Changing Discourse Structures in News Coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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1. Introduction

This paper describes a comparative discourse analysis of the U. S. newspaper coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict between the years 2002 and 2003. Approximately 100 news articles were collected for the periods April through July 2002 and April through July 2003. A discourse analysis was conducted on the linguistic structures, textual properties and stylistic devices of the stories in the sample. Much of the analysis is based on codings generated by the software program, ATLAS.ti, which was used to search for words, phrases and linguistic markers constructed for the research.

The purpose of the research was twofold: (1) to ascertain whether the discourse structures identified in a previous study of the period April through July, 2002, were still being used a year later, and (2) to discover changes in the coverage that may have arisen due to changes in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and/or in the network of communication practices which influence the construction of news discourse.

The major finding of this study is that news coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict changed in the period from 2002 to 2003 from a focus on the communication of civilians to a focus on communication by government authorities. This shift in focus resulted in a number of consequences, including increased depersonalization in the reporting of events and a decrease in the use of emotional language.

2. Critical Discourse Analysis

This study is in the tradition of what is called "critical discourse analysis". According to Fairclough (2001), critical discourse analysis has two aims; (1) it "seeks to discern connections between language and other elements in social life which are often opaque," and (2) critical discourse analysis is "committed to progressive social change" (p. 230). Thus, critical discourse analysis focuses on social problems and "especially on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse or domination (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 96).

Critical discourse analysis has been used by several scholars to examine the reproduction of power relations in news discourse. For example, using the linguistic concepts of schema and proposition, Van Dijk (1988) showed how newspaper coverage of the Palestinians was almost formulaic in its presentation of repetitive schemas. Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl and Liebhardt's (1999) constructed a list of topoi which could be used to categorize the rise of discriminatory discourse in newspaper and television coverage of the 1992-93 Austrian political campaign. Fairclough (2001) created an analytic framework with which to analyze political publications on welfare reform in Great Britain. This study contributes to critical discourse analysis by analyzing the U.S. media's framing of the Israeli/ Palestinian conflict.

3. **Previous Research**

In the first half of 2002 there were numerous complaints and protests from the American audience about the manner in which the major U.S. media were covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Barringer, 2002; Jones, 2002; Rutenberg, 2002; Vane, 2002). These audience protests stimulated a study (Almeida, 2003) to probe into the characteristics of this news coverage. Two general research questions guided that study: (1) What discourse structures were used by news writers to communicate images and perspectives about Israelis and Palestinians? and (2) What characteristics of the discourse may have contributed to an impression of bias, imbalance or prejudice to thousands of American readers? In Almeida (2003), several characteristics of the news coverage from the period April through July, 2002, were identified which may have led to an impression of unfairness or imbalance. These factors included unequal quoting of Palestinians and Israelis, the differential use of discourse styles and the presentation of many stories as "crime news."

An analysis of 25 news stories representative of the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in this period revealed that there was a preponderance of quoting of Palestinian and Israeli civilians (78.1% of direct quotes, 56.4% of indirect quotes, 60% of total). For each event, both Palestinian and Israeli civilians were quoted, demonstrating a commitment to "balancing" the presentation, but Palestinian civilians were the most frequently attributed sources of both direct and indirect quotes. Israeli authorities comprised almost one-third of indirect quotes, but Israeli civilians, along with Palestinian authorities, were infrequently quoted.

Stories were quite often presented as "crime stories". The "perpetrator," frequently a suicide bomber, is discussed at length, providing information about the perpetrator's motives, character, and history. Most of the violence in these stories is construed as the work of solitary individuals, as opposed to other possible interpretations, such as group action or organizational violence. Framing each violent act as a crime committed by a solitary individual allows the news writer to investigate the past of each individual and to interview police, family and friends for information. Quotes from the perpetrator's family provide background and insight into the nature of the individual who committed this violent act. At least partially as a result of the types of discourse being used, more Palestinians tended to be quoted in stories about both Palestinians and Israelis. Through the heavy use of direct and indirect quotes, the stories achieved a high degree of human drama, with victims expressing shock, horror and anger, families expressing sorrow, grief and hopelessness, and perpetrators expressing anger, stoicism and desires for revenge.

