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The Nature of Foreign News. Conceptual Considerations About Analysing Foreign News Over Time

Introduction

One could argue that the conditions for a *golden age* of foreign news are now. As the world is growing smaller and borders are becoming less of obstacles, events happening at one side of the world can easily be found to influence outcomes on the other. Not only economically, but also politically, powers are exceeding the national, turning information from abroad more relevant than before. In addition, the recent and fast dissemination of new communication technologies enables broadcasters to gather, produce and distribute news from all over the world in overall, but especially financially, more convenient ways (Moisy, 1997). Given the increased relevance and availability of news from abroad, expectations about skyrocketing shares of foreign news could only be marked logical. Throughout the nineties, however, study after study analysing the state of foreign news ended up with the conclusion of a shrinking foreign newshole. Foreign news became entitled as “an endangered species” (Emery, 1989), the world in the news was said to be “disappearing out of sight” (Biltereyst and Joye, 2005). Not only in the United States (Norris, 1995; Moisy, 1997; Utley, 1997; Stacks, 2004) but also in the UK (Hallin, 1996) and other European countries (Votquenne and Van Aelst, 2003; Peeren, 2003; Sinardet et al 2004) scholars noticed a lowering of mass media’s attention to foreign and international issues. While the world is interfering more strongly in people’s everyday life, its coverage in mass media is plummeting, the paradox goes.

This marginalization of foreign news raised new concerns that tied in with an old debate. Overlooking several decades of studies dealing with the state of foreign news, one common denominator comes to the fore: foreign news is, and always has been, a sort of problem child within the field of news studies. Time and again scholars seem to be ringing the alarm bell when discussing the quantity and quality of international news. Especially in the seventies and early eighties, the UNESCO-led *New World Information and Communication Order*-debates (NWICO) addressed foreign news and its gatekeepers with strong and explicit charges. International news flow was found to be one-directional and western filtered, excluding and distorting people’s picture of the world. Developing news was considered non-existent, news about Third World countries only emphasized its negative and fragile aspects (Stevenson and Shaw, 1984).

Also today, the *NWICO*-charges still seem to stand strong: besides the aforementioned quantitative degradation of foreign news, current studies also speak of its qualitative decline. The dependence of ever more broadcasters on single wire agency-sources is one side of that qualitative deterioration (Shanor, 2003). Other critiques include the narrow span of topics aired, the fragmented “in 15seconds around the world”-carousel approach, and the lack of context when depicting deeply rooted foreign conflicts. As Hess (1996) states: “TV tales tell us where and how, rarely why. They are too episodic, too lacking in context to provide coherent information. Instead, they provide just the opposite: undifferentiated mayhem.”

Wrapping things up, most studies are *unisono* and do not paint a shiny happy picture when considering the state of foreign news. Arguments of a quantitative as well as a qualitative nature, seem solid and hold strong. In this chapter, we will take a closer look at studies analysing the share of foreign news. Not the shrinking newshole itself is at the core of our investigation, but studies analysing the shrinking newshole are. Several authors (Riffe, 1994; Biltereyst, 2000; Barnhurst, 2006) already pointed to the overly episodic nature of the evidence supporting foreign news’s long term decline. As data covering longer periods of time is for most part lacking, the claim of a decline is largely based on a succession of snapshot studies. Exactly this succession is problematic. As Riffe (1994) summarizes: “The evidence that the foreign newshole is shrinking over time is indirect, and comes primarily through juxtaposition of isolated (and methodologically dissimilar) content analyses, rather than from well-designed longitudinal comparisons.”

Bearing this quote in mind, the goal of this chapter is twofold. First, we will zoom in on this “juxtaposition” of “snapshot” studies, and substantiate why such a succession is problematic. Three reasons are put forward as potentially endangering the reliability of linking snapshot studies: (1) the diversity in operational definitions of “foreign news”; (2) the mix of units of analysis that is employed; and (3) the event driven nature of foreign news. Both own content analyses and studies analysing the content of news on the Belgian public station VRT will be used to illustrate why interpolating trends from snapshot studies is risky. After having pinned down the barriers which should refrain scholars from linking snapshot studies, the second part of this chapter explores whether and how it is possible to overcome some of these hurdles. We will combine different existing studies, and test whether it is possible to sketch a long-term outline on the evolution of foreign news, considering the main remarks put forward in the first part of this chapter. With the long-standing tradition of applying content analysis to study news broadcasts in the United States, we will use the US as a case study. Finally, the conclusion of this chapter leads us to acknowledging that “foreign news” is a more thorny and complex concept than one would assume at first sight. Different conceptualizations in different studies illustrate the versatility of a seemingly straightforward concept. In the end, it is argued that one of the core issues in the study of foreign news should be the formulation of a communal and up to date operationalization of foreign news.

Problems When Analysing Foreign News

The state of foreign news is a much debated issue in scientific literature and is important for several reasons. Foremost, foreign news in mass media still continues to be the major source of information about other parts of the world (Wu, 2003). As a consequence, the impact of foreign news on how people look at the world and communicate with persons from other countries, is allegedly vast (Wu, 1999; Van Ginniken, 1998). And indeed, many studies highlight the impact of foreign news on knowledge of, and attitudes towards, foreign countries (Beaudoin, 2004; Brewer et al., 2003; Curran et al., 2007; Iyengar et al., 2009; McNelly and Izcaray, 1986; Perry, 1990).

Another aspect of this impact of foreign news is formulated by Tester (2004). He sees foreign news as "an important mechanism for the extension of people's horizon". Especially in this globalized world, looking "outward", -or getting information that enables one to look outward- is considered of the utmost importance. Just like it is impossible to fully understand the 2009 economic crisis, or refugees begging for asylum, a host of other problems can not be thought of without looking beyond the borders of the own nation state. Foreign news thus is vital because it offers viewers and readers a broader context in which important evolutions make sense.

