-authored written texts, we found it interesting to study an oral discourse that was less prepared and less controlled and that included structurally a plurality of voices – so potentially offering various and complex ways to deal with the presence of subjectivity. Second, in the perspective of studying *doxa*, we found it interesting to critically analyze a discourse that forces us to take distance from viewpoints and *doxa* that we were expecting to share. This was because the events at the Capitol were quite unanimously described as shocking, and even scary, and hence this convergence of views could make it more challenging to situate viewpoints in such a context where they are so widely shared that their particularity is hard to reveal. At the same time, since these events were rather unexpected and unprecedented, it called for an interpretation, and so there was room for different ways of making sense of it and hence different viewpoints. In this vein, we chose to compare two different accounts of these events in order to highlight recurrent similarities in both reports that would index ideas and views so much shared by journalists and interviewees as a sociocultural group that they work as a set of ideas and views about reality that no one can question – that is precisely a *doxa*³.

After having listened to the two broadcasts and read the full transcripts several times, we have applied a detailed and systematic analysis on the first 30 minutes of each broadcast (around 2500 words for each corresponding transcript). We follow a qualitative analytical procedure considering two levels of analysis. First, we tried to take into account any discursive element that would participate somehow in the presence of subjectivity as we have defined it above, that is in the construction of a particular representation or evaluation of the event, be it via very implicit ways (like in the implicature evoked above) or much more explicit (e.g. acts of assessment of behavior and practices); via forms or statements directly related to the event or via discursive features that would rather indicate the journalist or a given source's positioning with respect to these statements or to other voices and viewpoints⁴; and via several discursive mechanisms that could make some issues, social actors or viewpoints more present or prominent than others (see the concept of “scope” in Maesele and Ræijmaekers, 2020). Secondly, we took into account the way subjectivity was somehow recognized – e.g. through any linguistic device that would point towards a plurality of voices and views – or on the contrary was made invisible and made no space for any alternative viewpoint, especially by looking at the way the discourse “engages” with other discourses and positionings (Martin and

³ In this paper, we thus focus on these similarities, while there are of course also slight differences related to closed but different socio-cultural contexts and media environments, that could deserve to be analyzed in another study.

⁴ See White's (2015 : 1) distinction between “stances either toward phenomena (the entities, happenings, or states of affairs being construed by the text) or toward metaphenomena (propositions about these entities, happenings, and states of affairs)”.

White, 2005) or use several “discursive strategies” to exclude or on the contrary give legitimacy to alternative views (see Maesele and Raeijmaekers, 2020).

4. Results

4.1. Multiple voices, multiple viewpoints

As is consistent with the literature on the subject, subjectivity appears mostly in the media discourse we analyzed in the form of “attribution”, that is through “formulations which disassociate the proposition from the text’s internal authorial voice by attributing it to some external source” (Martin and White 2005, p.: 111). Here are a few examples:

- “‘Our democracy is undergoing unprecedented assault’ are the words of the future American president, Joe Biden.” (*La Première*)
- “‘A moment of dishonour and shame’, these are the words of former US President Barack Obama.” (*France Inter*)
- “Former president George W. Bush denounces scenes typical of a banana republic” (*France Inter*)
- “Boris Johnson denounces ‘shameful scenes’” (*France Inter*)
- “German Vice-Chancellor speaks of an ‘intolerable attack on democracy’” (*France Inter*)
- “For former US President Barack Obama it’s a shame but not a surprise.” (*La Première*)

The attribution of a statement to a given source makes “available space for alternative positions by grounding the proposition in an individual, contingent subjectivity” – that of the quoted source (White, 2015, p. 6). In doing so, journalists make room for subjectivity while not explicitly endorsing or rejecting it. In other words, this professional technique can be seen as a way of objectifying points of view. As the linguists’ work on reported speech shows (López-Muñoz, *et al.*, 2004; Rosier, 2008), attribution can sometimes function as a tool for journalists to “take shelter” behind the words of a person whose authority and/or legitimacy to speak in such a circumstance cannot be questioned. In that sense, reported speech is both legitimating and legitimated speech (de Proost, 2005). In other cases, it is a way to disalign with this external voice: for example in our data, the voices of Trump’s supporters are directly broadcasted, with a translation in a voice-over, and never quoted by the journalists (contrary to those of authoritative figures like in the cases illustrated above), and they always echo a praise of the events (e.g. “this is beautiful ! this is what needs to be done”) which directly appears at odds with the main framing of the events as a shocking assault against democracy that opens the two broadcasts. In either case, reported speech is thus a way for journalists to control the different subjectivities that will have a place on air.