In addition, it was found that the Palestinians were frequently characterized through the use of epic and pastoral discourse structures, where <u>epic discourse</u> puts events, persons and places within a larger historical context, and <u>pastoral discourse</u> explicitly constructs images of idyllic agrarian societies. In particular, the use of epic discourse structures in reporting suicide bombings tended to heroize the individuals who took part in them; these individuals were unusual, different from the average person. Especially in the words of relatives and friends, young male activists were frequently described as leaders of their families and their peer groups, and inclined to self-sacrifice to protect and defend their families and friends. In contrast, Israelis, whether victims of terrorist violence, soldiers, bus drivers or family members of victims, were generally described as ordinary people. In framing the Israeli victims as ordinary people, the news framed extraordinary action as what was newsworthy.

4. **The Discourse Analytical Problem**

There have been relatively few reported protests of the news coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 2003, suggesting that the news coverage may have changed from 2002. To investigate whether the news coverage had indeed changed, a sample of 2003 stories reporting the conflict was compared to a sample of 2002 stories.

The research questions which motivated the analysis were: (1) Is there still a disproportionate percentage of quoting of Palestinian civilians in 2003? (2) Are Palestinian activists portrayed, through epic discourse and the quotes of their relatives and friends, as "heroic" individuals? Do Israeli civilians continue to be portrayed as "ordinary"? (3) Is there still a disproportionate percentage of quoting of Israeli authorities in relation to Palestinian authorities? (4) Are the discourse modes identified as characteristic of news style in 2002 still characteristic of news style in 2003? (5) Do new categories need to be constructed to account for changes in the 2003 coverage or did coverage remain similarly structured?

5. **The Sample and Methodology**

Two samples of 50 news articles each were selected collectively from six newspapers: <u>The New York Times</u>, the <u>Washington Post</u>, the <u>Los Angeles Times</u>, the <u>Chicago Tribune</u>, the <u>Miami Herald</u>, and the <u>Boston Globe</u>. One sample of 50 stories was taken from April to July 2002 and the other from April to July 2003. Therefore, each sample contained approximately three stories per week. Stories were selected that were representative of the news coverage of that week while efforts were taken to ensure that stories taken from one newspaper were not copies of stories from another newspaper.

Each story was downloaded from the internet into ATLAS.ti, where the stories were then automatically coded according to criteria designed for this research. Most of the codes used were based on categories developed in Almeida (2003). In addition, all the direct and indirect quotes were located and their sources were identified and categorized. Because of ambiguities in the lexicon, parts of the coding had to be reviewed and edited by hand.

6. **A Comparison of 2002 News Stories with 2003 News Stories**

News stories were analyzed on eleven dimensions: patterns of direct and indirect quoting, the use of epic and pastoral discourse styles, the presence of words and phrases

indicating the emotions of fear, sorrow, anger and revenge, the use of words denoting violence and conflict, and the use of positive words.

6.1. *Direct Quotes and Indirect Quotes*

In the 2003 sample, there were a total of 554 direct quotes as compared to 720 direct quotes in the 2002 sample. While the number of direct quotes decreased from 2002 to 2003, the number of indirect quotes increased from 584 in 2002 to 639 in 2003. The increase in indirect quotes (+55) is not as great as the decrease in direct quotes (-166), so overall the number of quotes declined by 111. The decrease in direct quotes affects primarily two categories of sources: Israeli and Palestinian civilians. Table 1 illustrates the changes in direct quoting between 2002 and 2003.

(1) Sources of direct quotes in 2002 and 2003 news coverage

Source	2002		2003	
Israeli Authorities	124	17.2%	116	20.9%
Israeli Civilians	204	28.3%	85	15.3%
Palestinian Authorities	65	9.0%	126	22.7%
Palestinian Civilians	251	34.9%	124	22.4%
Palestinian Militants	25	3.5%	46	8.3%
U.S. Authorities	24	3.3%	55	9.9%
U.S. Civilians	24	3.3%	0	0.0%
International Authorities	3	0.4%	2	0.4%
Total Sources	720		554	

As can be seen in table 1, both Palestinian and Israeli civilians were directly cited far more frequently in 2002 than in 2003. Palestinian and Israeli civilians accounted for 63.2% of the direct quotes in 2002 and only 37.7% of the direct quotes in 2003. In contrast, the citation of Palestinian authorities dramatically increased, from 9% in 2002 to 22.7% in 2003. The citation of Israeli authorities did not increase much but the overall percentage of quotes cited from authority figures increased from 26.2% to 43.6%. The percentage of U.S. authorities directly cited also doubled from 24 to 55, bringing the citation of U.S. authorities to almost 10% of the total. Thus, in the 2003 sample, authority figures are directly cited more than half the time whereas civilians have a smaller role to play than they had in 2002.

