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Substantiating a political public sphere in the Scottish press

A comparative analysis

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ABSTRACT

This article uses content analysis to characterize the performance of the media in a national public sphere, by setting apart those qualities that typify internal press coverage of a political event. The article looks at the coverage of the 1999 devolved Scottish election from the day before the election until the day after. It uses a word count to measure the election material in Scottish newspapers the *Herald*, the *Press and Journal* and the *Scotsman*, and United Kingdom newspapers the *Guardian*, the *Independent* and *The Times*, and categorizes that material according to discourse type, day and page selection. The article finds a number of qualities that typify the Scottish sample in particular, and might be broadly indicative of a political public sphere in action. Firstly, and not unexpectedly, it finds that the Scottish newspapers carry significantly more election coverage. Just as tellingly, though, the article finds that the Scottish papers offer a greater proportion of advice and background information, in the form of opinion columns and feature articles. It also finds that the Scottish papers place a greater concentration of both informative and evaluative material in the period before the vote, consistent with their making a contribution to informed political action. Lastly, the article finds that the Scottish sample situates coverage nearer the front of the paper and places a greater proportion on recto pages. The article therefore argues that the Scottish papers display features that distinguish them from the UK papers, and are broadly consistent with their forming part of a deliberative public sphere, and suggests that these qualities might be explored as a means of judging future media performance.

KEY WORDS ■ content analysis ■ democracy ■ political coverage ■ public sphere ■ Scottish devolution

The public sphere and the democratic space

Much critical appraisal of the role of the various institutions of the press has turned on the neglect or the realization of their democratic potential.

Optimistically, American revolutionary and statesman Thomas Jefferson (1946: 93) speculated that 'were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter'. While generally less trusting of the institutions of the newspaper industry than he, much contemporary scholarship shares Jefferson's view of the press's importance in holding government to account. Schudson (1995: 204) argues that 'the job of the press is to help produce a more informed electorate', in the hope that 'a more informed citizenry will produce a better and fuller democracy'. Yet, just as the newspaper industry can be instrumental in the production of a politically knowledgeable voting public, there are depressing consequences when the press disregard their democratic responsibilities. Thomas et al. (2004) make just this point when they highlight press disengagement from the democratic process in Wales as a significant contributory factor to political indifference amongst the electorate at large.

The most satisfactory way of developing and assessing the democratic responsibilities accorded to the press has been to discuss the extent to which it provides for a form of 'public sphere' (Dahlgren, 1991; Garnham, 1992; Hallin, 1994; Thompson, 1995; McNair, 2000; Harcup, 2003; Thomas et al., 2004). The term public sphere is used to invoke a commonly accessible civil space in which private citizens gather together to discuss matters of political importance, towards forming a collective opinion. This notion develops from the work of Jürgen Habermas, who describes an original, bourgeois public sphere around the coffee houses of mid-17th century London, involving an informal mix of aristocrats and merchants (Habermas, 1989: 32–3). Yet for all its relatively distant roots, Habermas argues the public sphere remains crucial to the formation of a normative judgement on the political process, insisting that 'the critical state of a democracy can be measured by taking the pulse of the life of its political public sphere' (Habermas, 2004).

However, while its illustrative force is undeniable, the intimate arrangement of the coffee house hardly meets the wider requirements of mass suffrage, and Garnham (1992) argues that it now falls to the media to construct and sustain an effective space for the formation of public intelligence. As Livingstone and Lunt's (1994) and Hartley's (1996) work has demonstrated, though, a number of the forms of mediated public discussion are concerned with issues outside of the political domain, and many critics suggest that the media's interest in formal politics is insufficient as things stand and may well be in decline (Franklin, 1997, 2004; Negrine, 1998). It is against this background that I hope to make a survey-based contribution to the debate on how much the media acts as a conduit for developing political information and arguments and making this available for broader discussion

and appraisal (Lewis Taylor, 1991: 191; Hallin, 1994: 3; McNair, 1998: 112; Macdonald, 2003: 81). Furthermore, in the course of the article I help develop a set of replicable criteria for the measurement and assessment of how newspapers in particular contribute to any public sphere. In terms I outline more fully below, I therefore intend to use the public sphere as a platform to explore whether a given sample of newspapers appears to be significant political discussants, as well as arriving at a definition of the form this political engagement takes.