However, perhaps less expectedly coming from in-house journalists, we also observe numerous evaluative statements in direct speech. This involves, for example, the use of axiological adverbs or adjective of intensity: *unimaginable events*, *unforgettable events*, *astonishing images*, *incredible violence*, *bewildering chaos*, *a tragic day*, *crazy night*... It includes also hyperbolic wording (*everything was unprecedented for four years*, *images that will go down in history forever*); and a huge amount of warlike vocabulary: *stormed and occupied the Capitol*, *weapons in hand*, *faces covered in gas masks*, *insurrection*, *chaos*, *invasion*, *retreat*, *shock*, *risk of sedition*, *assault*, *insurgents*, *coup*, etc. We also find many fixed and repeated lexical

sequences, sometimes clichéd, insinuating a certain narrative. For example: “*scenes of X*” (replacing X by, alternatively, *chaos, violence, insurrection, invasion*, etc.), “*incandescent X*” (replacing X, alternatively, by *Trump’s supporters, demonstrators, motley horde*), “*X in shreds*” (*democracy, Republican party*), but also formulas like *going down in history, adding fuel to the fire, shock, sideration, earthquake*, to quote a few.

Through a whole range of dramatization effects, which make their subjectivity rather present in discourse, journalists endorse a very specific narrative frame: the (planned) insurrection. This frame presents the events not only as an attempt to violently prevent a democratic process to occur, but even as a project to overturn the future government. This vision is supported by a narrative where Donald Trump appears as having a central role in the events: it is he who “provoked chaos” (*provoqué le chaos*), who “encouraged them to violently try to keep power” (*Le président sortant a incité à la violence dans une tentative de garder le pouvoir*), left his supporters “incandescent” (*chauffés à blanc*) or has “electrified” (*électrisés*) them; reports insist on the fact that he has not called them to stop their action until the very end, so suggesting that he was able to stop and control them. Some versions of this narrative even suggest an attempted coup⁵.

These main trends in the presence of subjectivity in journalists’ discourse are clearly illustrated in the opening of each radio program:

(1) La Première – François Kirsch (FK), newsreader. Notre démocratie subit une agression sans précédent, ce sont les mots du prochain président américain Joe Biden. Des partisans de Donald Trump ont envahi le Capitole, des armes à feu ont été brandies et utilisées au sein du siège de la démocratie aux Etats-Unis, il y a au moins un mort. Donald Trump qualifie ses partisans de grands patriotes, le récit de ces événements dans ce journal. Bonjour à toutes et tous, aux Etats-Unis le Capitole a donc été pris d’assaut puis envahi pendant cinq heures par des partisans de Donald Trump. Le Capitole c’est le lieu qui abrite le Congrès, le pouvoir législatif. L’assaut a été mené au moment où devait se tenir le processus de certification des résultats de l’élection présidentielle. Comment en est-on arrivé là, Damien Roulette ?

[Our democracy is undergoing an unprecedented assault; these are the words of the future US president Joe Biden. Donald Trump’s supporters have invaded the Capitol, guns have been brandished and used in the seat of democracy in the United States, and at least one person has been killed. Donald Trump describes his supporters as “great patriots”. Reports of the events in this news bulletin. Hello everyone. In the United States, the Capitol was stormed and then invaded for five hours by Donald Trump’s supporters. The Capitol is home to Congress, the legislative branch of power. The assault took place just as the process of certifying the results of the presidential election was due to take place. How did we end up here, Damien Roulette?]

(2) France Inter – Nicolas Demorand (ND), anchorman and Agnès Soubiran (AS), newsreader . ND : à la une ce matin quand la démocratie vacille euh scènes de chaos hier à Washington, le capitole envahi par des militants pro-Trump des élus masqués à gaz sur le visage obligés de battre en retraite le calme est revenu ce matin mais le choc est terrible, reportage à Washington (...). AS : l’histoire se souviendra des violences aujourd’hui au capitole comme d’un moment de déshonneur et de honte. Ce sont les mots de l’ex-président américain Barack Obama après cette journée de chaos à Washington. Hallucinantes scènes d’envahissement du congrès par des militants chauffés à blanc par un Donald Trump qui refuse toujours de reconnaître sa défaite. Les élus qui devaient officialiser la victoire de Joe Biden ont été (2’) contraints de quitter les lieux saturés de gaz lacrymogènes.