(2) Sources of indirect quotes in 2002 and 2003 news coverage

Source	2002		2003	
Israeli Authorities	213	36.5%	268	41.9%
Israeli Civilians	49	8.4%	45	7.0%
Palestinian Authorities	45	7.7%	163	25.5%
Palestinian Civilians	217	37.2%	90	15.4%
Palestinian Militants	20	3.4%	40	6.3%
U. S. Authorities	22	3.7%	25	3.9%
U. S. Civilians	9	1.5%	0	0%
International Sources	9	1.5%	8	1.3%
Total Sources	584		639	

As can be seen in table 2, the percentage of Palestinian civilians who were indirectly cited seriously declined from 2002 to 2003. In 2002, 37.2% of the indirect quotes were made by Palestinian civilians; this figure declined by over half to 15.4% of the indirect quotes in 2003. In contrast, Palestinian Authorities have greatly increased their percentage of indirect quotes from 7.7% in 2002 to 25.5% in 2003. Israeli civilians have not changed much, but Israeli Authorities have increased somewhat to 41.9% of the sample. Palestinian and Israeli Authorities dominate indirect citations even more than is the case with direct quotes; 67.4% of indirect quotes are made by Palestinian and Israeli Authorities in comparison to 22.4% made by Palestinian and Israeli civilians.

How should these changes in patterns of quoting be interpreted? On the one hand, the American audience has not been protesting the news coverage in 2003 as happened in 2002. Part of the reason for the protests was the extensive quoting of Palestinian civilians who were the friends and family of activists and suicide bombers; American audiences protested that the individuals the news should be giving the most coverage to should be Israeli victims of the bombings. It is possible that the media grew wary of the American audience and decided to quote fewer Palestinian civilians. But, the percentage of quotes of Israeli civilians has also declined, although not so dramatically, from 36.6% of direct and indirect quotes in 2002 to 22.3% of direct and indirect quotes in 2003.

Another reason which may underlie these changes in patterns of quoting may have to do with an overall change in news frames that occurred within the U.S. mass media with the appointment of Abbas as Prime Minister of Palestine and the announcement of the "road map" by President Bush. U.S. reporters used the term "road map" frequently in their articles and interviews, and at the same time, Israeli and Palestinian authorities were often cited referring to the "road map." The appointment of Abbas as Prime Minister was viewed by U.S. media as signaling a change in power in Palestine, with the Old Guard, symbolized by Yasir Arafat, giving way to the new reformers. The view that the Palestinians now had a more regular government structure, along with diplomatic discussions of the road map, may have lead to the large increase in citations of Palestinian officials as well as the smaller increase in citations by Israeli officials. The use of news frames to guide the construction of news stories is discussed by Entman (1991).

An illustration of this change of news frame is a comparison of two stories on suicide bombers, one from 2002 and one from 2003. The 2002 story details a suicide bombing by a "quiet young seamstress named Andalib." The article cites Andalib's parents in 11 direct quotes, such as her father saying "They are free. If they want to do it, it is up to them" (Lamb, 2002) while authorities are cited only once. By contrast, the 2003 story about a suicide bomber contains one direct quote from a spokesman for the Hebron settlers and 19 direct and indirect quotes of Israeli authorities, including statements such as "Both sides agreed that the cessation of terror is a first and essential step for any advancement," from Prime Minister Sharon's office (Bennet, 2003). There are also 12 direct and indirect quotes of Palestinian authorities, including the statement by Michael Tarazi, representing Prime Minister Abbas, saying "Yes, we have to stop the violence, on both sides," and Prime Minister Abbas expressing "sorrow over the attack" (Bennet, 2003).

