
Looking at each other

French news on British television; British news on French television

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Looking at each other – overview

if television news reflects the society it serves, then it seems that most British people are not particularly interested in what goes on in France, and most French people are not much more interested in what goes on in Britain — unless, of course, some sort of ‘national interest’ is involved. In the studies which are published with this report, a whole month’s news output on the major channels of each nation were monitored for coverage of news about the other country; the results show that France lies very low on Britain’s news agenda, and Britain lies almost as low on France’s.

During the month (November 1997) which was monitored, two major news issues arose which were of common interest to editors in each country. The first was a strike and blockade of ports by the union of lorry drivers in France, which had the effect of preventing a considerable number of British lorry drivers either from reaching home or from reaching the Continent by way of the Channel ports. The second was a regular Anglo-French summit, the first to be hosted in London by prime minister Blair, at which matters of mutual interest to each country were to be discussed. There were also a number of what our French colleagues have called ‘delocalised’ stories, in the sense that the action does not take place in the country concerned, but which nevertheless relates to that country. One of these stories was the murder trial of British au pair Louise Woodward in Massachusetts; another was the Iraq weapons inspection crisis, over which France and Britain took opposite views about possible military action. Both topics were reported in each country as international news.

The lorry drivers’ strike was covered mainly from the national point of view by each nation’s broadcasters; for the French, it was, of course, a major national story, whereas for the British the pros and cons of the drivers’ and Government’s cases were secondary to the impact the action had on British nationals and their ability to travel and to trade. By contrast, the Anglo-French summit was a political story specific to both countries; yet the main burden of coverage in both nations was about the surface issues, in particular the attempt by the British to demonstrate (by the engagement of Sir Terence Conran to design the surroundings for the conference) that France is not the only nation to shine in the area of interior design. The Anglo-French summit also provided the starting-point for a long and not wholly disapproving Newsnight item on francophobia in Britain.

In purely numerical terms, it transpired that the number of individual stories relating to Britain covered by French broadcasters was greater than the number of stories relating to France covered by British broadcasters. Some of this may be accounted for by what appears to be a long-standing French taste for royal pomp, pageantry and gossip. Thus the French covered the Queen’s golden wedding anniversary, Prince Charles’ birthday, the reopening of Windsor Castle, the decommissioning of the royal yacht and the appointment of John Major to advise the young princes. Items covered by French broadcasters because of their

impact on national interests included a story about London as a suspected sanctuary for Islamic fundamentalist terrorists; this may be compared in terms of purpose or motivation with British coverage of Toyota's decision to build its new small car in France. Other French coverage of British matters came closer to the 'peculiar foreigners' category which we have identified as also forming part of the British news agenda; just as the British bulletins called attention to some of eccentric ways in which the French cater for their jobless youth, the French bulletins exclaimed over stories about fox-hunting, Humphrey the Downing Street cat and a very odd tabloid item about a British woman who gave simultaneous birth to two children who were technically not twins.

The statistical results achieved in our reports coincide generally with those derived from wider studies of coverage of foreign news. Wallis and Baran (1990), for example, found that over an 11-day period in 1986, BBC Television devoted just 6% of its news output by time to Western European affairs (measured by the mention of a particular country by name in a story), against 9% for stories about the United States, 7% for Australasia and 8% for the Middle East. Home stories occupied 62% of airtime. According to this study, Britain's nearest neighbours seem to get marginally less coverage than its more distant cousins.

Two questions remain: does the news agenda among professionals really reflect the interests of the public they serve? And should anything to be done to change the level of coverage? The second section of this paper briefly reviews current knowledge about newsroom agendas, and suggests some options.

* * *

The issue at hand is that of why decisions are made in the newsroom about which stories should be included and which should not, for it is that decision-making process in the newsroom that determines what news about France appears on British television, and what news about Britain appears on French television. Over the past two decades or so, a wide range of literature has been produced attempting to unpack some of the assumptions which underlie the selection of one news story over another in the busy environment of a television, radio or newspaper newsroom. Tunstall (1971) takes the view that one important way in which the newsroom agenda tends to be set is by the social and hierarchical relationship between journalists; he writes about 'competitor-colleague' relationships, and of 'newsgathering for newsgatherers.' He describes a world in which decisions are made by reference to a perception of colleagues' esteem. Another important determinant is that of logistics: news can only get on the air if it can get to the newsroom (Wallis and Baran, 1990, p.222). Other analysts, including Galtung and Ruge (1965) and Rock (1973) describe a recursive process in which news is broadly defined as what has already been defined as news. Rock writes:

Journalists religiously read their own and others' newspapers; they consult one another; and look for continuities in the emerging world which their reporting has constructed. In this process, a generally consistent interpretation is maintained and built up. It possesses an independent and impersonal quality which makes it seem compelling.' (pp68–69).

So according to this model, if news about Britain has not traditionally occupied an important place on the French newsroom agenda, it will be hard for it ever to grow in importance, since the way in which journalists constantly refer to each other's historic perceptions of news values make it unlikely that those values will change greatly over time. Moreover, as Stuart Hall (1973) has pointed out, the phrase 'news values' has its problems:

'News values' are one of the most opaque structures of meaning in modern society. All 'true journalists' are supposed to possess it: few can or are willing to identify and define it ... We appear to be dealing, then, with a 'deep structure' whose function as a selective device is untransparent even to those who professionally most know how to operate it (Hall, 1973).

As broadcasting has been dragged increasingly in recent years out of the public service arena into the marketplace, however, more and more attention has been paid to research about audiences, and today's news editors are likely to assert that their 'professional' news values are at least tempered, and at most dictated, by market research. This is a more complex version of the view of news developed by commentators like Chomsky (1989), Herman (1986) and others, whose position is that journalism reflects dominant viewpoints, to the exclusion of alternative views. News professionals temper this argument by referring to market-derived information about 'dominant' or 'majority' tastes and viewpoints which are taken into account when developing news programmes; the 'stand-up' news presentation style and agenda adopted by Britain's Channel 5, for example, has a distinct demographic intention to it.