[Headlines this morning: when democracy teeters, scenes of chaos yesterday in Washington, the Capitol invaded by pro-Trump activists, elected representatives in gas masks forced to retreat, calm has returned this morning, but the shock is terrible, report from Washington (...). AS: History will remember today's

⁵ Interestingly, on both programs, the Trump supporters’ discourse which is quoted, and which has been selected to illustrate their positioning, clearly supports this insurrection frame.

violence on the Capitol as a moment of dishonour and disgrace. These were the words of former US President Barack Obama after a day of chaos in Washington. Hallucinating scenes of the invasion of Congress by militants put at a boiling point by Donald Trump, who still refuses to acknowledge his defeat. The elected representatives who were to make Joe Biden's victory official were forced to leave the premises, saturated with tear gas.]

However, this very evaluative and dramatized account of the Capitol events coexist with another report that sticks much more to factuality. Interestingly enough, this more factual account frames the events in a quite different way as it presents them as a usual “demonstration that got out of hand” (*La Première*). This frame emerges from a narrative that appears several times on both radio channels, and which insists on the sequence of the events and suggests that each micro-event gave rise to the other, in an unforeseen manner. Lexical elements suggest the idea of a “regular meeting”, enlivened by Donald Trump’s usual speeches (“the same for two months”). They also state, more or less explicitly, that what explained the invasion of the Capitol is the weak presence of police forces and their lack of organization (“tiny Police line”, “National Guard cannot go there”). This frame focuses on the physical and concrete aspects of the action: [Trump’s supporters] “take the direction of the Capitol” and “climb up the stairs”, in consequence “the Senate debates are interrupted”. In extract 3 and 4 we observe also passive constructions which highlight the events themselves – what happened – and not their agents: “police forces are quickly overwhelmed”, “debates are interrupted”, “elected members of Congress are evacuated”, “reinforcements are sent”; as well as French present indicative, which is typically the descriptive narrative verbal tense in French (“the first door gives way, the security teams are overwhelmed, and Trump supporters pour into the Hall”).

(3) La Première – Damien Roulette, special correspondent in Washington. Tout avait commencé comme un meeting normal de Donald Trump/ la logorrhée est la même depuis deux mois (...) des milliers de partisans du président américain prennent la direction du Capitole / ils escaladent les marches / et font face à un mince cordon de police / rapidement les forces de l'ordre sont débordées / les manifestants pénètrent le Capitole (...) à l'intérieur les débats du Sénat sont interrompus les élus du Congrès sont évacués (...) des renforts sont envoyés / dans un premier temps la garde nationale ne peut pas se rendre sur place (...) dans le Capitole le calme revient progressivement / les insurgés sont évacués / le Congrès peut reprendre son travail sous la présidence de Mike Pence

[Everything had started like a regular meeting of Donald Trump / the logorrhea is the same for two months(...) thousands of supporters of the American president take the direction of the Capitol / they climb up the stairs / and face a tiny police line/ police forces are quickly overwhelmed/ the demonstrators get into the Capitol (...) inside the Senate debates are interrupted the elected members of Congress are evacuated(...) reinforcements are sent/ at first the National Guard cannot go there(...) in the Capitol calm gradually returns / the insurgents are evacuated / The Congress can resume its work under the presidency of Mike Pence]

(4) France Inter – Grégory Philipps, special correspondant in Washington. La police du Capitole a beau lancer des grenades lacrymogènes, la foule pousse trop fort et au bout de quelques minutes, elle parvient à envahir la terrasse qui surplombe le Mall, l’esplanade au cœur de Washington. Puis une première porte cède, les équipes de sécurité sont débordées et les partisans de Trump déboulent dans la salle des statues sous la coupole, ils atteignent le Sénat, puis la chambre des représentants qui vient d’être évacuée et même le bureau de Nancy Pelosi, la speaker de la chambre, où certains se font prendre en photo.