This change in quoting alters the structure and tone of the stories about the Middle East conflict. The addition of civilian quotes functions to dramatize and humanize stories about events and persons in ways that quoting Israeli and Palestinian authorities does not. As described in Almeida (2003), it stimulates identification processes by evoking the

emotions expressed by the civilians. The citation of government officials is more typical of political news.

6.2. *Expressions of Emotion: Sorrow, Fear, Anger and Revenge*

The lists of words used by ATLAS.ti to generate counts of expressions of sorrow, fear, anger and revenge are shown below. These words constructed a discourse, particularly in the citations of civilians, that was extremely emotional.

ANGER:= anger*|angry|ire|rage*|wrath*|defian*|striden*|defie*|defy|volatile|vehemen*|
frustrat*|despis*|detest*|hate*|loath*|spite*|anathema|enrag*|fume*|hatred|dismay|
FEAR:= afraid|anxiet*|dread*|fear*|hor*|panic*|doubt*|concern*|confus*|frighten*|worr*|
tense|terror|terrified|terrify*|scream*|suspect*|suspicio*|scream*|bewider*|hide*|hiding|
scare*|scaring|scary|turmoil|hysteria|danger|dangerous|trap*|gruesome|
SORROW:= anguish*|crie*|cry*|despair*|hopeless*|mourn*|piti*|pity|regret*|
resign*|sad*|sorrow*|tear*|wail*|red-eyed|guilt*|remorse*|condolence*|weep*|suffer*|
funeral*|tragi*|funeral|tragic|glum|gloom*|futil*|sob*|grave|
REVENGE:= revenge|aveng*|venge*|

In the lists that the ATLAS.ti program uses as its search patterns, the individual patterns comprising a list are separated by a vertical bar, while the asterisk is a wildcard character which matches any string of nonblank characters. Therefore the pattern "defian*" matches the words "defiant," "defiance," and "defiantly."

It was found that news coverage of 2003 had much smaller numbers of expressions of emotion than news coverage of 2002. Table 3 shows the comparison between 2002 and 2003.

(3) Comparison of use of emotional expressions, 2002-2003

Emotional Expression	2002	2003
Anger	65	51
Fear	169	91
Sorrow	110	54
Revenge	31	8
Totals	378	204

All four categories decreased in incidence in news coverage of 2003. The reason for the decrease in emotional expressions in news coverage could correspond to the significant decrease in the quoting of civilians and the increase in the quoting of authorities. It could also point to a new frame on the part of news writers which is depersonalizing coverage of the Middle East, possibly to avoid additional outcries from the American audience of "lack of objectivity" and an overly "personal" stance. The personal profiles and interviews given to Palestinian individuals and families in newspapers and on television had been strenuously objected to by several of the leaders of boycotts in 2002. For example, Eric Rozenman, executive editor of B'nai Brith's International Jewish Monthly, charged that the Washington Post ignored the personal sufferings of Israeli victims while, in contrast, it devoted a front page story to a Palestinian family's personal suffering (Vane, 2002). Similarly, CNN was criticized by the Israeli

government for giving more programming time to the family of a Palestinian suicide bomber than to his Israeli victims (Rutenberg, 2002).

6.3. *Epic and Pastoral Discourses*

As was described earlier, epic discourse puts events, persons and places within a larger historical context, in contrast to current narrative, which presents temporally structured information about events, persons and places in the present or in the recent past. Epic narratives have the function of historicizing or heroizing their subjects, while current narratives are dramatic and informational in function. On the other hand, pastoral discourse explicitly constructs images of idyllic agrarian societies and is primarily aesthetic in function.

