FRENCH TELEVISION AND PRINT NEWS DISCOURSE SOME CONTRASTS

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In previous papers delivered at the Mid-America Linguistics Conference, I have looked at various aspects of French print news discourse, such as the complex interplay of verb tenses and a stylistic preference for "elegant variations" to avoid repeating the same nouns and pronouns (Thogmartin 1986, 1988, 1989) In this paper, I am trying to characterize grammatical and lexical differences between print and television news discourse I want to explore the following questions

1 Is print news more formal in register than television news?

2 Are different grammatical constructions typically used in print and television news?

3 Are there specific lexical contrasts between print and television news?

Corpora and method

A sample of French print news discourse was to be compared to a sample of television news discourse The print news sample was drawn from Paris daily general-interest newspapers of 1995-1996 In order to create a corpus of print news similar in content and style to the television news corpus, articles were selected to provide a variety of news categories and story lengths Opinion pieces such as editorials and columns were omitted because they were judged to be stylistically different, argumentative and individualistic, and thus not comparable with the usually narrative content of French television news Tabular matter such as stock market reports and sports scores were also omitted Whole stories, including headlines, were scanned to create machine-readable files

Table 1	Print news texts from the Paris daily press
La Croix 16 July 1996	3,447 words
Le Figaro 12 January 1995	4,800
France-Soir 16 July 1996	4,644
L'Humanité 16 July 1996	2,799
Libération 13/14 January 1996	5,366
Le Monde 4 July 1996	5,753
Le Parisien 13/14 January 1996	5,415
Total words in print news corpus	32,224 words

Table 2	Television news texts from France 2 broadcasts
1 December 1997	3,587 words
3 December 1997	3,225
5 December 1997	3,035
10 December 1997	3,228
6 January 1998	1,177
7 January 1997	1,200
31 March 1998	1,667
22 April 1998	3,219
23 April 1998	3,538
24 April 1998	3,556
Total words in television news corpus	27,432 words

Machine-readable transcriptions were made from videotapes of all or part of ten news broadcasts from the French public television channel, France 2, as retransmitted in the United States by the international cable news service SCOLA Since the focus of the study is the professional writing practices of

French journalists, direct quotations from non-journalists were omitted from the television corpus Both corpora were spell-checked and proof-read with the help of a French-language spell-check and grammar-check package (LE CORRECTEUR 101, v 3 5 1)

In order to facilitate comparison of the grammatical and lexical characteristics of the texts, two word lists were prepared for each corpus with the help of the concordance program CONCORDER, one arranged in alphabetical order and the other by frequency Table 3 contains the totals for type and token in each corpus, counting as different the varying forms of the same verb, along with singulars and plurals, masculines and feminines of the same nouns and adjectives, and capital and lower-case initial forms of the same word

Table 3   Tokens, types, and type/token ratios in the two corpora

	Total number of words (tokens)	Number of different word forms (types)	Type/token ratio
Print news	32,224	7284	4 42
Television news	27,432	5857	4 68

The expectation that print news would have a richer vocabulary than television news was not strongly sustained The "average" frequency word in the television corpus, if there were such a thing, would occur 4 68 times in the corpus, while in the print news corpus the hypothetical average frequency word would appear 4 42 times

In counting the words and grammatical constructions under study, word counts prepared by CONCORDER were supplemented by counts using the find/replace functions of Microsoft WORD 6 0 1 and by close reading of the text

I. Is print news more formal in register than television news?

In French, the existence of a formal literary register that is distinct from the everyday speech of educated people is a conspicuous sociolinguistic fact This formal, literary register of French, known as or *le français soutenu* 'sustained French' or *le français soigné* 'careful French', has clear-cut grammatical characteristics that differentiate it from the colloquial register known as *le français familier* or *le français ordinaire* (for the description of which see Gadet 1989) Battye and Hintze (1992, 337–340) propose some defining characteristics for the literary register of French Among their proposed characteristics, those that were selected for investigation will be listed in this section in italicized, arabic-numbered paragraphs

