Global Media
Discourse

A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

DAVID MACHIN & THEO VAN LEEUWEN

Global Media Discourse

Global Media Discourse provides an accessible, lively introduction into how globalisation is changing the language and communicative practices of the media.

Featuring a wide range of exercises, examples and images, this textbook offers the student a practical way into analysing the discourses of the global media industries. Building on a comprehensive introduction to the history and theory of global media communication, it draws case studies from films, global women's magazines, Vietnamese news reporting and computer war games. Finally this book investigates how global media communication is produced, looking at the formats, languages and images used in creating media materials, both globally and in localised forms.

Written in an accessible style, this book integrates a range of approaches, including political economy, discourse analysis and ethnography and will be of particular interest to students of media and communication studies, applied linguistics and (critical) discourse analysis.

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Preface

This book is one of the outcomes of a five-year research programme on language and global communication carried out at Cardiff University's Centre for Language and Communication and funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

In this programme we studied how globalisation has changed language and communication in a range of fields including not just the media, but also health, tourism and Welsh language and culture. The programme created a wonderfully stimulating environment for our work. There were regular workshops in which we presented our work in progress to our colleagues, and we would like to express our enormous appreciation for their constant interest in, and engagement with, our work. Thank you, Hywel Bishop, Nik Coupland, Betsy Evans, Peter Garrett, Adam Jaworski, Sarah Lawson, Annabelle Mooney, Klas Prytz, Srikant Sarangi, Joanna Thornborrow, Gordon Tucker, Angela Williams and Virpi Ylänne. The programme also allowed us to invite guests to these workshops and we are grateful for comments and contributions by Peter Auer, Jan Blommaert, Brigitta Busch, Norman Fairclough, Monica Heller, Alastair Pennycook, Robert Phillipson and Tove Skuttnab-Kangas, Ben Rampton, Ron and Suzie Scollon, Abram de Swaan, Terry Threadgold and Jeremy Tunstall. Our project officer Lowri Griffith worked behind the scenes, not just to coordinate and organise the programme's activities, but also to imbue it with a sense of community and conviviality. Her work was enormously important to us all.

Initially we thought our research would involve a great deal of travel, but we ended up creating, instead, a global network of helpers and co-researchers who spent shorter or longer times with us in Cardiff and sent us media materials and interviews from many corners of the world. They included Janneke Fernhout, Michelle Lazar, Ping Shaw, Usama Suleiman, Sa Tran, Hans van Leeuwen, Emily Pettafor and Julia Zullo and we are also grateful to the many media workers who were willing to be interviewed.

As our work progressed, we tried it out on, and with, our undergraduate and postgraduate students at Cardiff University, and we have benefited a great deal from their questions and ideas. A special thanks goes to Lu Xing-Hua. We also presented our work in many different venues. We would like to single out in particular the annual meetings of the critical discourse analysis group, and we are grateful to Lilie Chouliaraki, Norman Fairclough, Phil Graham, Betsy Mitsikopoulou, Teun van Dijk, Ruth Wodak and others for their interest and encouragement.

Working together on this project has been one of the most productive and enjoyable ventures in our lives as researchers and university teachers. For Theo it finally

achieved the kind of interdisciplinarity between political economy, discourse analysis and ethnography which he had always argued for, but never actually practised. For David it meant an encounter with detailed linguistic and multimodal discourse which has changed and enriched his work as a media researcher and teacher. Both of us aimed at developing an approach to media discourse that would appeal, not just to people already working in the relatively small field of media discourse, but also to the much bigger field of media studies generally. Both of us also wanted to make a book which would be accessible and speak, not just to specialists, but also to students and non-specialists, and we are grateful to our editors, Louise Semlyen and Nadia Seemungal, for having made this possible. We also thank Bethan Evans for help with obtaining image rights. Whether we have succeeded or not it is of course too early to tell.

David Machin and Theo van Leeuwen

Introduction

It is not hard to see that the media are becoming increasingly global. The same films screen all over the world. The same television programmes and the same news footage are shown everywhere, albeit sometimes in 'localised' versions. The same bestsellers and glossy magazines dominate the stands of newsagents and booksellers and the same music is heard the world over. Global culture industries now produce and distribute consciousness for us all.