First of all, though, I should tentatively address the confines within which any mediated public sphere ought to operate. I want to argue that where the matter in hand falls within the formal political realm, the most productive approach is to set these parameters along the spatial or legislative boundaries of democratic action. Van de Steeg (2002: 507) looks for a means of accommodating the public sphere within the multi-levelled forum of the European Union, and asks that the boundaries we accord to any public sphere extend along with the generative and complex web of 'public discourse' that arises in such a domain of common political interest. Yet, while acknowledging the desirability of a greater European civic framework (Habermas, 2001: 112), Habermas (2004: 98) seeks to outline how productive political discussion will emerge from clusters of specifically 'national' public spheres working in cooperation. Importantly, though, Van de Steeg (2002: 500) objects that there is a consistent lack of clarity on what is to be expected of the series of national public spheres that Habermas (2004), Schlesinger (1995) and others take as axiomatic, leaving subsequent discussion of these entities in want of an empirical basis. In part, it is this empirical basis that I wish to provide.

The context in which I intend to explore the extent and character of any national public sphere is the May 1999 election to the newly formed devolved Scottish parliament. In a broad study of the communication industries to develop in this new political arrangement, including parliamentary lobbying and public relations, Schlesinger et al. (2001) highlight the various lapses in openness and accountability in the emergent institutional public sphere. Before offering an equally critical assessment of the practices there in particular, they also draw attention to the print news media as enjoying 'an intimate reciprocal connection' with the Scottish public (Schlesinger et al., 2001: 12). Overall, given Van de Steeg's (2002) call for content-driven research on the national public sphere, it will be interesting to see whether any link between the output of the Scottish media and what has been hitherto assumed to be a mediated political public sphere can be substantiated.

Of course, it might be pointed out that the very circumstances of this article – where a set of nation-based newspapers report on the election to a newly established national parliament – attest to the nation's current role as

the prevalent framework for both the civic institutions of government and the civil institutions of the newspaper industry.¹ In broad terms, this accords with those arguments that its economic and legislative power present the nation as the default context for any public sphere (Garnham, 1992: 372), as well as with Schlesinger's (2003: 18) insistence that even when the subject matter is European politics, the mediated public sphere tends to be 'overwhelmingly national' in its manner of expression.

Yet, I should acknowledge that the political event providing the context for this study is an exceptional one. As Schlesinger (1998: 59) has pointed out, the devolution of parliamentary power recasts the Scottish media as the chief communicators of a developing political culture. Even in popular historical terms, this is the first Scottish election of modern times and the first ever open to the popular vote (Devine, 1999). On the other hand, I want to argue that the historical and symbolic importance of this election may be useful to our present purposes, such that we have for analysis a relatively embryonic forum for political information and dialogue, which presents a rich political environment for the Scottish papers. While there is therefore some danger that any forms of political engagement may be amplified, these should be offset against the benefits of our comprehending more clearly whatever points of distinction there may be between the coverage of the Scottish papers and that of the papers beyond this emergent democratic space.

The sample and procedures of the content analysis

This analysis compares the election coverage of a selection of Scottish newspapers with that of a selection of more broadly based United Kingdom newspapers.² In keeping with the article's focus on the possibility of a mediated national public sphere, the division of the sample turns on which parts of the United Kingdom population have a participatory role in this election. Employing the terms of Schlesinger's (2000: 106) reappraisal of the work of Deutsch (1966), we can say that the Scottish and UK papers address 'communicative communities' with different terms of inclusion. In the case of the Scottish newspapers, a substantial proportion of their readership will be allowed to vote in this election or will at least be subject to the legislative body that emerges. This contrasts with the UK papers which are likely to see only the Scottish section of their readership empowered to vote, with the majority of readers elsewhere in the UK having neither any participatory function nor a direct and material interest in the election's outcome. The Scottish papers are therefore obliged to assume they and their readership share what Schlesinger (2000: 106–7) calls a 'deliberative space' around the new parliament, whereas

the UK papers need only account for the (proportionally unlikely) possibility that a reader might occupy such a space. An important aspect of the discussion that follows is therefore the extent to which those properties peculiar to or more prominent in the Scottish papers are explicable within the terms of their democratic obligation to their readership – the variable factor between the Scottish and UK samples – and might therefore help us in characterizing an operational political public sphere.

The Scottish papers to be used are the *Herald*, the *Scotsman* and the *Press and Journal* and the UK papers to be used are the *Guardian*, the *Independent* and *The Times*. The Scottish sample is chosen on the basis of these being the three broadsheet or ‘quality’ titles³ with the largest national circulation at the time of the election, while the three UK papers are selected to provide a cross-section both of the political spectrum and of length of establishment. The corpus text to be drawn from these newspapers comprises the entirety of their election coverage on the day before the 6 May 1999 election (hereafter to be known as Election Eve), on the day of the vote (Election Day), and on the day after (Results Day).