In Almeida (2003), half of the sample contained a use of epic discourse. All of these instances were used to characterize Palestinians, including the use of terms such as "hero," "martyr," and "martyrdom." For the 100 stories in the current sample, the list of words that are used to identify epic discourse is:

EPIC:= ancient|cultur*|hero*|histor*|martyr*|prophet*|glory|glori*|sacrifi*|paradise*| mystic*|Biblical|tradition|traditional|god|sacred|

A comparison of the 2002 and 2003 samples revealed a great many more instances of epic discourse in 2002 than in 2003. There were 92 uses in the 2002 sample, but only 15 uses in the 2003 sample. In contrast, the use of pastoral discourse increased in 2003; there were 58 uses in 2003 in comparison to 28 uses in 2002. The terms used to identify pastoral discourse are:

PASTORAL:= camel*|desert|farm*|graz*|nomad*|olive*|sheep|shepherd*|tent*| coop|crop*|garden*|greenhouse*|grove*|orchard*|

Why have the instances of epic discourse significantly decreased while the instances of pastoral discourse have increased in 2003? The reasons may be a change in the attitude of the Palestinians and a change in the way Palestinian civilians are cited. Whereas many Palestinians labeled the suicide bombers of 2002 as "martyrs" and "heroes" seeking "glory" by "sacrificing" their lives, this labeling apparently decreased in the 2003 coverage. Palestinians were more prone to criticize suicide bombers and activists for making the cause of peace more difficult, as in the statement of a Palestinian that "We suffer from both sides, and I have no influence with either" (Anderson, 2003). This change in Palestinian attitude was also reflected in the report of a few demonstrations against the militants by Palestinians. As one Palestinian demonstrator said, "They claim they are heroes….They brought us only destruction and made us homeless. They used our farms, our houses and our children....to hide," (Barzah, 2003). This change in the attitudes of Palestinian civilians was reflected in the discourse of Palestinian authorities, who frequently condemned the violence and took actions to arrest Palestinian militants. Finally, the press may have endeavored to interview Palestinian civilians who were unsympathetic towards the militants in order to project a more peaceful image of Palestinian civilians than that relayed in 2002.

The news continues to portray many Palestinians with pastoral imagery that contrasts with the images of Israelis portrayed in the news. Much of the imagery comes from stories

about the destruction of crops and farmland by the Israelis in their punitive expeditions, as in Anderson (2003) where a Palestinian farmer is quoted as saying "This farm was destroyed in the final phase of the incursion, while they were talking about withdrawal. All my work for 30 years has been destroyed."

6.4. *Violence Versus Conflict*

One of the striking qualities of the coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the violent nature of the events and persons described. The extensive list of terms used to denote violence is given here:

VIOLENCE:= die*|death*|dead*|lawless*|trigger*|kill|kills|killing|killed|destroy*| destruct*|attack*|body|bodies|wound*|fight|fights|fought|maim*|terror*|surround*|bomb*| force*|injur*|damage*|fire*|casualt*|burn*|stone*|shot|chao*|surrend*|crim*| violen*|force*|unconscious|sniper*|soldier*|hurt*|assassin*|raid*| rocket*|suicid*|homicid*|clash*|troop*|arms|armed|alert|blast*|shrapnel| uprising|intifada|disaster|ravage*|flame*|explod*|explosive*|projectile*|alarm*| disabl*|shell*|combat|gunmen|gunman|assault*|strike|struck|bullet*|tank*| blaze|blown|blew|gunfire|battle*|ambush*|execut*|invasion*|invad*|victim*| shoot*|offensive|hostilities|strike|grenade*|gunfight*|war|wars|blood*|retaliat*| storm*|weapon*|batter*|siege|murder*|gunship*|incursion*|demolish*|airstrike*|carnage|

As can be seen by perusing this list, many of the words denote different ways of killing people, different types of injuries and different types of weapons. This news coverage has been particularly bloody. A comparison was made between the 2002 and 2003 samples to determine if the degree of violence in the discourse remained fairly stable. It was found that although violent words overwhelmingly characterized both samples, there was some reduction of violence in the 2003 sample. There were 2828 uses of violent terms in the 2002 sample and 2185 uses of violent terms in the 2003 sample, a decrease of 643.