In thinking about whether the general lack of interest shown by editors in Britain and France about their neighbours might ever change, it is worth considering the addition of two new dimensions to the debate about news selection and newsroom agendas. One derives from work on the nature of communities and the changing technologies of broadcast diffusion. The development of cable, satellite and IP (Internet protocol) distribution of television and radio means that reception of television programming need no longer take place within defined geographical areas; so the traditional form of TV broadcasting to an audience lying within line of sight of a transmitter tower is no longer the only way of reaching an audience with a particular kind of content. Those who have studied the development of communities, such as Fletcher (1996), emphasise the importance of identifying new kinds of communities of interest which are not bounded by geographical limits. Through cable, satellite and IP delivery, the possibility exists of addressing (for instance) a community of viewers who are interested in French or British

news. These technical developments also suggest the possibility of broadcasting which addresses the communities of regional affinity that have been brought to the fore by the work of the European Union — a grouping such as that of those who share Celtic cultures in Ireland, Scotland, Cornwall and Brittany (reachable without difficulty by satellite or cable) serve as an example.

To some extent, services like BBC World and TV5, both distributed throughout Europe by satellite and cable, have already found communities of interest across the continent who are sufficiently interested in the host countries to seek out these international services, and it may be that this is an answer to criticism of mainstream channels for devoting only small amounts of time to the affairs of their neighbours. Satellite and cable, and the coming multiplicity of digital channels, hold the promise of allowing viewers to express their particular interests by subscribing to (or merely by viewing) channels appealing to relatively narrow sets of interests. Whether this change allows mainstream channels to abrogate any duty to serve smaller communities of interest is for further discussion.

The second dimension worth considering is that of the changing nature of the media in the postmodern context. While mass audience channels such as those which have been monitored for this report struggle to reflect public or private consensus about news values and agendas, or to 'give the viewers what they want', postmodernism suggests that there is no longer any such thing as the audience; rather, there are many audiences, all of whose tastes and interests are constantly shifting and changing. Lyotard (1981) suggests that postmodernity rejects 'dominant meta-narratives', and that the consensus-driven 'public sphere' which mass broadcasting was thought to provide becomes obsolete in the postmodern age. Like many postmodern analyses, this can lead to bleak conclusions, for it implies a certain futility in mass media attempting to serve large audiences. Yet even in the medium term there is no likelihood of mainstream broadcasting abandoning its enterprise, even though programming serving narrower ranges of interest delivered by new methods of diffusion will encroach on the mass broadcasters' market shares.

The optimist, however, might see a liberating thread in the postmodern analysis: if consensus has broken down, then the journalist has a new freedom to pursue eclectic agendas. That might mean that increasing the amount of time devoted to near neighbours (such as Britain or France) could turn out to be much less of a risk after all.

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Coverage of France on British television news

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Summary

From a study of the five major British television channels carried out in November last year, it is clear that British TV news editors are only interested in news coming from France when they perceive British interests to be directly at stake. Stories like the French lorry drivers' blockade of the Channel ports and the Anglo-French summit were reported strictly in terms of their impact on the British – and the demand for compensation for British firms who lost money because of the blockade dominated not only the coverage of the strike itself but also that of the Anglo-French summit. Although portrayal of the French by means of stereotypes remains rare, it is not completely absent. The indifference of British broadcasters to French news for its own sake can only be explained in terms of their perception of their audience's interests. Yet France is Britain's nearest neighbour, and millions of British people visit France each year.

Introduction

This paper reports on the findings of a study of British television news broadcasting carried out during the month of November 1997, commissioned by the Franco-British Council. The study was carried out by the Department of Journalism in the City University, London, to a research design developed by the Department of Innovation Studies in the University of East London. A similar study was carried out at the same time in Paris to monitor the output of the major French television news broadcasters.

Methodology

Each weekday main evening television news broadcast during the month of November 1997 on the five national television channels was recorded off-air and logged. The VHS tapes of each broadcast have been retained. Each bulletin was

analysed for complete items dealing with French news or current affairs, and mentions of France or the French in items with substantially different topics (referred to as 'passing references') were also logged.

The broadcasts monitored, together with their regular running times, are as follows:

- Nine O'Clock News (BBC-1): 25 minutes
- News at Ten (ITN for ITV): 22 minutes plus commercial break
- Channel Four News (ITN for Channel 4): 38 minutes plus two commercial breaks
- Channel Five News (ITN for Channel 5): 22 minutes plus commercial break
- Newsnight (BBC-2): 45 minutes

Note: the three ITN (Independent Television News) productions are made by different production teams, so they have substantially different styles and editorial structures, but they all have access to the same resources and material.

Because live coverage of a number of international football matches over-ran during the month, a very small number of broadcasts overlapped, and so could not be recorded simultaneously. In this case the most popular channel's broadcast was recorded, and the content of any programme not recorded was checked with the daily running order published by each broadcaster on its Web pages. There are substantially fewer, and shorter, news broadcasts at weekends, so these were not logged.