At the same time, new forms of migration have brought more cultural diversity to the major cities of European nation states than they have seen for a long time. And alongside the mainstream global media that seek to reach out to everyone everywhere, there are no longer only national media, but also a diversity of other media, catering for ethnic communities, sometimes locally produced, sometimes globally distributed from their countries of origin, as for instance in the case of Bollywood.

Nation states have tried, and are still trying, to stem this tide, to preserve the unity of their national media and to keep out what they often see as threats against their beliefs and ways of life. The Netherlands, in the 1980s, quickly cabled the whole country and prohibited satellite dishes to try and halt the erosion of its traditional media system (De Swaan, 1991). China has blocked media sources such as CNN, NBC and the *Washington Post*, and still blocks the websites of the BBC and several other Western news and entertainment media. Other examples could be mentioned. In many cases resistance gradually weakened. Economic prosperity and global culture seem to go hand in hand, and cannot be bought separately. In other cases, we cannot be so sure. In Indonesia, the editor and the centrefold model of the first localised issue of *Playboy* were charged with indecency, after demonstrations against 'Western decadence'. This kind of resistance seems to be growing.

Critics of globalisation have argued that globalisation leads to unprecedented standardisation and cultural homogeneity. Some make comparisons with the natural environment. Like species, they argue, local cultures and languages are in danger of becoming extinct and, as a result, the world's cultural resources will dwindle. Innovation will become more difficult. The global media industries have responded by deliberately creating diversity, producing global media in 'local' languages and integrating 'local' content in various ways. We discuss several examples of such localisation in this book. Theorists, too, have responded by arguing that global media products are not necessarily everywhere 'read' in the same way. People from different cultures will interpret and experience them differently, they say, thereby 'indigenising' the global media (Appadurai, 1990), so that diversity is maintained after all, albeit

in a less tangible form. We discuss such theories in Chapter 1. For the moment it is clear that we live in a period of transition. Two worlds coexist uneasily: the world of nation states, with their national languages and cultures, and the global world with its emerging global language and culture carried, not by nation states, but by global corporations and international organisations.

Another thing is also becoming clear – this new global culture is not universally accepted. It has not brought about a global village in which we can all live peacefully together. Other global cultures have emerged alongside, carried by transnational religions and dispersed ethnic groups. New cultural and political conflicts are emerging, and a new war – the 'war on terrorism'. Like the cold war, this war is ideologically driven. But the enemy is no longer an alliance of nation states. It is a globally dispersed cultural, political and religious movement. It is for this reason that we pay special attention to Arab-language media that seek to present an alternative version of this war.

Theorists of media globalisation tend to foreground either the evident increase in global homogeneity or these new diversities (which also include new chances for local minorities or regions whose languages and cultures were repressed by nation states). We discuss these issues in Chapter 2, and again in Chapter 7. Here we would like to stress that, in this book, we do not so much seek to give answers as to ask questions and offer tools for exploring these questions, in all their complexity. We look both at 'top-down' localisations of global media products, asking in which respects they are similar and in which respect different, both in form and content, and at 'local' media that are either produced for the global market or as alternatives to the dominant global media. How different are they from the global media products they seek to challenge or compete with?

In exploring questions of this kind, we focus on the global media products themselves, but not at the expense of their contexts of production, distribution and, especially, reception. Global media impact on the societies in which they are introduced and may clash with traditional ways of life. In a country like Vietnam this is happening right now. In a country like the Netherlands it started to happen more than 50 years ago. The Dutch writer Geert Mak described his first encounter with global media, at age 5, in the quiet and rather provincial Holland of the times:

> I try to remember the living room at the Westersingel, on an autumn evening in 1952. No sound other than the quiet ticking of the cosy stove, the only heater in the house. A single lamp lights up the dark oak dinner table, the chairs around it, the chest of drawers behind it, the rest of the room. Everything revolves around that light and that table.
>
> Suddenly there are footsteps outside, and through the letterbox comes something incredibly colourful and glossy: a comic strip magazine. It is the first Donald Duck, delivered door to door and free in half the country. Most of the pictures inside are in black and white but they nevertheless make a deep impression. A duck as a school teacher! And the nephews just pressing an icecream

to his forehead when he complains about a headache! Unheard of liberties, set in an only dimly known world of cars, refrigerators and televisions. A world which was neither Protestant nor Catholic nor Neutral, but in which people belonged to nothing. That too was unprecedented.