Finally, foreign news is also important for reasons purely related to the profession of "journalism". In a sense, foreign news can be considered as a difficult news category. As foreign news is expensive, and deals with complex issues that often not relate to the general public's sphere of interest, news from abroad puts the tension between journalistic and more business-related norms to the test. As foreign news does not "sell any papers", nor "builds circulation", most news organizations consider foreign news rather as a burden than a trump card. According to Shanor (2003) it is the increasingly competitive media market that puts the share and quality of foreign news under pressure. Private profit now tops the public's right to know. From this point of view, the simple amount of foreign news is considered as a proxy for the quality status of an entire media outlet. Newspapers or newscasts paying a lot of attention to foreign issues and international affairs, are considered of high quality, as they do not serve what the general public *wants* to know, but what they think people *need* to know. Essentially, the mere share of foreign news in this sense acts as a sort of *canary in a coal mine*: when the preconditions for a high quality press are violated, the share of foreign news comes under pressure and starts to decline. All in all, these three reasons make researching the state of foreign news a legitimate and valuable cause, a task that should be performed cautiously.

Several scholars, however, warn for a certain bias in analysing the decline of foreign news. These scholars do not deny the problems that confront foreign news nowadays, yet point to several difficulties, as well as a certain lack of clarity, in the demonstration and argumentation about the shrinking foreign newshole. In short, they believe that the over-time evolution of foreign news is not studied as cautious

as it should be. Barnhurst (2006), for instance, states that although researchers assume a long term decline, most studies usually only cover limited periods of time, which makes discerning long-time trends impossible. Biltreyst (2001), on the other hand, argues that not only the lack of longitudinal data in most countries is problematic. He also says that the process of differentiation, segmentation and targeting in the media market should be taken into account. Indeed, with a broader news ecology, and with specific issues on the market, one can say that more information on overseas matter is available than ever. Mass media thus should not be judged as a monolithic block. Yet one can easily question whether this enormous supply-side of information is reaching out of the already aware in-crowd, or rather is merely reinforcing and widening the knowledge gap. As Stacks (2004) argues: “[...] All these quality sources have limited circulation. Meanwhile the share of foreign news in the mass media decreases. In other words, more people now know less about the rest of the world, and a few people know a good deal more.”

Also Riffe (1994) states that the evidence of a shrinking foreign newshole is to some degree questionable, as the evidence is mostly indirect, and comes from a “juxtaposition of isolated and methodologically dissimilar content analyses”. With the next few pages, we will argue that this juxtaposition is troublesome for at least three reasons: (1) because of a diversity in definitions used to study foreign news, (2) because of a mix of metrics and measurement techniques applied, and, (3) because of the extreme event-driven nature of foreign news, which makes sampling techniques crucial. In the next few pages, we will elaborate why each of this factors should be met if one wants to sketch a long time evolution of foreign news based on different studies, and why scholars should refrain from doing so when these conditions are violated.

A Diversity in Definitions of Foreign News

The first remark is one of an overall conceptual nature, as it deals with the operationalization of foreign news. At first sight, a concept like foreign news seems rather straightforward. Its particular operationalization in content analysis, however, proves otherwise. Hester (1978), for instance, defined foreign news as “news reported from outside the country of broadcast”. In his case, a single measure, more specifically the dateline of the report, served as a strict differentiator. Larson (1984), on the other hand, used a far more broad operationalization of foreign news: “any news story that mentioned a country other than the United States, regardless of its thematic content or dateline”, was considered as an “international news”-item. Gonzenbach and his colleagues (1992), finally, tried to differentiate within Larson’s broad “international news” category, and distinguished domestic (involving only the United States), international (involving the United States and a foreign country, regardless of geographic location) and foreign (with no reference to the United States) news. Other authors tried to measure the share of foreign news by combining thematic codes that were exclusively linked to overseas’ events (Sinardet et

al., 2004). And some articles even don't provide information about how they operationalised foreign news (Peeren, 2003; Norris, 1996).

Wrapping things up, the operationalization of foreign news seems to be a much more thorny issue than the simple "domestic - foreign"- dichotomy seems to promise. While some scholars use the dateline of an item as a base, others are looking at the content of the news item. Yet also international organizations, or reports on global evolutions like "climate change", should be considered when taking the 'foreign' in the media into account. In order to illustrate the difficulty scholars encounter when trying to define news with a foreign slant it suffices to quote Gerbner and Marvanyi's (1977) definition of foreign news, from their seminal article "The Many Worlds of the World's press". The length and depth of their definition clearly shows that defining foreign news is more complex than one would assume:

"The world, meaning the outside world, was defined as any territory outside of the geographical boundaries of the country in which the newspaper is published. Colonies or protectorates of the home country were to be considered foreign for purposes of our study. Therefore, stories originating abroad (having a foreign dateline) were to be considered foreign news, even if the subject involved domestic affairs. Second, when most of the information came from abroad or the story dealt mostly with foreign matter, or both, it was to be considered foreign news, even if it had a domestic dateline. Third, a story about foreign visitors was always to be considered foreign news. News origination or written about international zones (the UN in New York, Geneva, Berlin East or West) was to be considered foreign on all papers".