In analysing the weight ascribed to a story by the editors of a television news programme it is important to understand the overall structure which has been adopted by British news broadcasters in recent years. Each bulletins has been reshaped so that its structure encourages viewers to stay tuned throughout the programme; trails, or advance mentions, of stories are used to suggest that something interesting or exciting can be seen if the viewer stays with the programme. The position of a story in the headline summary at the beginning of the broadcast and the use of 'trails' to promote it within the body of the bulletin are as important as its absolute position in the running order, the length of time and the resources (tape, graphics, journalists, etc) allocated as indicators of the

importance given to a story. Headline running order and, for commercial broadcasters, the distance from an advertising break are also indicative variables. Whether a story is headlined or trailed before a break helps to show the importance attached to it, as it signifies a producer's view that trailing that particular story is likely to encourage viewers to stay tuned. So a story can be mentioned up to three times in a bulletin before it appears in its substantive form — in the opening headlines, in a menu going into a break, and in a headline trail at the beginning of a new part. These variables have been taken into account in the logs provided. The trails accorded to each story or mention were logged as well as duration and position in running order. Resources allocated to the story are also indicated in the logs in format descriptions, covering the use of specially-shot and archive film/tape, pieces to camera (PTCs), use of own correspondent (as opposed to agency copy), specially-made graphics, etc.

Main news items

During the monitoring period there were two main stories concerning France which were directly relevant to Great Britain. The first was a blockade of the Channel ports mounted by French lorry drivers protesting over proposed changes in their pay and conditions, which had the effect of preventing British trucks from returning to Britain with imported goods. The second was the Anglo-French summit, held in London at the beginning of the month. There was also a major international story concerning Iraq's refusal to allow UN weapons monitors into the so-called 'presidential' compounds. The US and the UK were arguing for a military attack on Baghdad in response to this refusal, whereas many other nations, including France, were cautioning against violent intervention.

Overall, the British television news programmes monitored devoted 35 complete items to French news, of which 27 appeared in the first week, when the lorry drivers' dispute and the Anglo-French summit were taking place. In addition, 64 'passing references' of varying emphases were logged. By a small margin, the hour-long Channel Four News carried more complete items about French issues, although BBC2's Newsnight devoted an entire live studio programme to the Anglo-French summit towards the beginning of the month.

Discussion

The most striking characteristic of the British coverage of French issues was that in almost every case stories appeared only to have been included because they directly affected British political or individual interests. Practically none of the stories mentioning France appeared to have been included because they were of interest for their own sake, or because they had general international significance. France was sometimes used as a comparative reference (for example when different rates of interest in different countries were listed), especially in the items referred to as 'passing references'; but in many cases the tone of the reference concerned was that it seemed to be intended to point out how strangely foreigners behave, or arrange their affairs: this was particularly noticeable towards the end of the month in which French methods for dealing with jobless young people was compared with British practice.

The striking lorry drivers merited more mentions on British television than any other French-related subject during the month. However, although the background to the dispute was explained in a 9'06" item on Channel Four News on 3 November, the main way in which the story was treated was in terms of its impact on British lorries and lorry drivers prevented from returning home, and on the apparent failure of the French authorities to have paid the compensation promised to British firms after a previous Channel port blockade. There was discussion as to the likelihood of compensation being offered or paid in relation to the present dispute. Styles of coverage included a report from a stranded British driver's cab (Channel 5, 3 November), which warned British tourists (incorrectly) that they might have difficulties if they travelled to France during the period. On the same night, BBC1 carried agency tape of the blockade and its own correspondent's analysis of its effect on British firms. ITN's News at Ten, in a 4'42" story appearing third in the running order, showed scenes of angry words being exchanged between French and British lorry drivers and revealed the shocking news that a concert by the British band Oasis had been cancelled because their equipment was on a lorry trapped by the blockade. In Newsnight, the British Road Haulage Association's spokesperson Steve Norris debated the situation with Mario Monti, EU Commissioner, in a story which attacked the EU for failing to force France to keep its borders open for international trade.

This tone — in which the effect on Britain of the activities of French people provided the main dimension of the story — continued throughout the subsequent coverage of the dispute. On 4 November Channel Four picked up the Oasis concert dimension, and used a sound bite from a British trade unionist who said that 'if we did this in the UK we'd be arrested'. This perspective, which seems to be based on an underlying assumption that foreigners are peculiar people who don't behave properly like the British, can be found in a number of the stories recorded. However, on 5 November Channel 4 had not only footage of scuffles between French and British drivers, but also coverage of kindly French villagers feeding stranded British truckers, and ITN's News at Ten interviewed the editor of Le Figaro to get the French point of view.

The other main story of the month was the Anglo-French summit, which took place in a new, specially-designed conference suite at Canary Wharf. Inevitably, coverage of the summit was tied in with coverage of the blockade, but there was

also a different angle: by using top British designers to furnish the conference rooms, prime minister Blair was trying to update Britain's image and, it might be suspected from the coverage, to demonstrate that Britain is a match for France in the field of interior design. On News at Ten on 6 November, a 2-minute story focused on Blair using a dinner at Downing Street to remind his guest, prime minister Jospin, of the plight of the stranded British lorry drivers. This was also mentioned in a 9-minute Channel Four story the following night, but the main content of this story was an attempt to contrast the opulence of the 'cool Britannia' image of the Canary Wharf conference suite with the impoverishment of the local Docklands community: oddly, this story was not about the issues discussed at the summit, nor did it follow up any French dimension arising out of the summit.