The rest of the article now compares the Scottish and UK samples using a ‘content analysis’ (Bell, 1991: 213; Deacon et al., 1999: 114–31) that measures the distribution of coverage across the period of the sample, proportions of different types of coverage, and the division of coverage across pages; all the time comparing the two national samples. Until now, two conventional means of quantifying newspaper copy have been to establish the number of column inches or the number of articles (see Gans, 1980: 9; Scharrer, 2002), which at least in the former case allows account to be taken of such techniques of prominence as increased headline size. However, while accepting that all the available means of quantification have disadvantages, this study uses numbers of words of copy as the unit of measurement⁴ in an attempt to overcome the inherent difficulties of varying column widths and article sizes, while also adequately gauging the large amount of sample data.

The levels of coverage across the three days

In setting out a comparison between the election coverage of the national samples, the first test should be to examine their respective volumes. A full tally of words in all those articles and stories relating to the election shows a substantial difference in favour of the Scottish sample, such that the words in the three Scottish papers total 84,160, against the UK papers’ 19,246 words. On the face of it, the Scottish papers therefore assume the greater role in the

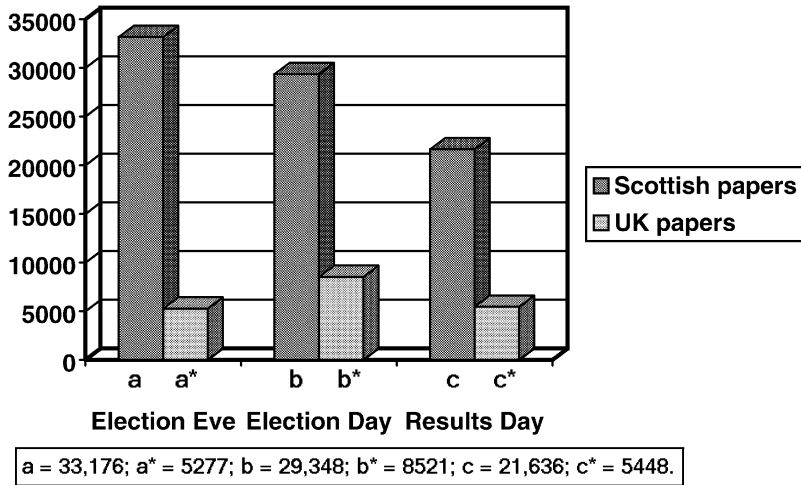


Figure 1 Amount of election coverage on each day

political public sphere around the election simply by offering substantially more coverage than the UK papers. Yet, in addition to this, the Scottish papers differ in the way the coverage is distributed over the three days of the sample, as shown in Figure 1.

The respective quantities would lead us to expect that the Scottish papers would have a substantially greater amount of coverage on each day of the sample and this proves to be the case; but there are also varying patterns of temporal distribution. Whereas the UK papers have similar coverage across Election Eve and Results Day, with the greatest proportion on Election Day, the Scottish editions have the greatest quantity of coverage on Election Eve, with progressively less through Election Day to Results Day. Thus, while the UK papers concentrate their coverage around Election Day, coverage in the Scottish papers is weighted towards the early part of the sample.

This distribution of coverage in the UK papers appears consistent with a concern with the 'dramatic climax' of the election more than with the process itself (Galtung and Ruge, 1973: 63) such that most coverage comes on the day of an event, whether that is the election itself or the announcement of the results. The Scottish sample, on the other hand, has the greater coverage on Election Eve – the day before the vote – although the coverage remains relatively substantial in quantity as the days go on. Of the two samples, the pattern evident in the Scottish papers is therefore more effective in embodying a critical forum in which deliberations occur when the outcome can still be transformed into political action. This means that those papers fully within

the participatory space of the election time their coverage to enable the public to contemplate before embarking on the political act of voting.

News discourse types

The analysis now explores the various discursive forms that this newspaper coverage takes. First of all, at any given historical moment the newspaper presents a relatively stable discursive form, with textual and design characteristics that successfully distinguish it from, say, a book of poetry or a celebrity magazine (Van Dijk, 1988; Fowler, 1991). However, the newspaper may also be sub-divided into a number of discursive options with their own distinct practices of composition and reading (see Evans, 1978; Hicks, 1998; Hutt and James, 1989). Specifically, I want to suggest that content is divided into four configurations, and I follow Raymond Williams (1976: 37) in naming these as the three categories of 'news', 'feature' and 'leader' (or 'editorial'), together with the category of 'opinion' piece (Diller, 1993; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2004). These four categories are to be treated as 'discourse types', in that they present 'relatively stabilized configurations of genres and discourses' (Fairclough, 1995: 66) that are readily identifiable from one another, that execute particular pragmatic functions within the newspaper, and that invite appropriate reading practices.