(Mak, 1999: 418)

As we will see when we discuss Disney in more detail, magazines like this did not arrive from nowhere. They were not carried like seeds on the wind. There were intentions behind their worldwide distribution, a mission to spread the virtues of the American way, 'a Marshall plan of ideas', as the American film producer Walter Wanger said in 1950 (quoted in Miller *et al.*, 2000: 25). And they were read in specific ways in a Holland where people did not yet have cars, refrigerators and televisions, where they clashed with traditional respect for authorities and with the Dutch 'pillar' system in which everyone belonged to a social 'pillar' with its own media, its own educational and political institutions, and so on.

This book is divided into three parts. The first part sets up the context. We present a history of media globalisation and an overview of the main themes of globalisation theory, and we apply these themes to specific case studies of media globalisation so as to keep in focus the complexities that tend to get backgrounded in all too broad theoretical statements (including theoretical statements about complexity).

The second part focuses on lifestyle and entertainment media in relation to three areas, covered in three separate chapters: identity and community; sex and work; and war. Chapter 3 proposes that global media engender different kinds of identity and community from those traditionally fostered in nation states. Chapter 4 deals specifically with the kind of identities that global media create for women. Our focus is on the magazine *Cosmopolitan*, which started in the early 1960s in the USA, as part of the 'second wave' of feminism, and which now appears in localised form in 48 languages around the world. *Cosmopolitan* has consistently, and globally, propagated its ideal of the 'fun, fearless female' – a woman who has a career and remains independent, although she is frequently involved in pleasure-seeking casual affairs. In many cultural contexts this ideal is just as revolutionary as the three little ducks' disrespect for authority was for the 5-year-old Geert Mak in 1952 Holland. For women it holds out the prospect of liberation from patriarchal relations; for the traditional, patriarchal societies in which they live it threatens the fabric that held them together. Chapter 5 explores how the 'war on terrorism' is represented in computer war games. The American computer game industry is now bigger than the Hollywood film industry. Many of the games it produces deal with war, are closely modelled on actual events (mostly in the Middle East), and are explicitly intended to aid the war against terrorism. Middle Eastern game designers have produced alternative war games, to propagate another view of the same events. We compare their games to American war games and talk to players from different cultural backgrounds to probe their awareness of the political dimensions of these games.

In Part III we look at the 'how' of global media communication. We will look at the 'formats' of media materials (celebrity profiles, 'hot tips' genres, and so on), arguing that they are not just neutral containers for 'localised' content, but carriers of culturally specific messages of their own. We look at language, exploring the influence of globalisation on journalistic English in Vietnam and the way in which the Dutch, Spanish and Chinese languages have adapted themselves to the conversational, tongue-in-cheek 'tone' of *Cosmopolitan* magazine. And finally, we look at the images that are produced for global consumption by global image banks such as Getty Creative Images.

Most of the examples we use in the book come from our own research over the past five years.[1] They represent only a small selection from the many examples we could also have chosen, and for this reason our book cannot provide definitive answers. We hope it will be useful as a guide towards further exploration. The questions we have added to the chapters aim to assist in that process.

Note

1 The project was part of a larger project entitled Language and Global Communication, carried out at Cardiff University 2001–2006, and funded by The Leverhulme Trust.

Contexts

In this first section we set up the context, presenting a short history of media globalisation and an overview of the main themes of globalisation theory.