As it became clear that the blockade was finishing, the coverage continued to be mainly about the problems caused to British freight operators, and most British broadcasters used tape of scuffles between French and British drivers as part of their illustrative material. Channel 5 News, in a 2' 38" item which formed the first headline, took first place in the bulletin and was headlined again before the signoff, took as its main theme 'the blockade is lifted ... but what about the compensation?' Scuffles between drivers were seen once again. The demand for compensation was mentioned in the second item on the same bulletin: 'it's all smiles at the Anglo-French summit as Tony Blair tries to convince the French we've changed.' The 2' 22" story included vox pops with French youths who spoke approvingly of cosmopolitan London. BBC-1 also reported the end of the blockade as its first item, also using scuffles in its illustrative material (probably from agency or archive sources, as there was no report from a BBC correspondent on the spot); the second item focused on the demand for compensation made at the Canary Wharf summit. ITN's News at Ten (second item, 2'44") also mentioned the compensation dimension, and reported President Chirac as being 'impressed' with Britain's new cool Britannia style. But in the same bulletin, the (usually humorous) final story was also about the summit, and took the angle that 'not so long ago the thought that the British had anything to teach the French when it came to style would have raised a few eyebrows'. Newsnight, on BBC-2, devoted most of its programme to a 28'40" studio discussion about France and francophobia, with mainly xenophobic extracts from British comedies such as Yes Minister!, Absolutely Fabulous and Have I Got News For You, as well as reading from a book called I Hate the French. There was yet another film report about style at

the Anglo-French summit. Studio guests included comedian Eddie Izzard, billed as a 'passionate European', and self-declared francophobe Boris Johnson, as well as Carol Tongue, a British MEP. The unscripted discussion, in front of a studio audience, is a new approach for Newsnight, and the programme seemed particularly uncomfortable as the guests struggled to conform with the labels they had been given. The idea of focusing on francophobia instead of mounting a serious discussion about cultural differences (and similarities) must have seemed extreme to some viewers.

The following week, the number of stories about France declined dramatically. Channel 4 had a 22-second piece in 7th position on 10 November about demonstrations in Paris against the Algerian massacres, using agency footage. The next substantive story about France did not appear until a week later, when the BBC Nine O'Clock reported Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the French minister of finance, as saying that Britain should not be allowed to join the new X-committee overseeing the European single currency. The 1'56" item, captioned 'Excluded', included interviews with Strauss-Kahn and British finance minister Gordon Brown. Three days later, the EU jobs summit provided an opportunity for a 'peculiar foreigner' story as Channel Four, in a long 6'47" item compared the ways in which France and Britain created jobs for young unemployed people: in a facetious tone, the reporter described stereotypes of France – revolutionaries, gourmets, etc – but also looked seriously at the impact of the 35-hour week legislation. On the same night (20 November), Channel 5 showed French people coming to Britain to seek work; apparently the reason they come is that Britain is very fashionable among the young French.

There were only four other main items logged in the month with any major French dimension:

- brief pieces on 3 November naming France as one of the nations warning Britain and America not to attack Iraq without UN approval (BBC1 and ITN, 2'44" and 2'08" respectively); a number of mentions of France's position on Iraq in stories focusing on the Iraq crisis were logged as 'passing references'
- a very brief item on Channel 4 (16", 11th in running order) reporting that French police were to question the owners of 40,000 Fiat Unos in connection with the death of Princess Diana

- a 12-second story on BBC-1 on 27 November reporting Toyota's decision to build its new small car in France rather than in Britain
- a piece on ITN's News at Ten (28 November) about French footballer Eric Cantona, who is involved in a youth employment project in Salford, Manchester.

Clearly all of these stories were fundamentally about British interests.

The initial conclusion from reviewing the main stories covered suggests that British television news editors do not believe that their viewers have any interest at all in France herself, except inasmuch as what happens there directly affects the interests of people here. During the month, the news coming out of France which might have been said to appeal to any audience generally interested in news and current affairs included the following

- Papon trial in Bordeaux (wartime collaborator, responsible for death of many Jews, finally brought to book)
- Jean-Claude Trichet launches candidacy for the presidency of the Central European Bank
- Exhumation of the body of singer Yves Montand for DNA paternity test
- Armistice Day celebrated on former French battlefields
- Twentieth anniversary of Concorde commercial service

However, none of these stories was covered on British television news at all, even though two of them (Armistice Day and Concorde) might actually be thought to have a British dimension to them. By contrast, a story about a coach full of British schoolchildren involved in a crash (in Britain) on its way to France, where they were to have had a school outing, was quite extensively covered on 7 November.

France is sometimes mentioned in news reports as a point of comparison, though other European nations are usually included in such reports. Thus the 'passing references' logged included mentions of France's arts spending compared with Britain's; a list of international interest rates; comparisons of youth drug use (higher in Britain than anywhere else); how various countries, including France, exercise their territorial rights in Antarctica; turnouts in local elections (British average is half that of France and Germany); comparisons of policy on tobacco advertising; and so on. Very occasionally, a straight stereotype comes through:

one British supermarket was reported as playing French accordion music over its loudspeakers in an attempt to make its customers purchase French wine.

British television (presumably because of its statutory duty to be fair and even-handed) does not exhibit the explicit francophobia of some of the British tabloid newspapers; and the pressure of time on news bulletins, in which a maximum of only about 4,000 words can be spoken in a half-hour period, is intense. But British television news broadcasters clearly remain indifferent to France and French news. Despite the fact that France is Britain's nearest neighbour, and that millions of British people visit France every year, British broadcasters do not appear to perceive any demand for news from their audiences about France except where it directly impacts on Britain; and the temptation to cast the French as 'peculiar foreigners' is not always avoided. It is beyond the scope of this survey to determine whether news editors' perceptions of their audiences' lack of interest in France is based in reality, but research intended to elucidate this perception would be extremely valuable.

Looking out across the sea

French television news reporting of events across the Channel

Jean-Claude Sergeant

This work is a continuation of a study carried out eight years ago on the attitude of the French and British press to each others' countries. The study, which was carried out under the aegis of the Franco-British Council and the International Press Foundation concluded that stereotypes continue to exist as a result of the conservatism of editors when selecting the news they will publish that the perseverance of the permanent correspondents of the various papers in London and Paris are unable to change. In other words, editors-in-chief will only consider stories that meet readers' supposed expectations. It is not so much a question of telling the real story, no matter how exotic, about the other country and of making readers see the picture as it really is, as of reassuring readers of the truth of age-old stereotypes.