Informative discourse types: news and feature coverage

The terms according to which the coverage is to be separated into these discourse types need to be clear from the outset; not least as a guide for similar exercises in the future. The first consideration in allotting an item of coverage to a given category is whether the type of discourse invoked is 'informative' or 'evaluative'. News and feature coverage items present informative discourse types on the basis that their role within the discursive complex of the newspaper is nominally the provision of new information. As I outline later, in the particular context of election coverage the informative category will include articles such as those delivering the results and those offering instructions on polling procedures.

Looking first to the news item, this can be said to offer an account of some external phenomenon that fulfils such criteria as immediacy, prominence and unexpectedness (Galtung and Ruge, 1973; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001; Palmer, 2002). The task of such an item will be either to offer what is constructed as a

set of facts, or to keep the reader abreast of recent developments in an issue of on-going concern. In the particular case of an election campaign, the news-worthiness tends to derive from 'events'⁵ along the way, such as shifts in opinion polls, politicians' stops on the campaign trail, restatements of policy and the ritual condemnation of opponents.

In the case of a feature item, a journalist fashions the relevance of some external phenomenon by placing it in a particular context, in a manner not necessarily subject to the constraints of timeliness demanded of a news item (Hutt and James, 1989: 103). In practice, a feature piece might be offered in conjunction with a 'hard news' item, where the news piece would describe the event and the feature coverage would explore background information or personal reflections on the people involved. An example of this appears in sample when the *Herald* highlights the extremes of age likely to enter the new parliament. Another of the *Herald's* feature articles focuses on the impact of the election campaign on the traditionally working-class town of Harthill. As Hicks (1998: 118) writes, the broad aim of the feature article is to go 'beyond the reporting of facts to explain and/or entertain' without being explicit in offering a judgement or opinion.

Overall, the division of the sample assumes that while the project of the news story is the communication of information, the feature is concerned either with the placement of information in a selected context or to provide a digression into a potentially interesting side angle.

Evaluative discourse types: opinion and editorial coverage

The two 'evaluative' types of opinion and editorial, on the other hand, are united in offering overtly subjective appraisal of current events or issues, either from a named individual journalist, or on behalf of the institution of the newspaper. We can identify these discourse types by looking to what Van Dijk (1988: 52) calls their 'schematic' properties. For example, both are given to exhibiting the structural and rhetorical properties of argument (Van Dijk, 1998: 39; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2004: 61), and both types are also permitted to mark the institutional or journalistic voice using personal pronouns such as 'I' and 'we' (Fowler, 1991: 64; Allan, 1999: 92). Also, while the journalist responsible is often acknowledged in conventional news and feature stories, in the opinion column the identity of the writer is to the fore, normally occupying a 'standard head' close to the top of the page, or incorporated within an illustrated byline (Hutt and James, 1989: 104). In addition, and not unusually

for an election, this sample includes a number of opinion pieces that have been commissioned on a one-off basis, from guest journalists, from interested politicians, or from accomplished literary figures such as William McIlvaney and Alasdair Gray.

The editorial column, lastly, is clearly identified as the institutional voice of the newspaper. In its standard form, it is marked with the newspaper's masthead and appears on a designated and regular inside page; normally the inside verso page adjacent to the letters to the editor. However, as is commonly the case on special occasions such as elections, much of the editorial coverage in the sample newspapers is moved to the front page (Negrine, 1994: 173). The core strand that distinguishes the editorial from opinion material – and a means by which these front-page addresses are recognizable as editorials – is that editorials offer opinion and advice to the readership on behalf of the newspaper itself, in such a way that the weight of the institution is explicitly cited to substantiate the authority of the voice. Thus, where opinion columns may depart from the official line – with occasional writers often being recruited for just that purpose – the editorial material expresses the institutional position of the newspaper.

I began this section by pleading that this division was necessary for the conduct of the analysis, and that its aim was clarity of process. Yet despite the abruptness of the categorization, there is no intention that acceptance of the term 'opinion columns', for example, should position the rest of the news as opinion free. On the contrary, as Van Dijk (1988: 5) points out, opinion is an important factor in the processes of news composition. By extension, I also acknowledge the tradition of ideological analysis by holding that the institutional authority of the newspaper extends beyond the editorial column (Hodge and Kress, 1993; Fairclough, 1995; Schudson, 1995). However, I maintain that the distinctions outlined here are central to journalistic practice. Tuchman (1997: 176) notes that, while even journalists themselves would be hard pressed to offer a universal definition of what distinguishes one category of item from another, they are rarely equivocal on whether their current project is a hard news item or a feature piece. Indeed, Tuchman argues that the category of item required would ordinarily be stipulated in advance, inscribing the categories into the very conduct of the newsroom. So, while accepting that the conceptual distinction between the four will include a degree of slippage, I want to suggest that the categories of opinion piece, editorial column, feature item and news story remain as an adequate reflection of newsroom practice and newspaper content, and should therefore help inform the forthcoming analysis of how each of the samples fashion their own approaches to the election.