Chapter 1 deals with the rise of global media. One of the major theoretical issues of globalisation is the homogenisation of world culture through Western media, and through the values and kinds of identity they promote. We look at examples of the earliest forms of global media and show how their rise to global dominance formed part of a US project that was at once economic and ideological. US news, movies, advertising and magazines created the template for today's global media, its industrialised and standardised processes, and its use of local features in order to make global media products successful. We also show how, right from the beginning, politics, culture and economics came together in the entertainment products that were shipped around the planet.

Chapter 2 is concerned with the question of what media globalisation is, and with the different ways that global media and global media formats and styles find their way into societies. While there are as many different stories about globalisation as there are societies, there are, nevertheless, some notable patterns. The chapter looks at these complexities, using two case studies: Dutch women's magazines and Arab comic strips. This allows us to avoid the kind of broad generalisations that often characterise theories of globalisation.

1 Histories of media globalisation

In this chapter we look at the history of media globalisation, singling out some key developments and exemplifying them with case histories. We start with the history of news agencies, the first truly global media enterprise.

The globalisation of news

Many of us tend to think of news as a natural phenomenon – a straightforward and self-evident process where professional journalists inform members of their societies about important issues. It seems natural that we should find newspapers all around the planet. Yet sociologists have shown us that what we call 'news' is quite an odd set of institutional practices that must be understood in terms of its social and historical development. And this context is a European and American one. News itself, and its associated practices, the organisations of its institutions, its formats and genre, have their origins particularly in European and American culture. And central to the global spread of news as a genre and also in terms of content has been the news agency – the first global medium.

Early nineteenth-century newspapers were an important vehicle of political communication. They did not yet separate 'fact' and 'comment'. They openly took sides in political issues and carried editorials on the front page in which they conducted debates with 'correspondents' that could last for days. Today, editorials are some-times still called 'leading articles', but they are no longer on the front page, and their writers no longer conduct debates with letter writers, while 'correspondents' are now professional journalists, rather than readers. News agencies started in the middle of the nineteenth century to supply these newspapers with news items from across the world. Information became a commodity, presented in a neutral style to be saleable to editors of different political persuasion. In developing such a neutral style, news agencies would pioneer a 'journalism of information' (Boyd-Barrett *et al.*, 1998: 7) that would eventually take over from the earlier journalism of argument and political debate, although this happened much more slowly on the continent. They would also spearhead the importance of the urgency and topicality of the news, setting great store on speed of delivery. In this they were helped by the new technology of the telegraph.

The first agencies started in the late 1840s in Germany (Wolff), France (Havas) and the UK (Reuters). Other national agencies followed, but the three major agencies managed to monopolise the flow of news and form a cartel that divided up the world in the same way as empire-building nation states in that same period divided up the

world to form their colonial empires. In this arrangement the big three agencies had monopoly access to the national agencies in their territories, and these national agencies in turn (and, therefore, also the newspapers that relied on them) could only buy news from the global agency that had the monopoly in their territory.

Three aspects in the development of news agencies are particularly important for understanding the development of global media communication generally:

* the close links they forged between news and the global financial market;
* the 'journalism of information' they developed, with its standardised formats and routine devices for guaranteeing facticity and credibility; and
* the way in which they catered both to national, often propagandistic, interests, and to international, often market-oriented interests.

We discuss these in turn.

News and the market

From the beginning the news agencies provided not only news to the press, but also business intelligence to financial brokers and businessmen. Reuters, Wolff and Havas had all worked in banking before they started their news agencies, and they established their agencies close to, or in, the stock exchanges of London, Berlin and Paris. They saw news as a commodity, supplying traders with the opening and closing prices of the stock exchanges as fast as they could, to provide them with the up-to-date information they needed to be ahead of their competitors.

Today's news agencies have not changed in this respect. They operate on the principle that 'almost anything that passes as news in print, broadcasting and electronic media is likely to have some financial implication for someone' and that the best stories 'move markets' (Boyd-Barrett, 1998: 62). Boyd-Barrett (ibid., 72) quotes a Reuters quality controller praising a journalist: 'Our story weakened the dollar and the Bank of Japan intervened in its support . . . Our competitors were left chasing reactions in support . . . We beat the competition hands down. Great stuff.' Companies such as Reuters, now joined by newcomers like Bloomberg, Dow Jones and Knight Ridder, also provide 'financial desktop products' such as interactive dealing services, automated matching systems for futures contracts, and information management tools. More than 90 per cent of Reuters' revenue now comes from financial services.