[Although the Capitol Police fire tear gas grenades, the crowd push too hard and after a few minutes, manage to invade the terrace overlooking the Mall, the esplanade in the heart of Washington. Then the first door gives way, the security teams are overwhelmed, and Trump supporters pour into the Hall of Statues under the dome, reaching the Senate, then the House of Representatives, which had just been

evacuated, and even the office of Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the House, where some had their photos taken.]

In this “unexpected riot” narrative frame, the demonstration got out of hand, with Trump supporters managing to get into the Capitol almost by chance and being idle once inside.

4.2. Plurality of voices, hierarchy of views

One could consider that the coexistence of this descriptive discourse and a much more sensationalist and evaluative discourse allows the media to present several viewpoints on the events, to make room for a plurality of voices and to find a balance between expression of some form of subjectivity and assessment (attitudes, emotions, etc.) and factuality. Nevertheless, if we take a look at the way these two approaches are distributed, the first appears as quite predominant.

A sequence on *France Inter* where the distribution of the two competing narrative frames is quite clear can help us understand this asymmetrical heteroglossia. Nicolas Demorand (ND), the broadcast’s anchorman, interviews Gérard Arraud (GA), former French ambassador to the United States. The sequence lasts just under seven minutes and is constituted by five questions. The first one is introduced by a contextualization:

(5) ND. Et retour donc sur les événements inimaginables qui se sont déroulés hier à Washington quand des partisans de Donald Trump ont pris d’assaut et occupé pendant plusieurs heures le Capitole. C’est le temple du pouvoir législatif américain où siègent la chambre des représentants et le Sénat qui étaient réunis en session pour confirmer la victoire électorale de Joe Biden. Elles resteront dans l’histoire, ces images stupéfiantes de policiers en civil l’arme au poing en plein parlement, ces images d’élus évacués le visage couvert de masques à gaz, celles d’émeutiers assis au perchoir de l’assemblée où les pieds sur le bureau de la chef de la majorité démocrate, Nancy Pelosi. Joe Biden a dénoncé une insurrection, tous les anciens présidents américains ont condamné ces émeutes qui ont fait un mort, une femme a été tuée par balle dans le Capitole (...) Pendant quelques heures hier la démocratie américaine, l’une des plus vieilles au monde, a-t-elle vacillé ?

[Let’s take a look back at the unimaginable events that took place yesterday in Washington when supporters of Donald Trump stormed and occupied the Capitol for several hours. This is the temple of American legislative power, where the House of Representatives and the Senate meet in session to confirm Joe Biden’s victory. The astonishing images of plainclothes police officers with guns drawn in the middle of parliament will go down in history, as will the images of elected representatives being evacuated with their faces covered in gas masks, and of rioters seated at the assembly perch or with their feet on the desk of the Democratic majority leader, Nancy Pelosi. Joe Biden condemned the riots as an insurrection, all the former American presidents condemned the riots that left one person dead, a woman was shot dead in the Capitol (...) For a few hours yesterday, did American democracy, one of the oldest in the world, teetered?]

The question of ND is fully in line with the “insurrection” narrative frame, involving the dramatization effects described above. The question even suggests that it is appropriate to consider that there has been a risk of regime change, and that we are therefore in a quasi-insurrectionary situation. However, the guest can shift or replace the narrative, as GA does.

(6) GA. Je ne suis pas sûr qu’elle ait vacillé, parce qu’il y a aussi là-dedans un incroyable raté, tout simplement, des forces de sécurité américaines (...).

[I’m not sure that it [democracy] has teetered, because there’s also an incredible failure there, quite simply, on the part of the American security forces (...).]

GA refutes the vocabulary proposed by ND; by doing so, he takes on the other narrative, that of the demonstration that got out of hand. When ND sticks to his narrative frame in the second question (see ex. 7 below), GA, once again, refutes the presuppositions with a rhetorical concession: “yes, but maybe not” (see ex. 8 below).

(7) ND. Je citais Barack Obama qui parle d’une honte mais pas d’une surprise, des événements de ce genre pouvaient, allaient arriver, c’était écrit ?

[I quoted Barack Obama, who spoke of a disgrace but not a surprise. Events like this could and would happen, was it written?]

(8) GA. Oui, enfin peut-être pas cet événement-là (...) on savait que ce président n’accepterait pas sa défaite quelles qu’en soient les modalités et donc on savait que ça se passerait mal. Alors ensuite évidemment on ne s’attendait pas à ça.