1 The presence of the so-called "literary tenses" passé simple, *past anterior, imperfect subjunctive and pluperfect subjunctive*

The literary tenses of French are used primarily in formal writing Their spoken use is limited to formal oratory, such as sermons and political speeches on the most solemn of occasions All literate French speakers have a passive knowledge of them, and secondary (*lycée*) students are encouraged to use them in writing, but in practice they are used largely by professional writers (e g , novelists, historians, journalists) Waugh and Burston-Monville found no lack of material for their study of the *passé simple* in newspaper usage, although they note that "it is quite possible to read one or two pages of a newspaper without finding a single [*passé simple*]" (1986 848)

Table 4   *Passé simple* and possible *passé simple* verbs

	passé simple	ambiguous
Print news	6	21
Television news	9	32

The *passé simple* was rare in the two corpora, even if ambiguous forms are counted in which the third person singulars of the two tenses fall together, such as *il dit* 'he says/said' or *il finit* 'he finishes/finished' All unambiguous forms of the *passé simple* in the print corpus were from *être* 'to be' (four examples of *fut* 3sg '[he] was', one of *furent* 3pl '[they] were') except one example of *tuer* 'to kill' (*tuèrent* 3pl '[they] killed') All of the ambiguous forms in the print corpus could be interpreted as the historic present, although there were four that I judged to be "possibly" *passé simple* and one "probably" *passé simple* The television news corpus has three examples of *fut*, one of *furent*, and five of other verbs *abrita* '[he] sheltered', *assuma* '[he] accepted', *poursuivit* '[he] pursued', *présenta* '[he] presented', *resta* '[he] remained' I judged that none of the television news ambiguous forms were *passé simple* They were invariably found in passages in which the other verbs were in the present tense

The other literary tenses are rare outside very formal prose, and no past anterior, imperfect subjunctive or pluperfect subjunctive tenses were found in the either the television or the print news corpus

2 *"Literary" inversions of the clitic subject pronoun* -je *in expressions like* puis-je *'may I',* comment dirais-je *'how shall I say it', and subject pronoun inversion in all persons after sentence-initial adverbs* sans doute *'doubtless' and* peut-être *'perhaps' instead of the more colloquial sentence-initial expressions* sans doute que peut-être que

No instances of inverted -*je* were found in either the print or the television corpus For pronoun inversion with other persons of the verb, the print news corpus contained only one instance each with sentence-initial *Peut-être* and *Sans doute* In Table 5, the capitalized heading *P-ê* stands for *Peut-être* at the beginning of a sentence, while the lower-case heading *p-ê* represents *peut-être* elsewhere in a sentence The same is true for *S d* and *s d* for sentence-initial and non sentence-initial *sans doute* Besides those instances listed in Table 5, the television corpus had one instance of *peut-être* before an adverb of time, and one instance of *Peut-être* at the beginning of a sentence introducing an adjectival phrase, it also had two instances of *sans doute* before a noun phrase, and one of *sans doute* in apposition to the sentence, set off with commas

Table 5   **Frequency of *peut-être* and *sans doute* in sentence-initial and other positions**

	P-ê inversion	P-ê *que*	P-ê no verb	p-ê after verb	p-ê after prep
Print news	1	1	1	5	1
Television news	0	0	0	1	0

	S d inversion	S d *que*	S d no verb	s d after verb	s d after prep
Print news	1	1	1	5	1
Television news	0	0	0	5	0

Although the relative frequencies of *peut-être* and *sans doute* in the two corpora suggest that print news writers are more nuanced than their television counterparts in affirming the degree of reliability of the statements they make, the low frequencies of the expressions involved render it difficult to draw any such firm conclusion, or to use inversion after them to differentiate the two news genres

3 Ne *without* pas *in expressions like* je ne sais, je n'ose, je ne peux

The print news corpus contained only one example of *je ne sais pas*, none of *je ne sais,* and none of either form of the others The television news corpus had none of the above