As different scholars are using different operationalizations of foreign news, one could argue that comparing these studies is like comparing apples and oranges. And comparing apples and oranges is something scholars should refrain from. Said differently, the field of foreign news studies is in urgent need of conceptual clarification. Especially now, as the boundaries between the local and the global are becoming increasingly blurry, one could ask oneself to what degree current affairs can be reported using a single national or foreign angle. With the recent reconfiguration of the state, the tendency towards "globalization", and in Europe, the EU-integration, the very nature of foreign news is going through a series of transformations. Also journalistic techniques and narratives, like "domestication" - as a "countervailing force to the pull of globalization" - (Gurevitch et al., 1993) should be taken into account when studying foreign news. Indeed, casting far-away events in familiar frameworks to make them more comprehensible, appealing and relevant, can only be thought of as a technique that will gain significance in a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected. As an overall conclusion, then, one can say that the current nature of foreign news proves to be more tricky than before, and that the construct that is designed to measure foreign news should take this "trickiness" into account. In that sense, an update, and a more systematic application of a new and uniform concept of foreign news, should be high on the agenda in the field of foreign news studies.

Mix of Metrics

Another problem when comparing studies, is the mix of metrics that is employed. Different studies use different units of analysis, which can lead to different conclusions. In the case of newspapers, one could count articles or use square inches to lay down the amount of foreign news. For television, one could count the number of items, or one could weigh the items according to their length. Again, these different units can give different impressions. Only counting articles or items, for instance, means passing by their possible growing or lowering in length. Consequentially, applying different units of analysis on the same data can lead to dramatic differences in results. One could sincerely ask oneself whether four short articles – leading to a bigger share of foreign news when counting articles – are doing a better job in interpreting the world than two longer in-depth articles. A closely related problem considers the growing newshole. As many newspapers are printing fancy life-style sections, and newscast are growing longer, the same amount of foreign coverage actually means a lower share of foreign news. Therefore, one should think about whether all the sections, or, on television, all the features (sport, announcements, repetitions of headlines) should be taken into account when judging the state of foreign news. Of course one could argue that not filling this created extra time with world affair news points to a clear editorial choice, which is already a conclusion about the state of foreign news *an sich*, however, it would nonetheless be advisable to give these remarks a thought, and be extremely explicit about metrics when illustrating and explaining results.

The Event Driven Nature of News

The third drawback focuses on another key fact that makes linking single snapshot studies doubtful. Snapshot studies, when methodologically consistent, can compare one moment in time with another. Yet they can hardly depict a trend, or an evolution over time. As the business of news is driven by current affairs, the share of foreign news is constantly fluctuating. News is a zero-sum game: big, domestic events are known for crowding foreign events out and *vice versa* (Weaver et al., 1984). As a consequence, the sample one takes, and the sample procedure one follows, are of the utmost importance. As snapshot studies span only a short period of time, and as they are often based on a “consecutive days” sampling-approach, these studies can hardly be said to represent anything but the period of the sample. Riffe et al. (1996) putted the effectiveness of sampling methods and sizes to the test by comparing them to one year population/census-data. Sample efficiency was determined by comparing the outcomes of the samples to the population data, with the values of the Central Limits Theorem as cut-off points (for more details about that see Riffe et al., 1996 and Riffe et al., 2005). By incorporating different news topics Riffe et al also tested whether sampling efficiency depends on the variable under study: the greater the variability of the variable, the more profound the sample should be to meet the CLT-standards. Jumping to the conclusion, Riffe et al without

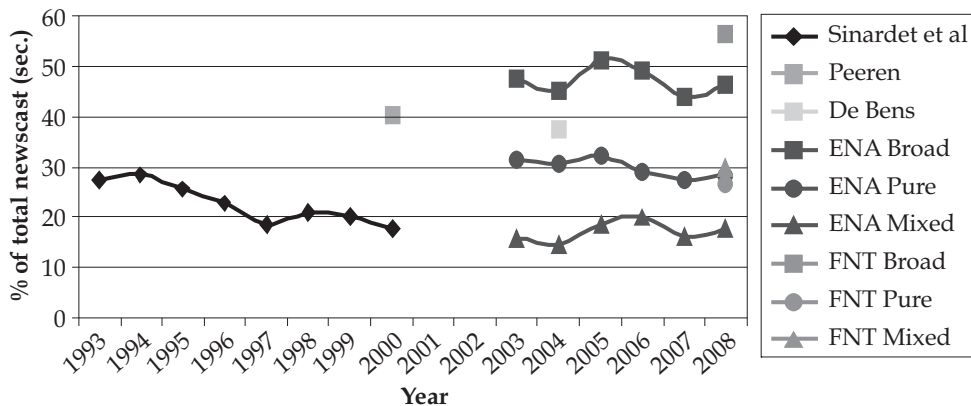
doubt found that different news categories mattered. For the ABC and CBS data, Riffe et al concluded that the most efficient (smallest number of days in a reliable sample) sample method for a reliable representation of one year of international news, was a 24-day, monthly stratified sample. Most snapshot studies, however, do not apply this method. They are samples of consecutive days, or samples of constructed/composite weeks covering only a limited period of time. In brief, one can seriously doubt whether these samples meet the standards to represent a single year.

In sum, with the previous paragraphs of this chapter we showed that how tempting and suggestive it may seem to interpolate trends from single snapshot studies, conclusions from such juxtapositions are at least incomplete, and flat wrong at worst. In the remainder of this chapter we will bring some evidence to the table. First we will sketch an outline on the evolution of foreign news in Belgium. Several single snapshot studies, and own data analysis, will make us rest our case. Then we will present information on the American situation, and argue that combining overlapping longitudinal studies can offer a solution to the problems we presented up till now.

Juxtaposing Snapshot Studies: A Case Study of Belgium

In this part of the chapter an outline is sketched on the state of foreign news in Belgium. Published studies are combined with own content analysis to illustrate why interpolating trends from snapshot studies is problematic. Since 2003, the University of Antwerp hosts the Electronic News Archive (ENA). Every evening newscast of the most important public and the biggest commercial Belgian television station is recorded and coded following an elaborated code scheme. What makes the Electronic News Archive exclusive is that no samples are drawn. In that way, the archive represents the rare census approach. Table 1 presents information about the ENA-data and the other studies, while Figure 1 plots the results of these different

Figure 1. Share of foreign news on Belgium’s public broadcaster Eén (VRT) according to five different studies, from 1993–2008



datasets in one graph. Only the share of public broadcaster *Eén* is taken into account. Looking at the table, what immediately strikes the eye is the variety in definitions of foreign news. None of the studies operationalises foreign news in the same way. Two studies even do not provide information about the operationalization of their main dependent variable. While all studies use seconds as their unit of analysis, the sampling methods and periods differ widely: from census, over constructed, to consecutive samples; from two over four weeks, till several years.