[Yes. Well, maybe not that event (...) we knew that this President would not accept his defeat whatever the terms, so we knew it would go bad. But obviously we didn’t expect this.]

During this interview, ND never deviates from his perspective, no matter what answer is given by GA. We can also note that his questions are close-ended and so clearly suggest that a definite answer is expected.

In the whole program, we find many “funnel” formulations, i.e., an open question immediately followed by a closed or binary formulation as in the following example from Léa Salamé – the second main presenter coming later in the program:

(9) LS. Comment analysez-vous ce qui s’est passé ? Diriez-vous que ce sont les derniers râles des trumpistes avant l’investiture de Biden ou qu’il y a un vrai risque de sédition aux Etats-Unis ?

[How do you analyse what happened? Would you say that this is the last gasp of the Trumpists before Biden’s investiture or that there is a real risk of sedition in the United States?]

In other words, even open-ended questions are then closed around one or two proposed narratives. It works as if a specific ready-to-use vocabulary was “suggested” to the guests by the interviewers.

To summarize, we see that the two viewpoints on the events are not symmetrically distributed. First, the programs’ main presenters and the news bulletins’ presenters adopt the insurrection viewpoint while only more external voices (pen-pals or interviewees) contribute to frame the events as an uncontrolled demonstration, thus backgrounding this second point of view. Secondly, even though they welcome various *voices*, the main presenters, especially on *France Inter*, do not really strive to make a plurality of *viewpoints* coexist but their discourse practices do rather restrict it, so that any plurality emerges rather incidentally. Indeed, we saw for instance that journalists’ questions are more or less always underpinned by a particular narrative frame.

Many of the discursive features evoked above can also be regarded as the product of journalists’ rhetorical habits. Indeed, journalist discourse is made of routines which are specific to certain genres (see Née *et al.*, 2016, for a general review of the notion of “discursive routine”). Actually, the representation put forward generally goes in the direction of sensationalizing the event. It may be part of the journalistic professional practices, where it is all about representing an event to capture and maintain the audience (Champagne, 2016). Hence one could argue that the narrative of the insurrection is prominent in the two broadcasts⁶ because it fits more with this typical journalistic rhetoric – and not because it reflects a subjective and ideological view. For sure, journalists do not necessarily express their own opinion as individual subjects in their

⁶ It should be added that, as the press reviews for the two programs show, this observation also seems valid for the written press.

discourse: they may more or less consciously align with the expected views of their audience, or those that are explicitly or not promoted by their owners or managers, but they also may convey subjective viewpoints just by reproducing discursive clichés and forms or sequences that have become keywords in a given sociopolitical debate. Yet, even when the features of their discourse are not the reflection of their own personal subjectivity, but rather a consequence of them being members of the journalistic corporation, we still consider that these features can be regarded as subjective, and ideologically oriented, since, by their own materiality, they circulate views that are particular and that other people (with other social backgrounds, positions, training, etc.) would not necessarily endorse and naturalize in the same way.

4.3. *Doxa as indisputable viewpoints*

In this third part of our analysis, we will illustrate how *doxa*, as it has been defined above, is present in the corpus we've analyzed.

The events of Jan. 6th, 2021, are not only framed as an “assault” on the Capitol but also described repeatedly as an assault against “the American democracy”. More precisely, while invading the Capitol and overthrowing American Democracy are two distinct realities, the latter is often used as a metonym for the former, as is shown in examples (1), (2), (5) and (9) above and also in these following examples where we see formulations which are repeated throughout the two programs:

- “The American democracy was under attack” (*France Inter*)
- “An attack against the democracy” (*La Première*)
- “It causes the American democracy” to stagger (*France Inter*)

Interestingly, these types of formulations can go unnoticed since they're not related to the events themselves – which need to be qualified, as they are quite unprecedented, and hence can be qualified in different ways – but rather the reality affected by these events, which is then only referred to descriptively. Asserting that the “American democracy” was under attack may indeed seem obvious: because this formulation is quite conventional, but also because one could see it as a rather uncontroversial way to account for events that actually interrupted the normal working of a major democratic institution of the American political system, events that contested an important procedure this institution is supposed to achieve, and that called the results of a legal election into question. Since this institution and the election are part of what makes the USA a *representative democracy*, it may seem obvious that obstructing such an institution is a way to hamper (representative) democracy itself. This is indeed what is suggested by a journalist when he states that “the legislative power was thus confiscated for a few minutes” (*La Première*).