4 Nous *instead of* on *as the first person plural subject pronoun*

Although infrequently taught in the classroom, the use of *on* 'one' instead of the paradigmatic first personal plural subject pronoun *nous* for 'we' is habitual in colloquial French However, in both the print and television news texts, *on* was used far more often in its classic impersonal sense than it was to mean 'we' *On* for 'we' was usually found only in a direct quotation from a person not accustomed to talking to the media (disaster victim, eyewitness to an event, etc) In some instances, *on* could be

interpreted to mean 'we' only by giving such an interpretation every benefit of the doubt These instances were classified in the category "ambiguous"

Table 6   **Uses of the pronoun *on* as 'one' or 'we'**

	impersonal *on*	*on = nous* 'we'	ambiguous *on*
Print news	53	9	8
Television news	75	4	8

5 Negations with nullement *'not at all', point (emphatic negative), and* guère *'scarcely' after the verb instead of* pas

Pas is the usual negator after the conjugated verb in French, and in the news texts under study as well There were five examples of *guère* as negators in the print news corpus, but only one in the television news corpus There were no occurrences of *nullement* or of *point* in either corpus

6 The use of more complex sentence structures with conjunctions such as car *'for, since', or 'when in fact, furthermore, on the other hand',* en outre *'moreover',* comme *'as, like',* puisque *'since, seeing that',* attendu que *'whereas',* d'autant que *'all the more so since',* quoique *'although',* alors que *'whereas',* non que *'not that'*

Le français familier tends to confine its use of conjunctions to a few simple, frequent ones such as *et* 'and', *ou* 'or', *mais* 'but', *ni ni* 'neither nor', and *parce que* 'because' *Le français soigné* has, besides these, a larger range of words showing nuances of logical relations between clauses, some of which are listed in the preceding paragraph

No examples of *attendu que, quoique, non que* were found in either corpus, but the other complex conjunctions listed were somewhat more frequent in the print news sample than in the television one

Table 7   **Complex conjunctions**

	car	alors que	or	en outre
Print news	10	9	5	2
Television news	13	3	0	0

	puisque	comme[1]	d'autant que	total complex conjunctions
Print news	2	1	1	30
Television news	0	2	0	18

To sum up our comparisons of the frequency of Battye and Hintze's register markers in print and television news texts 1 Contrary to our hypothesis, here were slightly more *passé simple* verbs in the television corpus than in the print corpus 2 There was one inversion after sentence-initial *peut-être* and one after sentence-initial *sans doute* in the print corpus, none of either in the television sample 3 There were no cases of formal *pas*-deletion, and only one context in which it could have taken place 4 The subject pronoun *nous* was used for 'we' in both print and television news Use of *on* in the sense of 'we' was rare in both corpora and was usually found in citations of spoken language Because of the way in which the news text samples were prepared, omitting direct quotations from the television news corpus, *on* 'we' was more frequent in print news than in television news 5 Only a few examples of one of the negators under study *(guère)* were present in the print corpus, and none in the television transcriptions 6 Nearly twice as many complex conjunctions were present in the print corpus as in the television one

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[1] *Comme* was counted only when used as the conjunction whose English equivalent would be 'as', and not when used to introduce a comparison

When Battye and Hintze's defining characteristics of French formal register are applied to the text samples, one characteristic (no 1) tends to disconfirm the hypothesis that print news is more formal in register than television news, two (nos 2 and 5) tend to confirm it weakly, and two (nos 3 and 4) were of little help one way or the other Only number 6 (complex conjunctions) strongly supported the hypothesis that print language was more formal in register than television news

Based on these comparisons, we may conclude that the register of French television news is little different from that of French print news Among the possible reasons why, I suggest two 1 French culture places high value on verbal proficiency, particularly on agile manipulation of the formal register of French French news consumers expect formal style and register from their media, whether in print or on television 2 The structure of France 2's news broadcasts seldom involves spontaneous oral production The normal procedure is for the anchorman to introduce a story, after which the field correspondent's prerecorded video report is run, then the scene shifts back to the anchorman, who introduces the next story Live reports from the field are relatively rare Studio interviews of political leaders by the anchorman and one or more other journalists are somewhat more common, but formal interview situations call for a fairly formal level of language

II Do selected grammatical constructions differentiate between the print and television news corpora?