Table 1

Overview of Belgian studies on foreign news according to author, period, unit of analysis, sample and definition of foreign news

Author	Period	Unit	Sample	Foreign news
Sinardet et al	1993–2000	Sec.	Content Analysis on the population of newscasts	– Thematic operationalisation: Europe, International Relations, Overseas Disasters, War, Domestic news from other countries than Belgium
Peeren	2000	Sec.	One consecutive week and one constructed week in November–December	– Not mentioned
ENA	2003–2008	Sec.	Content Analysis on the population of newscasts	– Domestic: news items only mentioning Belgium – Mixed: news items mentioning Belgium and at least one other country – Foreign: news items only mentioning other countries than Belgium
De Bens	2004	Sec.	Two consecutive weeks: 09–15/02/2004 and 05–11/04/2004	– Not mentioned
FNT	2008	Sec.	Four consecutive weeks: 20–26/01/2008; 10–16/02/2008; 02–08/03/2008; 23–29/03/2008	– Domestic: event takes place in country of broadcast with no foreign involvement – Domestic with foreign involvement: event takes place in country of broadcast but specific reference is made to at least one other country – Foreign with domestic involvement: event takes place in other country but specific reference is made to country of broadcast (combining both middle categories results in the mixed news category of the ENA project). – Foreign: event takes place in other country without any reference to country of broadcast

Looking at the results of the different studies depicted in Figure 1, three important conclusions stand out. Considering the left hand side of the table, the share of foreign news declined strongly during the nineties (Sinardet et al, 2004). Whereas news with a foreign slant captured about 30 percent in the beginning of the nineties, 2000 brought merely 20 percent news from abroad. More daunting, however, are the striking differences between the Sinardet et al study, and the one conducted by Peeren (2003). As for Peeren (2003) the 40%-share of foreign news in 2000 doubles the Sinardet et al results. Two factors lie at the bottom of this huge difference. First, different operationalizations definitely are key here: Peeren does not elaborate on the operationalization of foreign news, Sinardet et al use thematic codes. Second, and on top of the first bias between these studies, also the very short sample period of Peeren, with one week of consecutive days, probably contributed to these widely divergent results: only 14 days in November–December needed to represent 2000. As sampling procedures and operationalizations differ, we can surely speak of the proverbial apples and oranges when looking at these studies, which makes it impossible to clearly relate them to each other.

Also the 2003–2008 period of the graph proves interesting, as we have snapshot studies we can compare with longitudinal data that takes the whole population of evening newscasts into account. Notice that both the ENA and the FNT¹ study take different sides of foreign news into account. The triangles, dots and squares in the graph respectively reflect pure, mixed and broad foreign news. For an elaboration on these concepts, see Table 1. Juxtaposing the three snapshot studies could have led to the conclusion of a fair growth in the share of foreign news. Indeed, interpolating a trend from the 2000, 2004 and 2008 data, would imply a growing foreign newshole for the 2004–2008 period. The longitudinal study, however, tempers this conclusion, and shows a share of foreign news that is rather fluctuating than increasing. Also of great interest is the 2008 situation. While operationalizations and unit of analysis are constant, the sampling method between the ENA and FNT data differs. The first takes the whole population of 2008 newscasts into account, the latter uses a consecutive weeks approach. Again, sampling strategy matters. The share of mixed news in the FNT-period under study is much larger than during the whole year of 2008, leading to an increase of foreign news defined broadly. It is clear, then, that the FNT-data does not adequately represent 2008.

As a conclusion, we can say that in order to study the evolution of foreign news over time, one is in need of longitudinal data, gathered by a sampling method, metric and operationalization of foreign news one can justify, and that one does justify and describes extensively when writing about the results. However tempting the interpolation of trends from snapshot studies seems, the aforementioned drawbacks should not be taken lightly. Although longitudinal data obviously are part of the solution, one should still be careful: the start and end year of the period under

¹ The Foreign News on Television project (FNT) is an international study by researchers from more than 20 countries, conducting a comparative cross-national study of foreign news on television. The project is led by Prof. Akiba A. Cohen, Tel Aviv University.

study can greatly affect the conclusion, especially when only a short period of time is taken into account. That's why, in the next part of this chapter, and with the remarks of this first part in mind, we will explore whether it is possible to assemble an outline on the evolution of the share of foreign news on the American networks, thereby only combining existing longitudinal studies. In the case of Belgium, such a succession turned out to be impossible, with most of the data being snapshot studies, and operationalizations of foreign news being highly divergent. Scholars in the United States, however, can lean on a more longstanding tradition of applying content analysis to newscasts, positively affecting the odds of bringing this exercise to a good end.

Interpolating Trends: A Case Study of the U. S.

As already stated, scholars in the United States have a long-standing tradition of analysing the amount of foreign news (Warner, 1968; Almaney, 1970; Hester, 1968). Most of these studies use the *Television News Index and Abstracts* of the Vanderbilt Television News Archive as a base for their analysis. These abstracts give brief statements on the issue covered in the item, the length of the item, and its origin. Larson and Hardy (1977) – comparing the abstracts with their own coding- found the archive to be a very reliable source of data. In the next few paragraphs, we will present an outline of studies considering the amount of foreign news on the evening newscasts of ABC, CBS and NBC; America's three major networks. All together, these different studies span a period of almost four decades. By making an overview of mostly longitudinal studies and taking the US as a case, we want to explore whether it is possible to interpolate trends from overlapping longitudinal studies, taking into account the drawbacks encountered when analysing the Belgian case.

