WHO IS ON FOCUS?

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Телевизионните новини са по същество културен феномен. Предишни изследвания загатват, че често пъти недоглеждането на формални и имплицитни характеристики при новините може да бъде систематично свързано с културно-специфични характеристики. Изучаването на персонализацията на новините като една от тези характеристики чрез контент анализ кадър по кадър се определя като особено обещаващ методологичен подход. За да изследвам взаимоотношението между културни и избрани формални характеристики от новините (един аспект, на които е персонализацията), аз представям част от проучвателно изследване (Senokozlieva, Fischer, Bente, & Krämer, 2006), което сравнява материал от САЩ, Арабския свят и Германия. Резултатите показват, че съществуват много значими различия, някои от които потвърждават очакванията, получени от специфики в културата. По-конкретно, ние застъпваме мнението, че броят на представените лица и контекста, в който те са представени, се различава при отделните култури и може да бъде интерпретиран като индикатор за индивидуализъм/колективизъм. Тези заключения подчертават валидността на избрания методологичен подход, но също така демонстрират необходимостта от по-обхватни и теоретично обусловени категориални схеми.

Introduction

Media in general and newscasts in particular are essentially cultural phenomena. The mass media have so thoroughly permeated the pervasive phenomenon we call culture that the two have become seemingly inseparable. Consequently, there is a reason to expect that cultural differences between nations are also reflected in the way TV newscasts are presented. As national news seem to play a crucial role in how we perceive of and communicate with other nations (Wu, 1998, 2000) an understanding of cultural specifics can help us avoid misunderstanding and communication mishaps. Yet, empirical investigations of the relationship between dimen-

sions of culture and formal as well as specific content-related differences in the way newscasts are presented seem few and far between. While much has been written about how media differ from culture to culture (Kolker, 2001; Korzenny, Ting-Toomey, & Schiff, 1992; Rössler, 2004), and about how national news are perceived in other countries (Cohen & Roeh 1992), the adopted methodological approach is mostly macroscopic and rarely focuses on particular characteristics of the analysed material. More than a decade ago, Roger Masters, Siegfried Frey and Gary Bente (1991) conducted an empirical analysis of TV newscasts from three different countries (France, Germany, and the United States), analysing the frequency and duration with which political leaders of the three countries were displayed. Differences in personalisation between the three countries were intriguing to the extent that the leadership structure of each of the three countries was directly related to how often and for how long political leaders were shown in the newscasts. At the time, the authors decided not to explore how their data might be related to underlying dimensions of culture.

This, we would argue, is a logical next step and should therefore be the basis for further research. We make a case for investigating questions related to intercultural differences in the way meaning is created through implicit conventions in media presentation by means of detailed content analyses. This report presents a part of the study considering only one aspect of the formal characteristics — the persons presented on the news.

Against the background of current political and societal developments we selected the United States of America, Germany and the Arabic culture (as most TV channels are produced for the whole region, no specific country was focused). Regarding the formal aspect of presenting people on the news distinctions could be derived hypothetically from Hofstede's model of cultural differences (Hofstede, 1980, 2003) considered as indicators for Individualism/Collectivism. The Individialism/Collectivism dimension focuses on the degree the society reinforces individual or collective achievement and interpersonal relationships. These are easily overlooked, but are nevertheless a powerful means of affecting viewers (Bente & Frey, 1992; Kamps & Meckel, 1998; Rössler, 2004). In order to examine whether a content analysis-based comparison of the three chosen countries yields any differences with regard to formal aspects of the visual material, we conducted a small pilot study using a preliminary category scheme. The results of the pilot study led to substantial improvements of the category scheme used for the main study.

Method

For analysing the news material we applied the computer system tool INVAS, as first presented in Bente, D'Alessandro, Fürtjes & Krämer, (1997), which enables a frame-by-frame content analysis of video material.

As shown in fig. 1 digital video material (AVI, MPG, WMV) can be loaded and is displayed in the window on the upper left side of the screen. The video can be accessed frame by frame (see selection on the left).