A second list of terms was constructed to characterize discourse which showed conflict, a less bloody form of war. This list of terms includes verbs of saying, such as "accuse," "threaten" and "demand," among other words, and is reproduced below:

CONFLICT:= threat*|provoke*|provocat*|side*|accus*|divi*|demand*|insist*|reject*| dispute*|condemn*|protest*|denounc*|barrier*|defen*|trap*|conflict*|militant*|attack*| oppos*|lie*|occupi*|occupy|reoccupy|object*|demonstrat*|clash*|decepti*|deceiv*| right-wing|reoccupi*|strident|hardliner*|hawk|lying|liar*|slam*|rall*|problem*| critic*|far-right|ultranational*|refugee*|radical|impose*|curfew|aggressi*|resist*|patrol*| |roadblock*|guard*|warn*|harrass*|block*|barricad*|bann*|ban|bans| heckl*|scuffl*|checkpoint*|restrict*|detain*|forbid*|fail*|entangle*|confront*|adversar*| resign*|obstacle*|traitor*|snag*|block*|curs*|betray*|rile*|barred|incit*|stall*|denounc*| occup*|complain*|impossib*|stalemat*|refus*|harsh*|assail*|

Again, the list of words denoting conflict is very large and shows the variety of ways in which conflict has been portrayed. A comparison of the frequency with which conflict discourse was used in the 2002 and 2003 samples was made, revealing that the use of conflict terms increased from 952 uses in 2002 to 1326 uses in 2003. It appears in these two samples that as the use of violent terms decreased, the use of conflict terms increased.

6.5. *An Increase in the Use of Positive Terms*

The last stage of our research involved the creation of a list of terms which can be said to have positive meanings. As described above, the 2003 sample was found to be less violent and to contain fewer strong negative emotions, such as fear, sorrow, revenge and anger. It was also found to have more conflict discourse. It was wondered if there was a difference in the positivity of the two discourses: was the 2003 discourse more hopeful, more committed to peace, more democratic? Although a count of words cannot necessarily answer this question, a list of terms that commonly are regarded as positive things was constructed. The list is reproduced below:

POSITIVE:= empower*|relie*|confiden*|free*|liberat*|reciproc*|discuss*|pleas*|truce|
trust*|improve*|agree*|peace*|forward|cease-fire|secure*|withdraw*|happy|happi*|glad*|
relief|reliev*|calm*|satisf*|conced*|concession*|hope|hopes|hoped|hoping|hopeful*|
optimis*|lull|quiet|disarm*|negotiat*|luck*|bless*|congratulat*|pride|prais*|normality|
protect*|volunteer*|good|independen*|comfort*|compromis*|sympath*|surviv*|recover*|
breakthrough*|surviv*|recover*|success*|diplomacy|allow*|celebrat*|heal*|
sanctuar*|innocen*|meeting*|pledge*|backing|progress|safe|safety|reform*|
jubilation|offer*|willing*|endorse*|ceasefire|faith|dialogue|initiative|
reclaim*|summit|accomplish*|voluntary|resolve*|resolution|persuade*|persuasion|

In comparative frequency counts, it was found that the 2003 news coverage was far more positive in that 933 uses of positive terms occurred, while in the 2002 news coverage, only 367 uses of positive terms occurred. Thus, in terms of the language used to describe events and persons, news reporters in 2003 used many more positive words to construct their stories than they had in 2002. A complicating factor is that sometimes "positive" words are used in "negative" ways, as when someone says that they are happy that a suicide mission has been successful. It is left for future research to refine the analysis of the use of positive terms.

7. **Conclusions**

From 2002 to 2003, U.S. newspapers substantially reduced the percentage of quoting of Israeli and Palestinian civilians and increased the percentage of quoting of Israeli and Palestinian authorities. In particular, the percentage of Palestinian authorities who have been quoted dramatically increased although there was also an increase in the quoting of Israeli authorities. This increase can be related to a transformation of news frames from a crime news focus on the actions of lone suicide bombers and activists towards a more politically motivated and authoritative account of how two political nations interact with one another in a time of stress and conflict. Partially because fewer civilians overall were cited, and partially because of this political change of news frame, the news coverage seems depersonalized in 2003 as compared to 2002. There are far fewer expressions of emotion, the use of epic discourse to heroize Palestinians activists has stopped, and militant action once praised by Palestinian civilians is now subject to criticism by authorities.

In general, there was a decrease in the level of violent discourse and an increase in the use of positive discourse denoting hope, peace and democracy. Although the overall level of conflict discourse increased in 2003, it was less violent in nature. The Israelis and the Palestinians are described as continuously engaged in conflict, physically, verbally and

culturally, but there was a general perception of hope for a resolution of the conflict in the 2003 news coverage.

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