Almaney (1970) was one of the first who designed a study to find out how many stories in a typical newscast covered news from abroad. His study covered a four week period in April 1969. News was considered "domestic" when the event was occurring within the boundaries of the United States and no other country was involved. "International affairs" pointed to an involvement between the US and another country, and "Foreign news" referred to events where the US was not playing "an active or conspicuous role". On average, for the three networks together, a typical newscast – without time devoted to the commercial breaks – lasted 22 minutes and consisted of 14 different stories. Nine stories – or 13 minutes – were devoted to national affairs; three stories – 6,5 minutes – to international affairs; and two stories – each of about one minute-handled foreign affairs. Almaney concluded that Network TV was basically a domestic news medium, and that international and foreign affairs were only reported when they reached a sort of "crisis" point. Nevertheless Almaney believed that "such a potent communication medium as tv" could go a long way in arousing interest for foreign affairs. Table 2 summarizes the same main variables of interest as table 1 does, for Almaney, as well as for all the other articles discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Table 2

Overview of American studies on foreign news according to author, period, unit of analysis, sample and definition of foreign news. All ABC, CBS & NBC newscasts except Norris (ABC & CBS)

Author	Period	Unit	Sample	Foreign news
Almaney	1969	Items & Seconds	Four week sample: 1-28 April; weekdays, consecutive days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National affairs: events occurring within US boundaries. - International affairs: US and another country involvement. - Foreign affairs: US is not playing a role.
Larson	1972-1979	Items	862 newscasts, random sample stratified by year. average of 3 newscasts a month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International news: any story that mentions a country other than the united States, regardless of its thematic content or dateline
Weaver et al	1972-1981	Seconds	360 newscasts, random sample, average of one day a month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International news: news reported from outside the United States.
Gonzenbach et al	1972-1989	Items	738 newscasts, random sample of 41 days a year, controlling for a quarter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic: involving only the US - International: involving the US and a foreign country, regardless of geographic location - Foreign: no reference to US
Norris	1973-1995	Items	2228 items, structured random sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not mentioned
Tyndall	1988-2008	Seconds	Content analysis on population of newscasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bureau: time devoted to stories filed by reporters with a foreign dateline. - Foreign Policy: time devoted to stories concerning the foreign policy of the United States, regardless of dateline. - International: time devoted to overseas stories in which US foreign policy is not involved

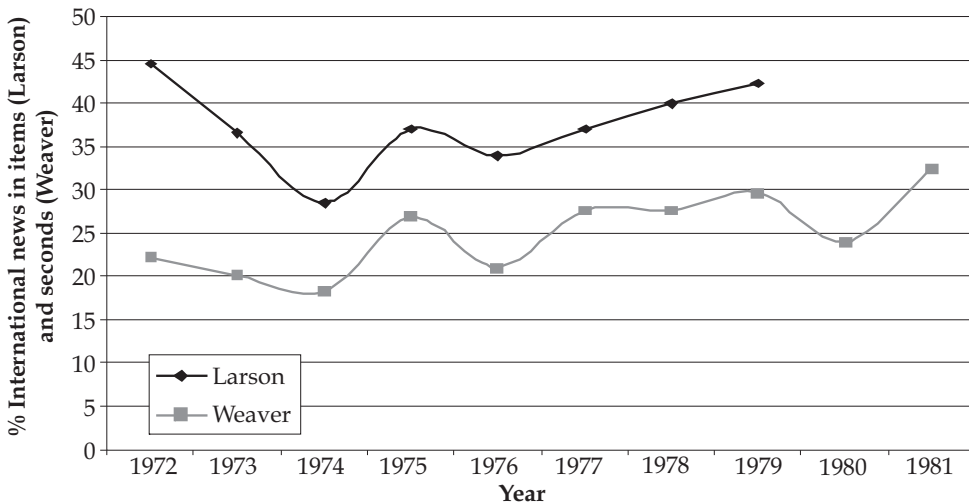
Soon after the snapshot study of Almaney, other scholars started to study the evolution of foreign news over time (Hester, 1978; Larson and Hardy, 1977). Often these scholars updated previous work by adding a few more years to existing datasets. Larson, for instance, first analysed the amount of foreign news for a four-year period (Larson and Hardy, 1977), and finally updated his own work to enclose an eight-year period (1972-1979) (Larson, 1982). Weaver, Porter and Evans

(1984), on the other hand, replicated Hester's content analysis for the '77-'81-years, as such succeeding in spanning a ten year period. Both content analyses of Weaver et al (1984) and Larson (1982) are of great interest to compare, as they employ different definitions of foreign news, use different samples and metrics, but look at by and large the same period.

Larson, to begin with, adopted a broad, but practical definition of "international news": any news story that mentioned a country other than the United States, regardless of its thematic content or dateline, was considered an international story. Also stories mentioning international organizations were labelled as international news stories. The basic unit of analysis was the individual news story. On average, 37 percent of the news items was devoted to international news. A typical evening newscast was made of 17 items; 6 treated international news. Considering the evolution of international news over time, the number of stories devoted to international topics was highest at the start and at the end of the period. Larson concluded that after a steep drop in the first two years, there was a clear trend towards a more extensive and consistent coverage of international affairs in the subsequent years.