Two sets of grammatical alternatives between formal and colloquial language were examined First, formal and colloquial interrogative sentence structures were compared Second, the formal synthetic future (*je chanterai* 'I will sing') was compared to the colloquial analytic future (*je vais chanter* 'I am going to sing')

1 Question structures

There are three principle ways of making questions in French The simplest way, most often found in informal speech, uses the basic declarative word order with a rising intonation, instead of the falling intonation of declarative sentences In discussing the print corpus, I will refer to its written equivalent as the question-mark question, since only the question mark enables the reader to distinguish a question from a declarative sentence Another informal colloquial way of making a question is to start the sentence with the global interrogative *est-ce que*

Il est Français 'He is French '   Il est Français? 'Is he French?'

                                         Est-ce qu'il est Français? 'Is he French?'

The formal way of asking a question is by inversion, putting the subject after the verb There are two types of inversion question in French Pronoun inversion takes place when a subject pronoun is moved to follow the verb or when the subject is a noun and the corresponding subject pronoun is copied after the verb Noun inversion takes place in very simple sentences containing a question word, a verb and a subject Examples of each are given below

Il est Français 'He is French '   Est-il français? 'Is he French?'

Paul est français 'Paul is French '   Paul est-il français? 'Is Paul French?'

Paul va où? 'Where is Paul going' (colloq) Où va Paul? 'Where is Paul going?' (formal)

Not all French questions are subject to inversion Among other exceptions, inversion cannot be applied to questions having *qui* 'who' or *quel* 'which' as their subject, e g *Qui parle français?* 'Who speaks French?' or *Quel livre est sur la table?* 'What book is on the table?' It was therefore necessary to count only invertible questions, that is, questions in the corpus that could have been inverted, if the journalist had wanted to do so

Table 8	Question structures				
	pronoun inversion questions	noun inversion questions	est-ce que questions	question-mark (intonation) questions	total invertible questions
Print news	20	2	0	2	24
Television news	11	0	2	16	29

The television corpus had a markedly more colloquial turn, with fewer pronoun inversion questions and a couple of *est-ce que* questions, which were entirely absent from the print corpus Most importantly, the television corpus had far more intonation questions than there were question-mark questions in the newspaper texts Moreover, the television news corpus showed an important pragmatic distinction in the use of question structures The pronoun inversion structure was used only for rhetorical questions, that is, questions addressed by the journalist solely to a television audience not in a position to answer them Intonation and *est-ce que* questions were used exclusively in interview situations in which an answer was expected

2 Future tenses.

The more colloquial analytic future tense *aller* + infinitive (like English *I'm going to* + verb) was three times more likely to be chosen as the future tense in the television news corpus than in print This suggests not only a less formal register, but also greater immediacy for television news, since some French grammarians call the analytic future *le futur proche* 'the near future' and consider the synthetic future more appropriate for events that are expected to happen relatively later

Table 9	Future tenses			
	formal (synthetic) future	*aller* + infinitive	total future tense verbs	percentage of *aller* + infinitive
Print news	126	11	137	8 03%
Television news	72	25	97	25 77%

III Are there some specific lexical contrasts between print and television news texts?