Actually, the fact that lay people violently entered the Capitol during a voting procedure can only be considered as a major threat for democracy, if one regards as obvious and undisputable that representative institutions are the core of democracy. This is indeed a view that is taken for granted in the discourse analyzed, since it is necessary for the audience to accept the implicit equivalence between the Capitol and democracy to treat the metonymy between these two realities as relevant and appropriate. Several formulations even suggest that institutions like the Capitol are so important for democracy that they have a sacred nature: entering the Capitol is

depicted as an attack against the “sacred” nature of the democratic procedure, it is a “profanation of the heart” of the American democracy, of its “center”, its “temple”, the “holy of the holies” (*le saint des saints*). In the same vein, the “assault” on American democracy and its institutions is presented as an attack against democracy in general, thus revealing how much the procedural aspect of democratic institutions is deemed to be the core of democracy. Speakers insist several times on the fact that the events are all the more shameful because the USA is “the biggest democracy in the world”⁷, “the light of democracy”, “the oldest” or “the most stable, solid and powerful democracy in the world”. These expressions imply that, because of its size or its old institutionalization, the American state is a kind of prototype of democracy, an idea that again assumes that what defines democracy is its formal institutions and procedures and not the substantial qualities of the processes which guarantee that the power is actually in the hands of the *demos*.

However, considering representative institutions and democracy as equivalent is not so obvious as it seems to be. It is actually embedded in a particular and ideological view of democracy. The expressions quoted above suggest that there was a real risk of collapse for American democracy just because hundreds of people managed to enter the Capitol and to take selfies in the office of Nancy Pelosi. Now, one could, on the contrary, think that democracy cannot be reduced to representative institutions and that these institutions are neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for a state to be claimed democratic. On the one hand, states which have representative institutions are not necessarily deemed to be democratic, and on the other hand, American democracy can be seen as made of much more than its representative institutions – it may be seen as related to a particular culture, to a large variety of institutions nourishing this culture, so that the simple blocking of the Capitol for a while could not affect significantly American democracy. If the institution is not conflated with democracy itself, one could regard the contestation of a session of the US Congress as a way to call for *more* democracy or *genuine* democracy – an argument put forward by some Trump’s supporters, on the basis of their nationalist understanding of democracy according to which a “pure” and essentialized *demos* should be in power. Alternatively, one could consider that the main assault on democracy was not made on Jan 6th, 2021 but every time politicians like Trump or other presidents who were not genuinely serving the interests of the American people were elected: one could see this as signaling that the American people have been deprived of the real means to exert political power and to influence the political process in order to serve its genuine interests (that is, quality education, a real access to independent and reliable media sources, etc.). In this view, the USA was no longer democratic for long and the events of Jan 6th would not be seen as an assault on democracy, but only as one of the convulsions of the long-standing sickness of US democracy.

One can of course consider that respecting institutions and their legal functioning is a core principle in democracy and hence that the actions of Trump supporters on June 6th, 2021 were not only illegal but plainly illegitimate and blameworthy. Yet, in the discourses we analyzed, alternative views of democracy have no room at all and could not even be considered: indeed, a large set of adjectives describing the events are falling outside the realm of what can simply be conceivable (“unimaginable”, “incredible”, “staggering”, “astonishing”, etc. see also examples (1), (2), (5)). As a consequence, Trump’s supporters are always presented as *obviously* not reasonable and illegitimate, as if there were no possibility to even consider their motivations as disputable but somehow valid or at least *understandable* and to engage in a debate with them.

⁷ Significantly, the expression “the biggest democracy in the word” is also often used in the media to refer to India, whose democratic *quality* is nonetheless not regarded as undisputable.

To be sure, only a naïve view of journalism would expect the European media to stick to report pure facts without expressing attitudes – and in this case a strong disapproval. But we can wonder whether it is the role of the media to rely on and reproduce a *doxa* which considers that our institutions are legitimate by nature, are “sacred” entities that coincide with democracy itself and cannot be questioned.

