AUDIENCE DESIGN IN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL NEWS: THE CASE OF BBC AND CNN

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1. AUDIENCE DESIGN

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Cable News Network (CNN) of the United States transmit to both national and international viewers. The aim of this paper is to study some of the ways in which television journalists exhibit their orientation to these different types of audiences through differential use of linguistic resources, and to explore the question whether different broadcasting styles can be observed in addressing these audiences.

Designing one’s talk to fit the receptive needs of one’s addressees has been discussed as recipient design by the conversational analysts, who have provided fine-grained descriptions of how conversationalists exhibit their orientation to this principle through various features of their talk. The linguist and media theorist Allan Bell (1984, 1997) has studied how recipient design works in the domain of media communication and has looked at the ways in which print journalists and broadcasters design their talk to fit the assumed needs and preferences of a collectivity of recipients, such as a mass readership or a mass radio or television audience. Bell analyzes the structural and procedural dimensions of journalistic or broadcasting style as manifestations of a history of audience design by the media workers and institutions by whom these styles were developed.

Two processes have been noted as being particularly significant in the development of broadcasting style: standardization and personalization (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991; Scannell, 1996). Standardization is a method of dealing with the pressures of the broadcasting production process, including those of adequate audience design for a mass audience. By way of formatting,
scheduling, and the repetitiveness of serial production, it led to a certain uniformity of product types and discourse styles. Because of this process of standardization, the national broadcasting stations played a significant role in the homogenization of national and cultural identities in Europe (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Personalization is due to the fact that broadcasters tried to bridge the gap between the institutional site of the studio on the one hand and the listener or viewer in their particular home reception situation on the other. The result was an accommodation of broadcasting’s institutional voice to a more familiar, private, personalized style. In this paper, I will pursue the question of what happens to standardization and personalization as dimensions of national broadcasting style when programmes are designed for international audiences.

2. Audience Design in National and International News

For the comparative analysis of national and international news I shall rely on data from a larger study on the comparative analysis of television election nights in Britain, the United States and Germany, involving the channels listed in Table 33.1.

Previous studies of these data have consistently shown differences between the national and the international channels: Comparing the usage of metaphors (Scheithauer, 2007), interviewing practices (Becker, 2007), or vision, sound and studio design (Schieß, 2007), the style of the national channels was found to be more dramatizing, controversial, and entertainment oriented than that of the international ones, exhibiting also stronger addressee orientation and more emphatic or stronger affective stance. For presenting practices, I myself found differences on the level of speech acts such as identification or self-identification of presenters in the opening frames (excessively used in the international channels, but omitted in almost all national channels, thereby inviting the inference of in-group familiarity between presenter and audience), also a difference in greeting and addressing the audience, in higher emphatic and affective stance in the national channels, and on the whole between dramatizing (nationals) and matter of fact style (internationals), as well as between more familiarity and more distance (Lauerbach, 2007).

Table 33.1. Election coverage by television channels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>GB 1997</th>
<th>GER 1998</th>
<th>USA 2000</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>BBC1 (public), ITV (commercial)</td>
<td>ARD (public), RTL (commercial)</td>
<td>NBC (commercial), CNN USA (commercial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>CNN I GB (commercial)</td>
<td>BBC World (commercial), CNN I GER (commercial)</td>
<td></td>
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