In a cultural environment that is characterised by the ubiquity of television, which is the main source of information for most people, it was tempting to see if the same distorting mirrors were being turned on the information given out by the main French national TV channels on our neighbour across the Channel. The scope of studies of this kind is materially limited and this study does not claim to provide an analysis of viewers' reactions to the information broadcast, which is of importance if we consider that while 51% of all French viewers expect television to provide them with important news, only 35% of them expect detailed explanation of the news from the television¹. The time and funding available for this study have not permitted consideration of discourse, the verbal treatment of news about Britain. Systematic linguistic analysis of this kind would show links with the previous study of the press, even though TV discourse is more consistent than that of the press, whose sociological divisions are understood.

Simultaneously of modest and considerable importance, this study sets out to list all the topics on Britain that were touched on in news programmes (the JT in France) over the course of a month. The focus will be not only on what subjects are covered but also on how they are put together and presented, while the study of the accompanying commentary will be merely perfunctory.

The channels examined

The general hertzian broadcasting channels, TF1 and the two France-Télévision channels were the obvious ones to look at. M6 and La Cinquième/Arte were not examined because they do not reach all homes (91% in the case of M6 and 89%

¹ *La Croix/Télérama* study by SOFRES (December 1997)

of La Cinquième/Arte) and they place less emphasis in news in their broadcasting schedules. *6 Minutes* for M6 goes out at 7.54 p.m. and is targeted mainly at the 15-34 age group, giving brief, practical news. *8½* for Arte devotes 10 minutes of film to a summary of international news and news on the two countries which together manage this 2-country channel, to which in 1997 a new 30-minute news programme called *7½* was added that is broadcast Monday to Friday. However, the audience ratings for this news programme (about 2% of viewers) were not enough to justify its inclusion in the study.

Most French people remain faithful to the traditional JT programmes that were started up in 1954 and have considerably evolved with the available technology (Betacam cameras, satellite link-ups etc.) since then. Nevertheless the audience for the 20 hours of major news reporting broadcast by TF1 and France 2 has continued to contract, even though it is still large. Between 24 and 30 November 1997, 7.3 million viewers over 15 (38.1% of total viewers) watched the TF1 news programmes, while 4.7 million preferred to watch the news on France 2 (24.6%), the second part of France 3's *19/20* dedicated to national news accounts for 5.6 million viewers (35% of viewers)². E. Leclerc has pointed out that while "in 1991 almost three out of every four French people watched the 8 p.m. news, this figure had dropped to three in every five by 1997".³ According to the same author, the erosion of the JT audience is due less to the programme's shortcomings than to the development of other types of programme, such as those broadcast on Canal + for example. The transmission of the JT a few minutes before the important 8 p.m. deadline and the (unpredictable) overrunning of programmes beyond 8.30 p.m. are all indications of a crisis about the validity of these 'information crossroads' that are based on the popularity of the journalists who present them: Patrick Poivre d'Arvor and Claire Chazal on TF1 and, until October 1997, Bruno Masure on France 2. The 'star system' introduced to the JT therefore gave credit to the idea that a change of presenter would halt the audience decline, or at least that is what Albert Duroy, the Deputy Director General of France 2 believed when he replaced the popular Bruno Masure with Daniel Bilalian and Béatrice Schönberg in an attempt to entice back to the JT on the public channel those viewers who had migrated to TF1 or other competitors. The continuing decline in the audience for France 2's 8 p.m. news shows that the alchemy between viewers and the news of any one TV channel cannot be accounted for by the supposed charisma of any particular presenter, just as changing the Finance Minister is not enough to improve a country's economy. The increasing popularity of France 3's *19/20*, whose second half is dedicated to national and international news, is itself enough to raise questions about the extent of the impact any star presenter can have on audience figures. Although they do not enjoy the popularity of Patrick Poivre d'Arvor and Claire Chazal, Laurent Bignolas, Georges Mattéra and Elise Lucet, who take turns to present the national news, have managed to gain the

² Médiamétrie figures of research carried out on 2,300 homes

³ Emmanuel Leclerc, *Les Ecrits de l'Image*, no. 15, June 1997

loyalty of an increasing number of viewers, most of whom watch the twenty-four regional news programmes that make up the first half of 19/20.

Apart from scheduling differences, the three channels considered in the study dedicate different amounts of time to the news. 19/20 dedicates no more than twenty-five minutes to national and international news while it is not unusual for the TF1 news to go on until 8.40, with the France 2 programme being only slightly shorter. There is also a difference between the items dealt within the various news programmes on the three channels.

**Average and maximum numbers of items per programme
(November 1997)**

TF1	20	33
France 2	12	24
France 3	10	15

The basic items in the programmes - the topics - vary in length between a few dozen seconds, in the case of comments by the presenter, with or without pictures, to an average of one and a half minutes if a report is included. Here too procedures differ. TF1 and France 2 reports are introduced by the presenter and commented by the correspondent or special reporter who comes on screen to conclude the report. France 3 correspondents almost never appear on screen but on the other hand France 3 identifies if not the source of the films its shows, apart from library pictures, at least the place and date on which they were taken, which neither TF1 or France 2 do, unless they flash "live" on the screen. It is therefore impossible at present to know who made the film, broadcast simultaneously on TF1 and France 2, of Jacques Chirac arriving in London on 6 November for the Anglo-French summit. It was probably made by an agency and sold to the UER who then relayed it to its members but there was nothing to say that this was the case. We also do not know who took the film of the Commons sitting on 12 November in which Tony Blair is shown answering critics about the Formula One business. Unlike its competitors, TF1 does make more careful presentations that include photos and maps when its presenters introduce reports.

There is therefore a standard pattern to the presentation of the information given in the evening news by the various news teams. More generally, the items are presented in an extremely fragmented way if compared with British news programmes, there is systematic use of guests (politicians or show-business personalities) while the huge variety of topics make the JT's more like news magazines than news programmes in the strict sense of the term.