The level of coverage according to discourse type

Before setting out the various discourse types, we found that the Scottish papers had the most coverage and appeared to time that coverage in a manner conducive to informed political action. This section determines the format of this coverage by examining the incidence and patterns of the four discourse types of news, feature, opinion and editorial. Figure 2 shows how the two sets of coverage can be divided into these four types.

Here, the Scottish and UK samples show some degree of similarity in the patterns of their coverage. While the quantities in each sample continue to differ considerably, both present news as their largest category, followed by feature, opinion and then editorial. In proportional terms, however, the UK papers have the greater emphasis on news, while the Scottish sample devotes more material to feature and opinion coverage. Indeed, when combined, the latter two categories account for 54 percent of the Scottish sample and only 36 percent of the UK sample. It thus emerges that the Scottish papers are disposed towards accompanying news coverage with a greater quantity of background information, while also offering the higher proportion of subjective argument and advice. However, we can also see a contrary pattern favouring the UK papers in the relative predominance of editorial coverage. In proportional terms, 10.5 percent of overall coverage in the UK papers is taken up by editorial columns, compared with 4 percent of coverage in the Scottish titles. While some allowance must be made for those constraints of compositional practice that generally limit the use of the editorial to one per issue, it

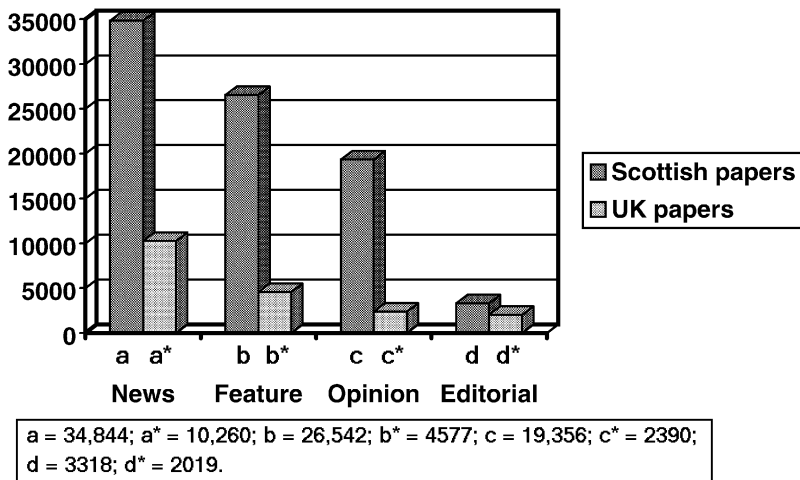


Figure 2 Total words for each of the four discourse types

nonetheless emerges that the provision of institutional advice is a characteristic of coverage UK wide.

To summarize the findings, then, the Scottish papers can be seen to discharge their nominal role within the participative space of the election by offering significantly more of the expert and journalistic advice of the opinion column, and by placing an emphasis on the background material of the feature coverage.

The levels of discourse type across the three days

This section now shows the relationship between the four discourse types and the timing of coverage. While not referring to the political event as such, in the introduction to a series of essays on the mediated public sphere, Dahlgren (1991: 1) argues that the media should be in the business of informing democratic decisions in a way that helps 'citizens learn about the world, debate their responses to it and reach informed decisions about what course of action to adopt'. I earlier argued that there is a general pattern in the Scottish papers in which coverage is weighted towards the lead-up to the vote. None of this is to say that coverage should be exclusive to the earlier period of the sample, though, as the diligent voter will demand an update of results the day after, so informing future democratic action. Nonetheless, in the immediate context of an election, informed political action is aided by coverage delivered either the day before the election or on election day itself: points at which the electorate are still able to take account of any content in their voting decision.

The graphs in Figure 3 represent the distribution of the four discourse types over the three days.

Although quantities in the Scottish sample vary, reaching a low in the Results Day editorial coverage, it is immediately apparent that all four types are represented on each day of the sample. In addition, the Scottish papers are more inclined to distribute their news coverage towards the earlier part of the sample, before and at the time of the act of voting, in keeping with the broader Scottish patterns demonstrated earlier. In contrast, the UK sample increases its news coverage as the days proceed, up to and including Results Day. Also, the Scottish papers differ from the UK papers in sustaining at least some level of feature coverage on Results Day.