Figure 2 shows the course of international news over time in Larson's study, with the percentage of total news stories as unit of analysis. The same graph also depicts the results of the study conducted by Weaver, Porter and Evans (1984). Weaver and colleagues defined foreign news in a much more stringent way than Larson. Foreign news was defined as "news reported from outside the United States". As such, only the dateline, and not the content dealt with in the item, mattered. The data gathering effort of Weaver et al resulted in information on foreign news for a ten year period. Obviously, due to the more narrowly defined foreign news concept, the share of foreign news proves to be much lower in comparison with

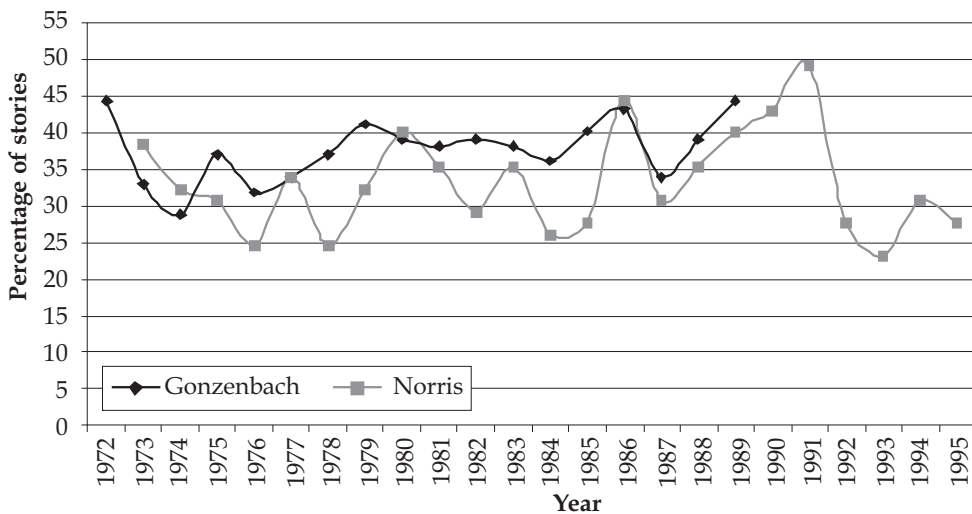
Figure 2. Percentage of foreign news on ABC, CBS and NBC considering Larson (1972-1979, items) & Weaver (1972-1981, sec.)



Larson’s results: during the ten year period, approximately 25 percent of the total evening newscast time dealt with news from abroad. Furthermore, according to the authors, no significant increase in the volume of foreign news in the ten year period was found. Despite these striking differences, also the great similarity between both lines catches the eye. Yet with a different definition of the foreign, with different metrics (number of stories versus seconds), different samples, and – probably decisive – a different end point, the overall conclusions of both articles turn out to contradict each other.

Almost a decade later, Gonzenbach, Arant and Stevenson (1992) updated the research on foreign news, performing a content analysis spanning an eighteen year period. Foreign news was defined much in the same way like Almaney (1970) did, resulting in a three category-variable, distinguishing domestic, international and foreign news. By and large, coverage of “the foreign” remained steady over the 1972–1989 period, only a small increase was noticed. On average, 40 percent of a typical network newscast dealt with either foreign or international news. In a 23-minute newshole, 12 minutes were granted to items exceeding America’s borders. Interestingly, the authors checked for differences when switching unit of analysis, reasoning that otherwise “a one-inch filler at the bottom of the back page gets the same weight as a story covering the entire front page”. Several important differences were noticed considering topics, correspondent and anchor reports, yet only a small difference considering the amount of domestic/foreign/international news was noticed. When measured by time, international coverage increased at the expense of domestic and foreign news. Figure 3 shows the course of foreign and international news for the eighteen year period. Also the results of Norris’s (1995) study are plotted in that graph.

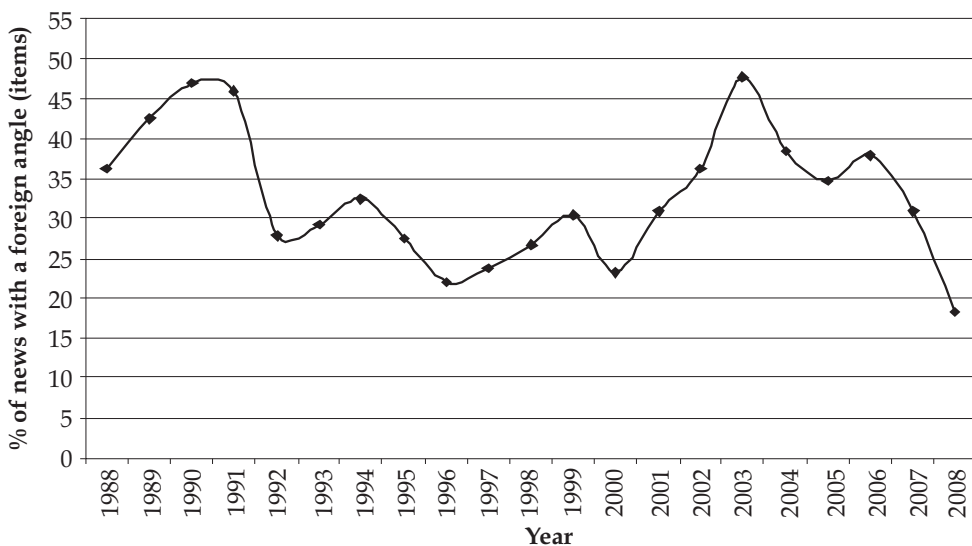
Figure 3. Percentage of Foreign and International news considering Gonzenbach (1972–1989, items) & Norris (1973–1995, items)



Research of Norris (1995) continued Gonzenbach's study over time, adding up to 1995. Contrary to the previous studies, Norris did not take all three major networks into account, but focused on the reports of ABC and CBS only. While summarizing previous studies, and pointing to differences in matters of conceptualizations and measures, Norris herself, however, does not clearly describe what kind of conceptualization she uses, nor the sampling method she applies. The period under investigation, however, appears to be of great interest. In the years after 1987 Norris notices an increase in the share of international news in typical weekday's newscasts. After 1991, however, a "dramatic drop" is measured. In 1992 the share of foreign news plummeted to less than 30 percent of all items. In 1993 23 percent of all items dealt with international news. When time was used as a standard, the decline of foreign news even became more spectacular. Results of Moisy (1997) and Utley (1997) confirmed the downward trend, resulting in many scientific contributions on "the crisis of foreign news".