The time period selected for the study

As experience led us to fear we would find very little news about Britain, we had no cause to think that the picture would be any different on the other side of the Channel, and so we decided to look at the month of November 1997 when the regular Anglo-French summit was held in London on 6 and 7 of that month. The body of the study therefore comprised all the early evening news programmes of TF1, France 2 and France 3 from Monday 3 to Friday 28 November inclusive, plus the Saturday and Sunday news programmes.

Although the news cannot be predicted, November turned out to be extremely prolific. The month was dominated by the lorry drivers' strike in the first week, then came the Louise Woodward trial, which led to many discussions of the US justice system, and then the tension between Iraq and the USA.

In order to have a scale of the 'British' information given out by the channels, we produced a chart of events based on the news given in a French daily. We selected *Le Figaro* for this purpose because of its large circulation and the amount of coverage it gives to foreign news, making it the French paper most like *The Times*, the daily chosen for the British study. The news on Britain reported by *Le Figaro* during November was as follows:

Date	Front page	Other news
Wednesday 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death of Diana Police are searching for a Fiat Uno 	The last hope of the "murdering nanny" (p.10)
Thursday 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blair's frustration at the lorry drivers' strike • <i>The Times</i> believes that the French lorry drivers are "highwaymen" 	
Friday 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20th Anglo-French summit. • London is the middleman between Bonn and Paris 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article by Robin Cook "Giving Europe back to the People" (p.2) • Report by the London correspondent (p.5)
Saturday 8	A polite summit with no great results	
Tuesday 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While London does not rule out 'military action', Iraq defies the UN • Louise Woodward is freed 	Reports from the New York and London correspondents (p.8)
Friday 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Fifteen meet in Luxembourg • Unemployment: the goodwill summit 	
Monday 24		Rushdie and Le Carré at daggers drawn (back page)
Friday 28		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student protests in Germany and Britain • Report from London correspondent (p.2)
Saturday 29	<p>Editorial: Poor universities</p> <p>The French who are moving to Britain</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

Volume and contents of 'British' information in French television news programmes

The data collated included 27 early evening news programmes on the three main French television channels over the period Monday 3 to Saturday 29 November

1997⁴. The corpus therefore comprised 79 news programmes (see note below) which accounted for over forty hours of recordings distributed as follows:

TF1: 15 hours 45 minutes France 2: 15 hours France 3: 10 hours

On the basis of the above table we can compare the number of news programmes per channel that contained a reference to a 'British' item and also the way in which items were treated (reports or voice-overs of stills or film).

	TF1	FR2	FR3
No. programmes	27	26	26
No. programmes including one item on UK	16	16	10
No. programmes including more than one item on UK	11	2	2
No. British people presented	28	18	12
No. items/reports	17	14	9
No. items/comments on pictures	6	4	2

This table immediately shows the similarity between TF1 and France 2 as regards the coverage they give to British news. Almost two-thirds of the news programmes of these two channels include an item on the UK. Being shorter, the France 3 national news programme *19/20*, is more selective in its coverage of British news. This in contrast to the large number of topics dealt with by the TF1 news which indicates that it chooses a wider range of information. Most items on British topics include film or at least stills in the report. A number of items, such as the Louise Woodward story, produced two sets of reports: one from the USA where the nanny's trial was being held and the other from the UK or more precisely London or Elton, the town in which Louise's family lives. By comparison, the information first given in the *Observer* about the facilities that Islamic militants have access to in the UK merited no pictures before Egypt's President Mubarak commented on the matter at the end of the month.

While "British" topics, and particularly the country's institutions (Parliament, the royal family) readily lend themselves to film treatment, the almost standard use of film in reports is no longer limited to news about Britain itself. Most items in news programmes are given an introduction of about ten seconds which is then followed by a report lasting on average ninety seconds. France 2's 3'15" report on the Royal Hospital, Chelsea on 11 November was an exception to this rule.

⁴ As a result of a technical problem, the France 3 news on Friday 7 November and the France 2 news on Thursday 13 November were not recorded

The apparent similarity between the treatment given by both TF1 and France 2 to UK news also exists at the time level: TF1 spent 29 minutes on UK news (of which 25 on reports) and France 2 30 minutes (of which 24 on reports). This compares with the 14 minutes 30 seconds (of which 13 minutes on reports) given to this news by France 3. Without dwelling on the question of whether this amount of time is enough to give adequate information on developments in a foreign country whose proximity to France and position within Europe might lead one to hope for more interest, we shall merely note the rather erratic coverage given to British problems. During the period analysed, British news was reported on the same day by all the three channels only six times (4, 5, 10, 11, 12 and 20 November). On the other hand, with four exceptions (16, 21, 26 and 29 November) one British news item was given on at least one of the three channels every day.

"British" news

Our examination of the 23 topics that either directly or indirectly related to the UK showed a certain similarity between them, if only at the geographic level. The obvious connection between the Louise Woodward trial in Cambridge (Massachusetts) and the UK was the nationality of Louise herself and also the campaign in Britain supporting her but an additional interest to French journalists was the difference between the working of the American and French criminal systems.

The French lorry-drivers' strike which dominated the first week of November only indirectly affected the UK although it did produce a number of interviews with British hauliers which probably would never have taken place in normal circumstances. The few reports on the investigation into the death of the Princess of Wales and the memorials to her were focused on France and Gerry Adams appeared on the TF1 and FR3 news on 12 November because Jack Lang, the President of the Foreign Affairs Committee at the *Assemblée Nationale* had invited him to Paris. This sort of British news is what we shall call "delocalised news" in the sense that it does not actually take place in Britain. A typical example of delocalised "British" news is the report on the investigation into the murder of Caroline Dickinson (TF1, 12 November). This type of news accounted for about half of all the topics dealt with during the course of the month.