In terms of lexical contrasts, I was not looking for those that would have provided insight into the content of the particular newspaper articles and television broadcasts that I had chosen to study Those would not have been hard to find, but they would have proven little or nothing, since the texts were not chosen for content, nor did they refer to the same day's news, which would have made comparisons valid I was looking for contrasts among the system words that are present in any French text, and that would give insight into grammatical differences between the two genres of news reporting

1 Common conjunctions, logical markers, and the relative pronoun *dont*

Among the conjunctions most often found in *le français familier*, both *mais* 'but' and *ou* 'or' are present in roughly similar numbers in the television and print corpora However, there are surprises in the frequency counts of other common conjunctions (See Table 10) The conjunctions *donc* 'therefore, so' and *parce que* 'because', which are the most frequent expressions of effect and cause in *le français familier*, turn more to be more frequent in the television news corpus than in the print news one Print news, on the other hand, seems to use the conjunction *et* 'and' more often than does television news, suggesting that paratactic sentence structures with the simplest of conjunctions are common in print journalism

Words and idioms that tend to be found in more elaborate sentence structures were more frequent in the print corpus than in the television news one, such as *ni ni* 'neither nor' (Uses of *ni* two, three or more times as coordinate constituents of the same sentence were counted as one use) Also more frequent in the print sample are *ainsi* 'thus' and *en effet* 'in fact, as a matter of fact, actually' These expressions are used in elaborate sentence structures with extended logical comparisons or explanations The relative pronoun *dont* 'whose, of which' also lends itself to more elaborate sentence structures, and is thus more frequent in the print news corpus

Table 10   Common conjunctions

	et	mais	ou	donc	parce que
Print news	512	100	59	23	5
Television news	367	134	48	38	12

Table 11   Words found in association with more elaborate sentence structures

	ni ni	ainsi	en effet	dont
Print news	14	16	17	48
Television news	5	6	4	12

The grammar and readability statistics routine of Microsoft WORD 6 0 1 was used to measure average sentence lengths in the two corpora Since words associated with sentence elaboration were more frequent in print news than in television news (Table 11), it is not surprising that sentences are longer in the print corpus than in the television one

Table 12   Sentence length as calculated by Microsoft WORD 6 0 1.

	average sentence length
Print news	22 52 words
Television news	16 65 words

2. Prepositions showing spatial orientation

The prepositions expressing basic orientation in space, namely *sur* 'on', *devant* 'in front of', *sous* 'under', and *derriere* 'behind' are all more frequent in the print corpus than in the television one The exception is *à côté de* 'beside' There are two possible explanations for the higher frequency of spatial prepositions in the print corpus The first is that, since television shows pictures, the journalist has less need to describe the scene in front of his eyes, since it is in front of the viewers' eyes as well Another, more speculative, possible explanation is that, since newspapers themselves are organized in space—inside, outside, page one, page two, top of the page, left side, right side, bottom of the page— spatial organization is simply a more prominent feature of print journalists' thinking

Table 13   Spatial prepositions

	sur	devant	sous	derrière	a côté de	total
Print news	199	31	31	6	0	267
Television news	124	14	10	1	3	152

3. Time expressions

If it can be said that newspapers are organized spatially, it is a self-evident truth that television news is organized in time As the broadcast unfolds, the television viewer must attend to it in real time in order to get the maximum information There is no chance for rereading even if, in theory, the viewer could videotape it and go over it again and again In practice, viewers do not treat news broadcasts that way A television news broadcast is also different from a newspaper in that television viewers do not

scan it hurriedly and select just the parts that are of interest to them, as a newspaper reader does They must listen more or less attentively from the beginning to find the stories that interest them

Most importantly, a live television news broadcast has a definite moment of speaking to which events can be related Because of the exact time-orientation and the timeliness of television news, a cluster of time expressions are more frequent in the television news corpus than in the print corpus They are *aujourd'hui* 'today', *heures* 'hours, o'clock', *ce matin* 'this morning', *ce soir* 'this evening', and *il y a* 'ago' These expressions establish a direct link between the events being reported and the moment of speaking

Table 14   Time expressions more frequent in television news

	aujourd'hui	heures	ce matin	ce soir	il y a
Print news	39	18	1	3	5
Television news	98	46	23	24	13