Many people still think of politics, culture and economics as separate domains. In global media communication they come together. We are now familiar with the ways in which marketing permeates culture and politics. The news agencies already pioneered this more than 150 years ago, in a different age.

Standardisation

To sell to editors of different political persuasion, news had to become politically neutral, pure information, pure fact. This approach, which today is common in

newspapers the world over, was gradually developed and globally propagated by the major news agencies. In a 1915 jubilee brochure, Reuters already wrote of 'compressing news into minute globules' (Palmer, 1998: 184). These 'globules' condensed news stories to their absolute essence, and at the same time used standard devices to guarantee facticity, for instance an insistence on including specific times and places and on mentioning sources for anything even remotely open to inter- pretation. Michael Palmer (1998) has described how Reuters imposed its standards on early twentieth-century Russia, where it had started to work with a new local news agency, Vestnik, in 1904. Regularly, Reuters chided Vestnik for filing stories which consisted 'mainly of argumentative statements which appear to have a semi- official character and to be intended to influence public opinion in this country' (ibid., 182). 'We must not be judgemental or editorialise', they wrote. 'Stick to the facts.' And: 'One of your dispatches yesterday began with "The mess persists . . .". If such be the case, mere factual reporting should suffice. Facts without comments please.' (ibid., 182). Vestnik, on the other hand, felt that many of Reuters' reports were not factual, but 'speculated about events'. 'We abstained from communicating to you these rumours until they found realisation', they wrote. 'If, however, you are willing to receive from us private and totally unconfirmed rumours, we are quite prepared to supply you with them just to please you' (ibid., 182).

   In the course of the twentieth century, standardisation increased further. In the 1980s the chief editors of news agencies began to publish voluminous handbooks to prescribe company style in minute detail and they also started quality control units to reinforce their prescriptions day by day, as in this quote, where a journalist is reminded of the principles of the 'lead paragraph':

> Those first 20 or 30 words make or break the story . . . Many media subscribers scanning wire services directories on a computer screen will decide whether to use a Reuters' story rather than an AP or AFP story on the basis solely of the headline and first paragraph . . . The lead paragraph should . . . stand as a self- contained story, complete with source if the subject is contentious . . . .
>
> (ibid., 187)

Today such standardisation is second nature to working journalists the world over. When we discuss a Vietnamese newspaper in Chapter 7, we see that what went on in Russia in 1904, the process of adapting local approaches to a global 'journalism of information', was still going on, just a few years ago, in Hanoi.

International and national aspects

The rise of the news agencies took place in the second half of the nineteenth century, the heyday of nationalism in Europe. Nation states all started their own news agencies, and the national interests these agencies sought to protect sometimes clashed with the interests of the international agencies on which they depended. Schulze-Schneider

(1998) has documented the case of Spain, where the national agency Fabra had been controlled by Havas from its inception in 1865. When Spain fought its war in Cuba in 1898, the world press was on Cuba's side and Havas ignored the news Fabra provided. Fabra then protested and Havas eventually compromised by agreeing to distribute official Spanish statements. Later, the propagandistic role of news agencies intensified. In 1939, after the Civil War, EFE, a new Spanish agency, was started, as an instrument of the Franco regime. It made no secret of its propagandistic intentions: 'News agencies are a powerful instrument in the task of distribution of news and influence abroad' (ibid., 120). The Nazis had already nationalised Wolff in 1933, merging it with its competitor Telegrafisches Union, and viewing it as a key tool of National-Socialist propaganda (Wilke, 1998). America and Britain also enlisted their media in the war effort.