Of the purely British news topics, a large percentage dealt with the country's institutions (e.g. the golden wedding of the Queen and Prince Philip and Prince Charles' 49th birthday) to meet the assumed taste of the French for the ceremonial associated with the British monarchy. This reinforced the stereotype that the nature of tradition is unchanging and was easier to report than investigations into the new developments within a society

If we exclude all news about British institutions from British news proper, there is little left to enlighten French viewers about the political and social reality of their neighbour across the Channel, as the list of reports below shows:

"British" items and localisation

Franco-British items

Place: France

- Lorry drivers' strike
- Investigation into the death of Princess Diana
- Investigation into the death of Caroline Dickinson
- Visit by Gerry Adams

Place: UK

- Lorry drivers' strike
- Franco-British summit
- London and Islamic terrorism

Delocalised British items

Place: France

- *Stomps* concert
- New *Spice Girls* album

Place: Luxembourg

- European summit on unemployment

Place: Belgium

- British aircraft has problems landing

Place: USA

- Louise Woodward trial

British domestic items

Institutional topics

- Golden wedding of the Queen and Prince Philip
- Prince Charles' birthday
- Reopening of Windsor Castle
- Farewell to the Royal Yacht Britannia
- John Major appointed special advisor to the young princes

Other

- Remembrance Sunday
- Tony Blair and Formula One
- The Bill to stop fox-hunting
- Disappearance of Humphrey the cat
- Birth of false twins
- Opening of a creche

In addition to this list we should add a list of international items to include the few items given by TF1 on Britain's position on the deadlock between Iraq and the UN over the verification of military sites. This does not substantially alter the basic structure of the news presented, which largely ignores stories on Britain unless they fall into the category of anecdotes.

Nevertheless, particularly in the case of the lorry drivers' strike, the treatment of items that are not considered specifically national shows a national focus that the various country editors are only too ready to reduce to its most traditional level.

At the 7 July meeting the studies on the lorry drivers' strike, the Franco-British summit and the political difficulties facing Tony Blair will show how this information is presented and reveal a rather uniform treatment that is perhaps typically French.

Looking at each other
(French news on British TV/British news on French TV)
Royal Society of Arts - 7 July 1998

The discussion involved the authors of the report, Rod Allen and Professor Sergeant, and the following participants:

Jonathan Baker

Editor, BBC Nine O'Clock News

Peter Fiddick (Chairman)

Editor *Television* (Royal Television Society)

Charles Fries

Press Counsellor, French Embassy

Alec Hargreaves

Professor of French and Francophone Studies, Loughborough University

Paul Hodgson

Former Head of BBC French service and former BBC representative in Paris

Charles Hoff

London Bureau Chief, CNN

Sue English

Senior Editor, ITN

Andrew Ketteringham

Communications Director, Broadcasting Standards Commission

Andrew McDonald

Senior Foreign Editor, Channel 4

Jean-Marie Le Breton

Director, French Section, Franco-British Council

Claude Mussou

Head of Research, Institut Nationale de l'Audiovisuel, Paris

Stephen Perkins

Senior Programme Officer

Independent Television Commission

Sir Peter Petrie

Chairman of the Franco-British Council

Richard Tait

Editor-in-chief, ITN

Sir Peter Petrie welcomed the participants, remarking that the Franco-British Council's aim was to improve understanding of each country in the other, or, failing that, at least to identify and try to remove misunderstanding.

Fiddick, as the meeting's chairman, commented that he was delighted to see so many senior representatives from the world of television news. He confirmed that the objective of the meeting was to provide practitioners with an opportunity to respond to the findings of the French and British study.

INTRODUCTION

Allen explained the methodology of the report and his conclusion that in general stories about France on British terrestrial TV were confined to those with an obvious impact on Britain. He felt that the proliferation of cable and satellite channels meant people with a specialist interest now looked to those for their information on France. He showed a series of clips from Channel 5 and BBC 1 and 2 (November 97) evening news programmes, covering the French lorry drivers' strike of. He noted that coverage of the Anglo-French summit (Blair, Jospin, Chirac) had mainly restricted itself to discussion of the strike.

Sergeant then introduced his video clips from French news programmes, again on the lorry drivers' strike (including interviews with British drivers), on the Louise Woodward trial in Massachusetts and on the tabloid coverage of the birth of 'false twins' to a British woman.

DISCUSSION

Fiddick noted that France had once again been in the news in Britain very recently, and invited the broadcasters' comments on the coverage of British football fans' behaviour during the World Cup as well as on the study.

Tait

- felt that Sergeant's report gave a fair analysis and that the French TV media covered the UK well. He welcomed the opportunity to discuss the report as he considered that international comparisons were very valuable.

- took issue with Rod Allen's assertion that British TV news priorities were only about giving viewers what they wanted to see and hear. ITN did take French news seriously, and prioritised stories of international significance. The news context might require that Iraq or the killings in Luxor took priority over French stories.
- said *Euronews* in Lyons was evidence of its serious interest in France. As for the summit, 'when great men meet great things are deemed to have happened' (Macchiavelli). The summit had not been genuinely newsworthy - hence the scant coverage.
- said the 1986 TV survey by Wallis and Baran quoted by Allen in his report was now out of date and a product of the cold war era when the British mood was still post-imperial, so that comparisons were inappropriate. Europe had in fact moved further up the agenda for news broadcasters, displacing the USA and South Africa. ITN had expanded its bureaux in France and Belgium in recent years and contracted elsewhere. The whole profession had become more international with more European staff working in London and ITN staff in Europe.
- pleaded not guilty of cultural stereotyping, which ITN did take seriously. The dangers it posed were an important message from this report.
- held that bad behaviour at football matches was not acceptable in France (or many other countries). The British media generally had not highlighted these different standards and thus failed to explain reactions to the violence. ITN had balanced the picture by showing Spaniards and Paraguayans drinking amiably together in a French bar.
- defended TF1 for including royal news stories
- said popular news programmes in Britain had to balance two types of journalism, the core serious news items, and the ones exemplified in the 'and finally' section. This was harmless so long as these lighter stories did not take precedence