Focussing on opinion coverage, while it is significant that there is a deliberative pattern in both samples in which the stress is placed on coverage before the time of voting, it is noteworthy that it is the Scottish papers that demonstrate this pattern the more strongly. Indeed, in both the informative

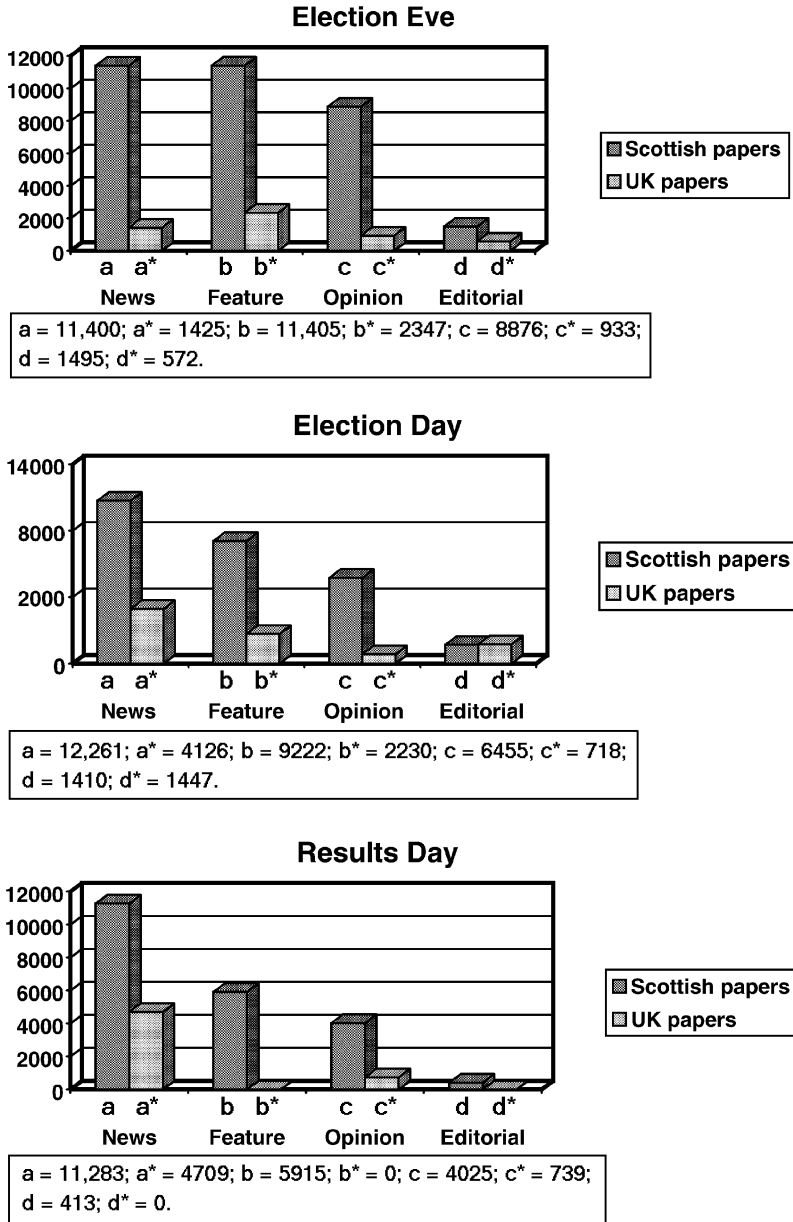


Figure 3 Discourse types across the three days

and evaluative discourse types, the Scottish papers place the greater weight of coverage before and during the vote. This provides a partial contrast with the

UK editions, where both types of coverage peak on Election Day. In the Scottish papers, therefore, the temporal arrangement in both advice and information appears most in line with the requirement of the electorate to gather intelligence and opinion before casting their votes.

The distribution of coverage across pages

I have so far sought to establish the volume, character and timing of the election coverage, but it is also important that we see how that coverage has been distributed through the pages of the newspapers. Patterns of distribution will, of course, be influenced by the newspapers' policy on the pagination of editorial and opinion columns, as well as the front page's conventional status as the most prominent part of the newspaper (Hutt and James, 1989: 78). To show how the coverage has been distributed in this case, though, Figure 4 contains the word totals for each page through each of the two samples. In each case, where an item continues into another part of the paper, the words in that item are attributed to the opening page:

Looking to the samples in turn, while front-page material accounts for a greater proportion of the UK sample, it remains that the Scottish papers have more than double the quantity of front-page coverage. Also, the Scottish coverage is more widely distributed through the paper, using a total of 18 different pages compared with 13 in the UK papers. The Scottish papers have also made greater use of the initial three double-page spreads, such that all the pages from two to seven are pressed into use, whereas only page three is used by the UK papers. The only areas in which the UK papers have the advantage over their Scottish counterparts is in their exclusive use of pages 20 to 22 for a number of opinion pieces, with the rest of their coverage concentrated on a few select pages, specifically pages eight and 13. The coverage in the Scottish papers has therefore tended to be in the more prominent pages closer to the front of the paper.