Conclusion

In line with the literature on journalistic discourse, our study discusses the discrepancy between neutrality that is claimed and the reality of hard news discourse – i.e., the unavoidability of point of view and subjectivity –. The aim of our analysis was not to propose an exhaustive list and a detailed account of the multiple linguistic mechanisms that allow journalists’ discourse to convey subjectivity, but rather to highlight the fact that subjectivity can be present in very diverse ways, which make it more or less recognizable. Moreover, we wanted to study how journalists deal with this subjectivity and see whether and how they make room for a plurality of views.

Our analysis has shown that subjective points of view can indeed be present in rather expected and explicit forms – like in attribution processes –, but also in more indirect ways where the view of the journalist shows through the wording of the discourse: through a lot of evaluative statements coming especially from the anchormen and presenters in the spoken texts we examined or through the wording of questions. We have also invoked the concept of *doxa* to look at the presence of subjectivity where it was probably less expected and less visible. As we have seen, subjectivity does not only appear because journalists move away from the “reporter voice mode” (Thomson, *et al*, 2008) and heavily use the “language of evaluation” (White, 2015), but also because their discourse conveys a *doxa* through the repetition of discourse sequences which convey particular views even though they stay implicit and may appear as self-evident.

How do journalists find a balance between this unavoidable presence of subjectivity and their professional commitment to objective accounts of events? As a matter of fact, there is an attempt from journalists to objectify the presentation of the facts by staging a plurality of voices – a professional practice which cannot be considered as the construction of a deceptive, purely rhetorical objectivity. Nevertheless, a key distinction between *voices* and *viewpoints* has to be made. Despite the presence of several voices on air crucial to the professional journalistic habitus, the plurality of viewpoints is only incidental. Indeed, as we have seen in these representative transcripts, viewpoints are not balanced: guests must systematically refuse or displace the anchormen’s narrative to impose another viewpoint, to such an extent that we can say that a sort of dominant viewpoint seems to emerge. For what concerns statements relying on *doxa*, they do not, by definition, give room for any other point of view than the one assumed to be taken for granted and so go against some endeavor towards “dialogic expansion”. In this sense, these *doxic* statements can be related to the “naturalizing strategies” which play a key role in processes of “depoliticization, since they clearly eliminate the possibility of or need for other (political) interpretations” and “conceal” and “misrecognize” the particular or subjective nature of the “politico-ideological values” that they rely on (Maesele and Raeijmaekers, 2020, p. 1603, 1596). Yet, while many approaches in discourse analysis focus on the presence of specific discursive forms used to frame a particular view as, for instance, “well-accepted” or on the contrary as “hardly making sense”, we see with the metonymy analyzed above a case where

no discursive cue or marker indicates the preference given to the endorsed point of view or the rejection of alternative conceptions: this process of inclusion and exclusion is realized through the use of a discursive means that draws upon an implicit and seemingly evident equivalence which is then confirmed in its obviousness.

As a social field, media have obviously their own mechanisms of social (re)production, notably their processes of selection of certain types of social actors, with their particular habitus and social dispositions, their specific rituals, their rhetorical habits and practical routines (Accardo, 2017); all these practices do rely on a specific *doxa*, which they feed and hence reproduce. And it is precisely because *doxa* is a kind of viewpoint which is not recognized as such – i.e., ideological biases of which journalists are unaware – that it raises important theoretical and ethical questions when journalism is concerned. As Herman and Chomsky did a long time ago (1988), or Halimi (1997) in France, we might consider that there is a problem of democratic legitimacy here. If some part of the population feel that media are relying on a common sense that is not their own, it can develop a form of mistrust, a polarization of opinions, the use of alternative and sometimes unreliable media, etc.; all trends that the most established media denounce, but which they therefore contribute to fuel.