In the 1960s, the newly independent African countries set up their own news agencies, as well as a pan-African TV exchange. Similar agencies and exchanges were established in other parts of the world: Eurovision, Arabvision, Asiavision, Caribvision. They adopted some of the values of the 'journalism of information', but had other interests as well. The charter of Arabvision, for instance, states that the material it will distribute 'shall reflect the interests of the Arab man, deepen his belief in the unity of objectives and destiny of the Arab nation, develop common trends in the Arab homeland by disseminating information on its message and potentialities, while stressing and supporting the causes of the struggle' (quoted in Hjarvard, 1998: 212). Western journalists constantly criticise these agencies and exchanges for being under the control of governments. The majority of the political news items supplied by Asiavision from any country, complained one journalist, 'are about the activities of the government, with a heavy dose of official visits and ceremonies. Coverage of opposition activities is rare, and in the case of some members completely absent' (ibid., 215).

Under Communism, the news agencies of Eastern European countries were also government-controlled. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the major Western agencies moved in, further diminishing the remaining influence of local agencies. A company like Reuters now derives 25 per cent of its revenue from the former Communist countries in Eastern Europe. The Baltic states and the new states of the former Yugoslavia, however, have founded new, fervently nationalistic state media.

On the surface, most countries' news and information media are still national. They support their countries' national ethos and protect national interests. But below that – invisible to most newspaper readers, radio listeners and television viewers – there has been a gradual increase in the influence of the global media producers and their market-driven interests. National news agencies had never found it easy to reach out beyond their own territory and today they are in decline in many parts of the world. The exchanges that seek to provide alternatives to the agenda of the global agencies also find it difficult to keep their heads above water. The view that only private ownership and an open market can guarantee free, unbiased information is gaining ground everywhere.

The cartel of European news agencies collapsed in 1934, when the United Press Association (UPA) refused to join the cartel and began its own global operations. The other major American agency, Associated Press (AP) followed. From this moment, the major news agencies began to compete with each other, and the USA, rather than Europe, became the major player. The new global agencies that started in the late twentieth century were all American: Bloomberg, Knight Ridder, Dow Jones.

It is sometimes said, particularly by 'local' broadcasters, that news agencies only supply 'raw material', which they then 'localise' and 'domesticate'. Broadcasters often refer to agency material as 'protection' or 'insurance policy' and take credit for stories they have not themselves generated (Patterson, 1998: 85). Careful content research has shown, however, that agency video material is most often used in virtually unchanged form (ibid., 85). A famous case was the 1984 famine in Ethiopia, which the BBC claimed to have brought to the attention of the world when it had in fact been filmed by a Reuters' correspondent: 'The power of exchange systems and TV news agencies . . . is much greater than the public generally knows or feels' (Malik, 1992: 88).

Newer news outlets in poorer countries will be set up to run directly from material provided from the big agencies. Many will not have the facilities for extra levels of editing or presentation. So giant media corporations like Reuters and Worldwide Television News will send packages of more or less identical clips and pre-prepared scripts around the world for easy, cheap, immediate use (Patterson, 1998; Machin and Niblock, 2006).

The globalisation of American media

From the 1920s onwards, America began to take the lead, not only in the provision of news, but also in other media, so much so that, in the 1970s, a study of the political economy of the mass media could be called *The Media Are American* (Tunstall, 1977). Hollywood was the first breakthrough. Until 1918, most movies and movie equipment were produced in Europe. France even exported a dozen films a week to the USA (Miller *et al.*, 2000). But in 1918 Congress passed an Act that would allow the Motion Picture Export Association (MPEA) to set export prices and impose conditions on overseas sales that were not allowed at home, such as blind bidding and block booking. As a result foreign sales soon became a significant part of the film industry's revenue. After the Second World War, America was in a position to impose quotas in Europe and gradually push local production to the margins, especially now that the Hollywood giants have become part of large conglomerates that not only produce the films, but also own multiplex cinemas, video retail outlets and cable/satellite channels everywhere in the world. By the mid-1990s America controlled about 85 per cent of the world's film market and even in France, which has been the only European country to retain a strong home production industry, French-language films now account for only 30 per cent of their home box office revenue (Robinson, 1995: 245).