Finally, the most recent longitudinal results are published by Andrew Tyndall. Tyndall monitors the "Big Three" since 1988 and does not take any samples, but works with the total population of evening newscasts. Tyndall appears to be using three different labels when considering foreign news. A first category is named "Bureau", and consists of time devoted on items filed by reporters with a foreign date-line. A second one is labelled "Foreign Policy". All time devoted to stories concerning the foreign policy of the United States, whether filed from the US or from the country that's involved, is part of the "Foreign Policy" category. Finally, the third "International"-category includes all time devoted to overseas stories in which US foreign policy is not involved. Adding together last two categories, one can derive a total of all coverage with a foreign angle. Figure 4. shows Tyndall's re-

Figure 4. Percentage of news with a foreign angle according to Tyndall (1988–2008, Seconds)



sults for the twenty year period. After a peak at the end of the Cold War, foreign news plummeted in the nineties, thereby confirming Norris analysis. Yet after this drawback during the nineties, the September eleven attacks in 2001, and the start of the Iraq war in 2003, resulted in renewed attention to overseas –yet still strongly American-related – affairs. Since the invasion in Iraq, however, foreign news started to decline once again, falling back to the level of the nineties. 2008 can be considered as an all time low, with two strong domestic themes – the economic crisis and the presidential election campaign – dominating the news agenda.

Wrapping things up, the share of foreign news on the US networks appears to be studied extensively. Especially the fact that longitudinal studies are overlapping, proves rewarding. When plotting these different studies into one graph, an interesting picture emerges (see figure 4.4), resulting in a rather clear-cut and straight notion of the evolution of foreign news. Three reasons lie at the bottom of the fact that these different studies can easily be linked, and trends can be interpolated between studies.

A Uniform Definition of Foreign News

Except the study of Weaver et al (1984), all studies were closely related to each other with regard to the definition of foreign news. By focussing on the content of the item, and coding the countries that were mentioned, several options were kept open to construct the domestic-foreign concept. Where some scholars interpreted foreign news rather broad as all the items that mentioned another country than the land of broadcast (Larson, 1984, Norris, 1995), others tried to differentiate within this broad foreign news category between the “pure” foreign news and the “mixed” international news (Almaney, 1970, Gonzenbach et al., 1992, Tyndall, 2008). Adding “pure foreign” and “mixed international” together, which leads to the broad definition of foreign news, made the succession of these studies possible.