McDonald

- seconded Richard Tait's objections to Rod Allen's thesis on priorities.
- pointed out that C4 had covered several stories with no specific British link such as the Papon trial in October as well as the 'baby money' offered by the Front National authority in Vitrolles and the arrest of a paedophile in Bordeaux.
- thought ironic use of stereotypes could work well as a technique to grab the interest of a British audience in the introduction to a relatively dry story such as unemployment and the 35 hour week in France.
- was surprised at the number of royal stories on French TV but felt we had the same problem in the UK

Fiddick asked whether French TV had treated the World Cup more seriously.

Petrie as a regular weekend watcher of France 3 in Normandy (Cherbourg peninsula) had found that although their 8pm news programme (which lasted for an hour) had a shorter international section than other channels'. The first 20 minutes of so-called 'local and regional' news often included items on (for example) town twinning, and reports were both straight and sympathetic. He suggested that stereotypes were often projected, in a competitive spirit

Le Breton thought finding ways of avoiding stereotyping might make a useful follow-up to the report. Some British lorry drivers did sympathise with their French colleagues and vice versa - if this had been shown on British TV a more balanced view would have emerged.

Tait remarked that the focus of foreign coverage had changed. It was important to remember the significance of the generation gap. Younger people travelled more across Europe, didn't remember the war and expected to see news of Europe rather than of America and South Africa. Generally news programmes are targeted at older people but when Channel 5 was set up there were only sufficient funds for one foreign correspondent. The one correspondent had been sent to cover Europe.

Perkins confirmed that the main terrestrial channels were required by statute to cover national and international news. Channel 5 had originally committed itself to more European news than transatlantic news, but this had only happened after about a year of broadcasting and after complaints by the ITC.

English

- held that the setting up, despite scarce resources, of Euronews - a consortium of broadcasters from countries including Spain, Italy, France and Germany demonstrated the growing importance of European news. Common video material was shown with different commentary for each country. Stereotypes were therefore out of the question. The service is received by 90 million homes in Europe and the problem in putting it together is to give different perspectives and at the same time present the European context.
- had noticed that one of the French clips showed British drivers speaking French. This underlined her experience that the most effective form of communication depended on hearing real people speak ideally in the language of the audience.
- agreed with Richard Tait about the non-newsworthiness of the Anglo-French summit.

Perkins asked how other comparable foreign countries had fared recently on French news programmes.

Sergeant replied that Spain was more affected by the strike than Britain and so received more coverage. Normally Germany would get more coverage although at heart the French were much more interested in Britain than in Germany. A Franco-British equivalent of ARTE would be a good idea.

Inglis expressed surprise at the extent of coverage of the Louise Woodward trial in France.

Sergeant explained it was because American legal system was so different: overturning verdicts by a judge was impossible in French law and cameras were not allowed in French courtrooms.

Hoff

- did not entirely share Richard Tait's position; all broadcasters needed audiences, and so would give them what they wanted in order to tell them what they needed to know.
- did not always understand why stories got coverage in the UK, including the Woodward saga. Earl Spencer's opening of Althorp (not really a news story) recently provoked excessive interest.
- The French and British media (TV and press) were, on the whole, very parochial in their coverage with a few notable exceptions such as recent coverage of the Sudan. Unemployment in France should concern the British but was barely reported except in statistics in order to provide a contrast.

Baker

- said the BBC had just done a survey as part of the Broadcasting Strategy Review which showed that the appetite for European news was no stronger now than it had been previously; audiences were happy to watch anything so long as its relevance was explained. Sudan had no direct relevance, but with images people understood the importance.
- commented that the evidence of the clips did not actually support claims that audiences were only interested in events abroad in as far as they affected their own country. Considerable background information was given about the reasons for the strike.

Allen replied that this was part of his argument - that we should not expect more but look to other sources for more French news.

Sergeant responded that he had been disappointed by the paucity of information given by British newscasters on the strike. It had only been at the conclusion of the strike that the background had been given.

Hargreaves said that new modes of broadcasting were emerging. On the one hand technological developments meant that there were new transnational ones

such as CNN and Euronews. On the other hand, news programmes with a more local focus such as France 3's evening news had been gaining ground over the other channels. Why should we necessarily assume that news should have a national framework? This might be because it covers more local news at the expense of national..

Allen had also noticed this phenomenon - there were now a lot of minority cable channels also (e.g. TRT providing the Turkish immigrant population in Europe with their own channel) providing for a more specialised audience. Every ethnic group in Europe could now have its TV service. However national news programmes would be with us for some years yet.

Ketteringham claimed that British TV had not abandoned overseas news. Many people now might regard Europe as 'home' and European news as 'home news' which put a different gloss on Richard Tait's boast about Channel 5's one foreign correspondent being sent to Europe.

Hodgson thought it was a pity that only news programmes were monitored; outside the news it was easy to find many other programmes covering France and the French. He welcomed the use of Ginola as a sports correspondent. In general there was not a lot of bias.

Fiddick asked whether there similar data from French news programmes?

Mussou replied that ever since TF1 was privatised there had been increasing competition for news audiences. It had been concluded that *TV de proximité* is very popular.

CONCLUSION

Allen mentioned in conclusion that the European media was far less parochial than that in America.

The meeting agreed that the exchange of views had produced some useful insights.