References

- Amossy, R., 2002. Introduction to the Study of Doxa. *Poetics Today* 23 (3), 369–394.
- Bednarek, M., 2010. Evaluation in the news: A methodological framework for analysing evaluative language in journalism. *Australian Journal of Communication*, 37(2), 15–49.
- Bourdieu, P., 1984 [1979, French ed.]. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., 1997. *Méditations pascaliennes*. Paris, Seuil.
- Bourdieu, P., 2001. *Langage et pouvoir symbolique*. Paris, Seuil.
- Champagne, P., 2016. La double dépendance. Sur le journalisme. Paris, Raisons d’agir.
- D’Angelo, P., Kuypers, J. A. (eds.), 2010. *Doing news framing analysis: Empirical and theoretical perspectives*. London, Routledge and Taylor & Francis Group.
- De Proost, S., 2005. Journal télévisé et discours rapporté : une approche du discours convoqué. In López-Muñoz, J. M., Marnette, S., Rosier, L. (eds), *Dans la jungle des discours : Genres de discours et discours rapporté*. Cadiz, Universidad de Cadiz Servicio de Publicaciones, 413–422.
- Entman, R. M., 1991. Framing U.S. coverage of international news: contrasts in narratives of the KAL and Iran air incidents. *Journal of Communication*, 41(4), 6–27.
- Entman, R. M., 1993. Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58.
- Gauriat, L., Cuoq, J., 2016. *Journaliste radio. Une voix, un micro, une écriture*. Grenoble, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble.
- Guilbert T., 2009, Discours d’évidence : Constitution discursive des normes et des connaissances. In Gautier, C., Laugier, S., (eds), *Normativités du sens commun*. Paris, PUF, 275–300.

- Halimi, S., 1997. *Les Nouveaux chiens de garde*. Paris, Liber-Raisons d'Agir.
- Herman, E. S., Chomsky, N., 1988. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York, Pantheon Books.
- López-Muñoz, J.M., Marnette S., Rosier, L. (eds), 2004. *Le discours rapporté dans tous ses états*. Paris, L'Harmattan.
- Maesele, P., Ræijmaekers, D., 2020,. Nothing on the news but the establishment blues? Toward a framework of depoliticization and agonistic media pluralism. *Journalism*, 21:11, 1593-1610. DOI:
- Martin, J. R., White P. R. R., 2005. *The language of evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Basingstoke, Palgrave.
- Montgomery, M., 2008. The discourse of the broadcast news interview. *Journalism Studies*, 9:2, 260-277.
- Née, É., Sitri, F., Veniard M., 2016. Les routines, une catégorie pour l'analyse de discours : le cas des rapports éducatifs. *Lidil*, 53, 71–93. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/lidil.3939>
- Nicolas, L., 2007. *La force de la doxa. Rhétorique de la décision et de la délibération*. Paris, L'Harmattan.
- Pinto, L., 2020. Doxa. In Sapiro G. (ed.), *Dictionnaire international Bourdieu*. Paris, CNRS Editions, 260–262.
- Rantsudu, B., Bartlett T., 2023. The role of deontic modality in the construction and mitigation of evaluation in hard news reporting. *Journal of World Languages*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/jwl-2023-0059>.
- Rosier, L., 2008. *Le discours rapporté en français*. Paris, Ophrys.
- Steensen, S., 2017. Subjectivity as a Journalistic Ideal. In Fonn B. K., Hornmoen H., Hyde-Clark N., Hågvar, Y. B. (eds). *Putting a Face on It: Individual Exposure and Subjectivity in Journalism*. Oslo, Cappelen Damm, 25–47.
- Stenvall, M., 2008. On Emotions and the Journalistic Ideals of Factuality and Objectivity – Tools for analysis. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 40, 1569–1586.
- Stenvall, M., 2014. Presenting and representing emotions in news agency reports. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 11(4), 461–481.
- Thompson, G., Hunston, S., 2000. Evaluation: An Introduction. In Hunston, S., Thompson, G. (eds). *Evaluation in Text: Authorial Stance and the Construction of Discourse*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1–27.
- Thomson, E., White, P. R. R., Kitley, Ph., 2008. “Objectivity” and “Hard News” Reporting Across Cultures. *Comparing the News Report in English, French, Japanese and Indonesian Journalism Studies*, 9(2), 212–228.
- Vernet, S., 2023. Doxa. In Lorenzi Bailly N., Moïse C. (eds). *Discours de haine et de radicalisation. Les notions clés*. Lyon, ENS Editions, 31–39.
- Verschueren, J., 2012. *Ideology in Language Use. Pragmatic Guidelines for Empirical Research*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

White, P. R. R., 2000. Media Objectivity and the Rhetoric of News Story Structure. In Ventola, E. (ed.), *Discourse and Community: Doing Functional Linguistics*, Tübingen, Gunter Narr Verlag, p. 379–97

White, P. R. R., 2015. Appraisal Theory. In Tracy, K., Ilie, C., Sandel, T. (eds), *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*. DOI: 10.1002/9781118611463/wbielsi041