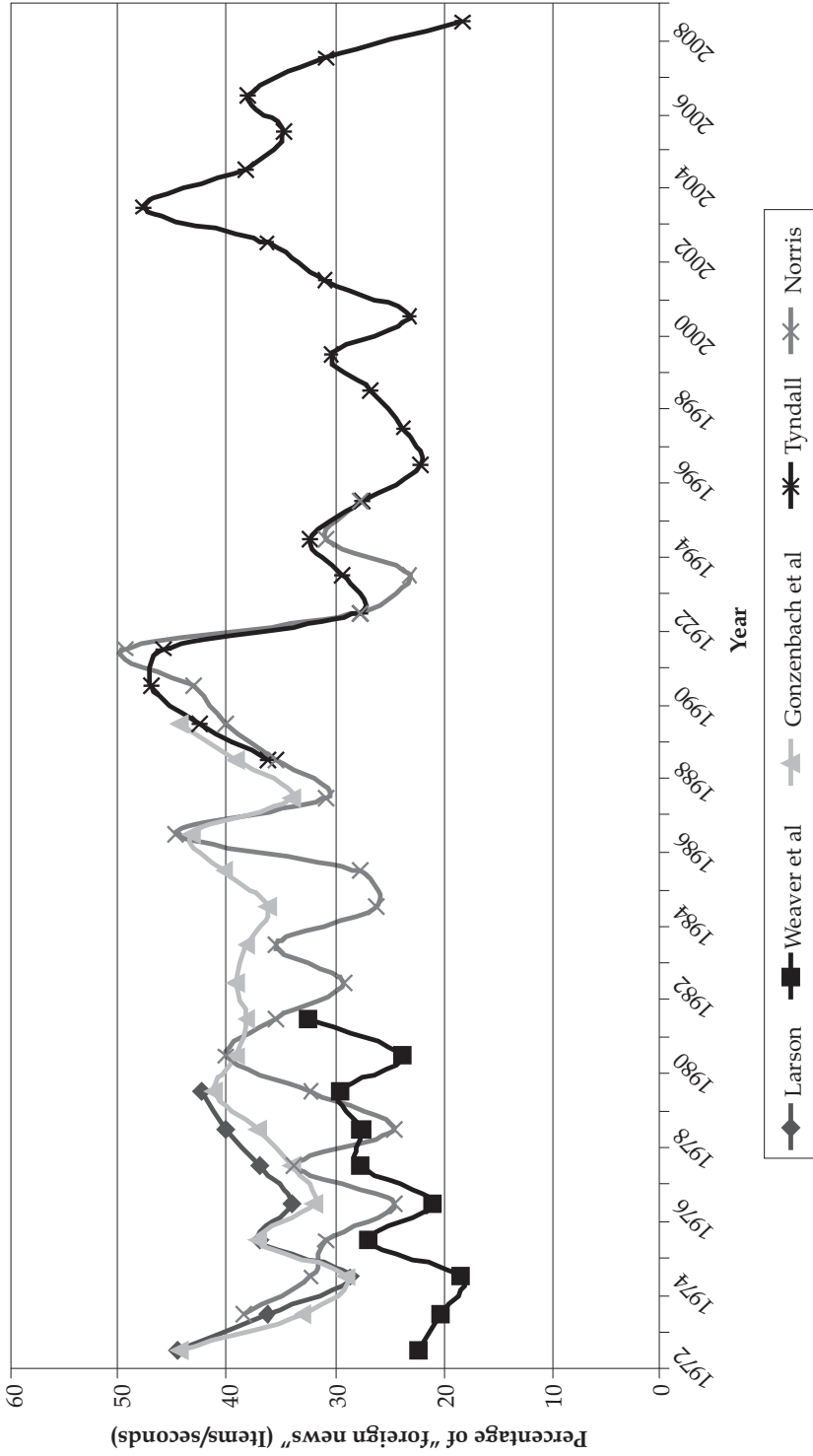
All Extensive Sampling

All of these studies did major data gathering efforts using random samples, often structured by year, quarter or month. With the event-driven nature of news, the danger exists that less profound samples are episodic in nature, and become swayed by the issues of the day. Profound sampling techniques, however, and most importantly, even across these different studies, succeed in drawing a rather uniform picture of the evolution of foreign news over time.

Overlapping longitudinal data

Closely related with the previous asset, working with overlapping longitudinal data proves rewarding. As Gonzenbach stated: “Looking at the forest rather than at a few trees has some advantages, although the resolution is always less”. In this

Figure 5. Summary graph depicting the share of foreign news according to different studies



case, the advantages are clear: the fact that most studies are overlapping, and are not only depicting the same trends, but also almost showing the same absolute numbers, adds reliability to the results as well as the sampling techniques. The fact that no major differences were found in the amount of foreign news between studies using time or item as a single unit of analysis confirms the efforts of Gonzenbach, who within his own study, only found marginal variations when taking this into account. Recent evolutions in media outlets (like newscasts becoming longer, due to more items or to longer items), however, makes the unit of analysis nevertheless something that should be taken into account.

All in all, the picture that emerges from combining these different studies analysing foreign news puts the evergreen-rhetoric of an ever declining foreign newshole into another perspective. What emerges is a picture of an ever fluctuating foreign newshole. Presidential elections – being major domestic events – are seen to crowd foreign affairs out, as can be seen from 1972 onwards. Crucial for the evolution of foreign news on the American networks seems to be the end of the Cold War. In a sense, when considering foreign news, one can speak of an era before and after the bipolar world. Comparing the evolution of foreign news as depicted in the graph to a machine that monitors a person's heartbeat, we can say that the situation from 1989 onwards differs significantly from the period before. Whereas the heart of foreign news was more constantly beating before the fall of the Berlin wall, it now seems to pump more irregularly, taking long breaks between fierce beats. Foreign affairs only in very peculiar situations seems to be making news. Whereas during the Cold War most events could easily be framed and made relevant for the home public, the world in this era of globalization shows itself in all its complexity. Journalists thus can be considered to have a more difficult job when reporting on foreign affairs than before. With a transforming real world, and transforming journalistic principles – like domestication – to report about this world, also scholars of foreign news should adapt their concepts, theories and schemes to this new situation. Maybe, with more fine-grained concepts to measure how journalists try to capture the world, a more rose coloured picture about the state of foreign news emerges.

Conclusions

This chapter started with two goals. First, we wanted to substantiate on the problematic succession of snapshot studies that more often than not serves as a base for the argumentation of a shrinking foreign newshole. Second, and closely related, we tried whether it was possible to get round this problematic juxtaposition, by interpolating trends from different longitudinal American studies.

The juxtaposition of snapshot studies as evidence for a shrinking newshole was found problematic for three reasons, that is: (1) the different conceptualizations of foreign news; (2) the employment of a mix of metrics; (3) and the event-driven nature of news. Longitudinal data, with extensive sampling procedures, thus proves

necessary. However, also here, the start and end point of the period under study can greatly affect the conclusion. As a consequence, in the second part of this chapter, we explored whether it was possible to combine several longitudinal studies. With the United States without doubt being the “best documented case” in the content analysis of news, we managed to span almost four decades of foreign news on the big three networks by juxtaposing overlapping longitudinal studies.

As an overall remark, we can postulate that throughout this chapter, foreign news appeared to be a much more thorny concept than one would assume at first sight. Foreign news showed to be defined in many different ways in many different studies. While some researchers define foreign news according to dateline, others take the involvement of countries as a starting point. But also in other, more theoretical ways, foreign news revealed to be a difficult issue. As globalization is continuing –turning the political and economical sphere upside down and inside out–distinguishing the local from the global becomes ever more complex. Also the concept of domestication, as a narrative or journalistic technique to turn the foreign more familiar, needs to be taken into account if one wants to study “foreign news” in the current context. In other words, the field of foreign news is in need of conceptual clarification and shared standards. As other contributions in this book show, we believe that with the operationalization of foreign news in the “Foreign news on television-project”, a great step forward is made in creating a more modern approach to study the concept of foreign news. By combining the dateline (location) of the event as well as the involvement of countries in the item as a base for a four category foreign news variable, this new approach does not only succeeds in taking a concept like “domestication” into account, but also succeeds in tying in with previous operationalizations of foreign news.

Concluding, we believe that developing an up to date typology and operationalization of foreign news in the era of globalization should be one of the core issues in the field of foreign news. Also serious data gathering efforts spanning longer periods of time should be high on the agenda, as they certainly prove their worth. Only if the standards and directions discussed in this chapter are met, the field of foreign news can confidentially enter the age of globalization and continue to produce interesting and noteworthy results.

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