A less immediately obvious hierarchy between pages derives, potentially, from a body of Gestalt-based research, that suggests 'new' information tends to be placed on the right-hand side while 'given' information tends to be situated on the left (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 55). If applied to the division of newspaper pages across a double-page spread, this means that new information should appear on the recto side of the page, which is more a feature of the Scottish papers. In precise terms, the UK papers have 51.9 per cent on the more desirable recto pages including front-page coverage while the equivalent pages in the Scottish papers account for 65 per cent of the coverage – a difference that would be still more pronounced if the front pages were to be discounted.

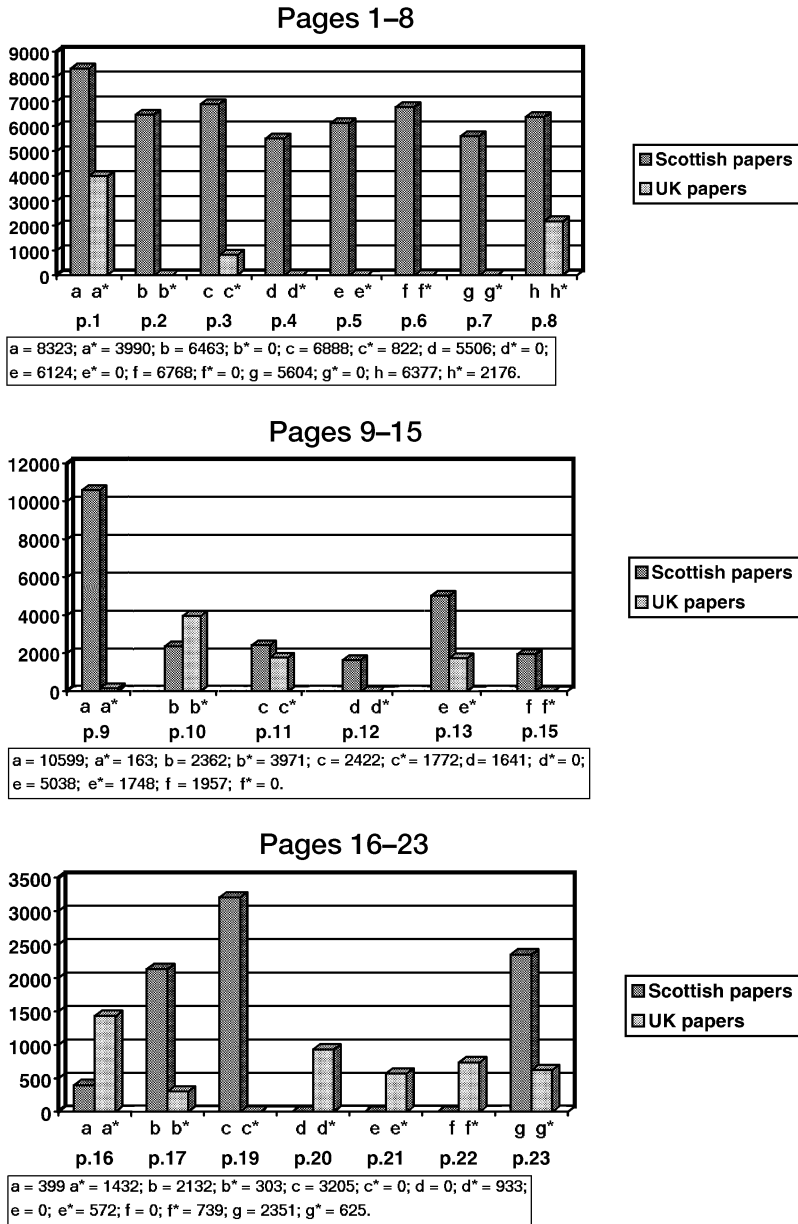


Figure 4 Distribution of coverage over pages

How Kress and van Leeuwen's particular division between new and given could be deployed as a critical tool across the various forms of newspapers

content would benefit from further research. For now, though, it is worth noting that their suggestion that material on the right occupies the more attractive position for generating attention favours the Scottish sample. Even in more immediate terms, the mechanics of reading a broadsheet format newspaper from the front also place the recto page in parallel with the body, making them easier to read.⁶ These patterns of page selection in the Scottish papers provide circumstantial evidence that one means of gauging the degree of emphasis a newspaper wishes to place on a text is the proportion that appears on the recto pages.