On the other hand, the time expressions *hier* 'yesterday', and *nuit* 'night' are more frequent in print news than in television news, probably because five out of the seven Paris national dailies from which texts are drawn are morning papers that report on the news of the day before and the night before that, while the television broadcast transcripts are from an evening program that concentrates on reporting the news of the current day

Table 15   Time expressions more frequent in print news

	hier	nuit
Print news	54	18
Television news	18	5

The television corpus uses the expression *la nuit dernière* 'last night' once, but the print corpus uses expressions which are less context-sensitive, such as *la nuit précédente* 'the preceding night' (used twice in the print corpus) or *la nuit de   à* 'the night from [day of the week] to [day of the week]' (used three times in the print corpus)

4. Interactional language

INTERACTIONAL is the term I have chosen to describe the language of the give-and-take of everyday conversation, as opposed to the language of the formal text that has been prepared for unilaterally informing the reader/viewer Examples of interactional language that is more frequent in the television texts than in the print ones are the deictics *voici* 'here is', *voilà* 'there is', and emphatic words like *bien* 'well', and *beaucoup* 'many, much', which seem more characteristic of the imprecision and exaggeration of spoken language than they do of the exactness favored in written language

Table 16   Interactional language

	voici, voilà	bien	beaucoup
Print news	4	19	11
Television news	16	44	21

Table 17   First and second person pronouns

	je, me, moi	tu, te, toi	nous	vous
Print news	50	2	32	11
Television news	39	2	32	46

Quintessential examples of interactional language, first and second person pronouns (Table 17) are nonetheless no more frequent in television news than in print news, except for *vous* (plural/formal

singular), which helps the news presenter draw in the silent television viewing audience and include them in the broadcast

Conclusion

The defining contrasts between formal and familiar French proposed in Battye and Hintze (1992) for the most part did not differentiate sharply between the samples of print and television news language In the texts studied, both genres tended toward the formal register, especially due to the predominance in French television journalism of the practice of delivering carefully prepared texts rather than carrying on live interaction with the anchor Of the criteria from Battye and Hintze, only the greater use of complex conjunctions in print news served to differentiate the two samples

Among the other grammatical features displayed in the two kinds of texts, two were quantitatively different 1 Intonation questions occurred sixteen times in the television texts, but their written equivalent, unmarked questions, only twice in the print corpus In the television corpus, there was a definite pragmatic distinction The interrogative inversion structure was used exclusively for rhetorical questions, while only *est-ce que* and intonation questions were used for interaction between anchor and reporters or between journalists and interviewees 2 In future tenses, although the formal synthetic future predominated in both the print and television texts studied, the more colloquial synthetic future was three times more frequent in television than in print

As far as lexical contrasts between the two corpora were concerned, words found in association with more elaborate sentences, such as *ni ni* 'neither nor', *ainsi* 'thus', *en effet* 'in fact, as a matter of fact, actually' and *dont* 'of which, whose' were more frequent in the print corpus than in the television news texts This is consistent with the greater average sentence length found in the print sample Print news is organized in the space of the printed page The print corpus contains more spatial prepositions than does the television corpus, but whether there is a direct link between print's spatial orientation and the greater number of spatial prepositions remains speculative Television news unfolds in time on the television screen The television texts under study contain a greater number of time expressions whose meaning depends on the exact moment of enunciation, such as *aujourd'hui* 'today', *ce matin* 'this morning', and *ce soir* 'this evening', although a few contextual time expressions like *hier* 'yesterday' were more frequent in print Words more frequently used in spoken interaction, such as *voici* 'here is', *voilà* 'there is' and the pronoun *vous* 'you' (plural/formal) are also more frequent in the television corpus than in the print one

In general, the French television and print news corpora are similar in register and vocabulary, although the television corpus shows a few grammatical and lexical influences attributable to the spoken language and to the nature of the television medium

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