Conclusion

Content analysis and the public sphere

In this article, I have tried to provide a means for the future assessment of the political public sphere through a content analysis of how a symbolically important internal political event in Scotland is covered by a selection of domestic newspapers. Overall, the extent and prominence of the coverage of the Scottish papers is in a positive relation with their proximity to the 'deliberative space' of the election (Schlesinger, 2000: 106; Deutsch, 1966), this being the space within which it may be assumed that the readership is entitled to vote. Firstly, the Scottish papers have the significantly greater quantity of election coverage. Secondly, over the three days of the sample, the Scottish newspapers present a pattern consistent with voter deliberation by providing the bulk of election material when it is able to inform democratic action. Thirdly, when the coverage is separated into the four discourse types of news, feature, opinion and editorial, the Scottish papers place a greater emphasis on feature and opinion coverage. Also, while both the Scottish and the UK papers deliver most of the evaluative coverage before the time of voting, the Scottish sample places the greater stress of informative material at a time where it can be used to substantiate voting decisions. Lastly, the Scottish papers place their coverage in the most prominent parts of the paper, and make more use of the recto pages. All in all, these results show how the media may contribute to a political public sphere, and I have tried to offer a number of defining characteristics for the assessment of the role of the press in any political public sphere in the future.

I hope that this article provides an adequate response to Van de Steeg's (2002: 500) call for clarity on how a national political public sphere actually operates. At the same time, these results reassert the value of such 'deliberative spaces' as that of the nation in discussing the public sphere (Garnham, 1992;

Schlesinger, 1995; Habermas, 2003), as well as serving as a reminder of deliberative spaces below the national level. As noted earlier, the corpus data itself is drawn from an election to a fledgling parliament, formed by the devolution of power from the broader nation state of the United Kingdom to the internal 'stateless nation' of Scotland (McCrone, 2001).⁷ At first sight, such political developments highlight the prominence of the nation in the exercise of government. However, the political necessity of devolution also re-emphasizes the role of localized and culturally constituted geo-political formations. Considered alongside the key role of the media in giving coherence to a hitherto 'stateless' Scotland (Meech and Kilborn, 1992; Smith, 1994), these results demonstrate how such civil institutions as the press might contribute to the conditions for political public spheres at the national and sub-national level. This article thus serves to emphasize the importance of the correlation between the political coverage of newspapers and the 'deliberative spaces' established around democratic and media institutions as they stand and as they emerge. Overall, it is crucial that even at the sub-state and regional level, media scholarship remains attentive to localized formations in its engagement with what may be called the 'actually existing' media terrain.

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Notes

- 1 On the case for European government, my approach betrays no political judgement as such, and stems rather from a concern to most accurately test the relationship between the corpus and political event at hand. My approach is, however, consistent with the argument that any European public sphere will best develop in parallel with the institutions of European government.
- 2 The status of the Scottish newspapers as 'national' publications is more complex than in the case of their UK counterparts. On the one hand, Connell (2003) charts how the Scottish press of the inter-war years sought to emphasize their national credentials to establish a place in the market, and Law (2001), Higgins (2004a, 2004b) and Rosie et al. (2004) argue that identification with the home nation remains a key part of the news discourse of the Scottish press. On the other hand, the sales of all three Scottish papers used in this sample run along regional lines, in that the *Herald* and the *Scotsman* have the greater proportion of

their sales in the industrial centre, and the *Press and Journal* is more successful in the northern and rural areas. Yet for all that, all three have the main qualities of national titles. The *Herald* and the *Scotsman*, in particular, habitually claim to be 'the' national title, while its market penetration and political influence have made it necessary to include the *Press and Journal* in discussions on representing the interests of the Scottish polity (see Schlesinger et al., 2001: 68).

- 3 See Bromley (1998) for a critical discussion of the distinction between 'quality' and 'popular' newspapers.
- 4 Intended here is the 'orthographic word', as a single lexical or grammatical item (Crystal, 1997: 419). The word count includes headlines and captions for accompanying photographs and illustrations.
- 5 It is a moot point whether such events ought to be newsworthy at all, given that they rarely contain any element of surprise. Boorstin (1963) suggests that this form of manufactured event – 'pseudo-events' as he calls them – are a corruption of the news-gathering process. On the other hand, other than where a politician makes an unexpected policy statement, it is difficult to see how election coverage could be sustained over the period of a campaign by any other means.
- 6 In 2003, what was presented as popular disgruntlement over the relatively ornate physical contortions required to read a broadsheet newspaper, especially in a confined space such as a bus or tube train, prompted the *Independent* to begin the process of replacing the broadsheet with a tabloid format, later to be followed by most of its main rivals.
- 7 A broadly parallel devolution of authority took place in Wales (see Thomas et al., 2004).

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