

International News Flows in the Seventeenth Century: Problems and Prospects

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Last year in the French Journal *Annales Histoire Sciences Sociales*, Will Slauter from the University of Paris at St. Denis stated "although specialists know that the gazettes and journals of the early modern period contained mainly foreign news, the movement of this news across linguistic and political boundaries remains *tres peu etudie*". As an example to the contrary he very kindly cites this volume [*]. Now it's nice to be in the vanguard – but when does "*tres peu etudie*" really mean "impossible" or "*trop difficile*"? Joad Raymond last year in the *Journal media history* acknowledged, with resounding emphasis, that for writing the history of international news flows in the 17th century "there are profound obstacles not only in **method**, but also in the practical **methods** historians in different traditions use to collect and assess data, not to speak of significant and underexplored asymmetries between the contents and the cataloguing of the relative archives in the relevant countries." Nevertheless he stated that international news networks are "probably the most pressing and promising issue in the history of early media today." The question is what have we learnt over the last couple of years and what can we do with it? On the one hand the intervening time has more than confirmed Joad's suggestion that "there are profound obstacles" – on the other hand there are also signs that the obstacles may be temporary although the question remains "*tres peu étudié*," and over the time allotted to me I would like to examine what has been done and what could be done to trace the European news networks of early modern times using a combination of methodologies involving text mining and network analysis.

An important tool for tracing news flows is the measurement of textual borrowing across media i.e. the massive study of intertextuality. And one such tool is the Crouch program developed by Andrew Hardie and his team at Lancaster named after John Crouch, an early English satirist. [*] .And in their chapter for the *Contemporaneity* book Andrew and his team using this program showed patterns of textual borrowing between several mid-17th century British news publications, so that, for instance, a significant percentage of news in the 1654 *Moderate Intelligencer* published in London appeared to be derived from the *Weekly Post*, also London based.

[the case looks like a print-out from the student plagiarism detector TURNITIN:

Frank describes *ModIntell171#2* as a counterfeit; but what the text reuse analysis makes clear is that its similarity was to a closely contemporaneous text also printed by Wood, not the text by Horton that (according to Frank) it counterfeits. In fact, we find it hard to accept this as a straightforward case of counterfeiting, since this incident came at the end of a period when Horton and Wood had been printing alternate issues of the third title they shared/competed over, *The Faithful Scout* (by late April, they settled on it

being published with the attribution 'printed by Robert Wood, for G. Horton'); they also went on to alternate their publication of the Moderate Intelligencer and Weekly Post. The precise motivations of the two printers are probably not now recoverable in full, although amusingly, both Horton's and Wood's versions of issue 171 of the Weekly Post carry the attribution, 'Printed by [name of printer]; to prevent all false copies'.

As the team clearly showed, there are many possible relations between texts that are not necessarily wholesale borrowing. But when any such borrowings occur across state and linguistic borders we refer to news flows i.e. we add a geographical vector to the textual vector. So the first step in tracing news flows is to compare typical texts.

And when we first thought of a collaborative project I suggested to Nick Brownlees that the newsletters in the Florence state archive might be a good place to look for the original material that showed up in the early 17th century corantos, a couple of days later he said he found a match and here it is.[*] This seemed like record time and I wish he'd show me his trick. In any case his evidence suggested a flow pattern something like this where we imagine a story originating in Venice about mischief occurring in Venice harbor([*]), which by some means, we assume by newsletter, gets transmitted to the Caspar van Hilten shop in Amsterdam, who in turn write it up in their coranto entitled Courante uyt italien Duytsland etc. which is in turn translated and printed probably by Nathaniel Butter or Nick Bourne and Thomas Archer in London. So far the original Dutch coranto hasn't turned up; instead what we have are the English paper and the Venice newsletter collected by the Medici court in Florence.

The next steps seemed obvious – let's get everyone in our network to look out for these connections and soon we'd have the problem licked. Of course matters are not quite so simple in practice. The connections between one medium and another are not altogether easy to find. Not all researchers are as fast or as fortunate as Nick. The problems involved in analyzing large masses of material are formidable; and so far in early modern studies the Crouch system of Andrew et al. has been applied only to texts in the same language, although potentially it can be used anywhere. Large corpora for inter-linguistic and inter-textual comparison simply do not yet exist and must be formed – largely by entering text manually as Andrew and his team have done with the Lancaster corpus – and the same obviously goes for the manuscript newsletters. Until we devise a mechanical way to carry out the comparisons on a massive basis we have to rely on an eclectic method of looking up texts within certain time frames (since dates are not always reported accurately and calendars differ from place to place).

Some enticing questions are simply not answerable in the current state of research. We know that at least in the German-speaking world Johann Carolus [*] in Stgrassburg was the first to start regularly printing up the newsletters he had around his shop beginning in around 1605. We simply don't know which newsletters they were – also because no printed numbers of his Relation aller Fürnemmen und gedenckwürdigen Historien exist before 1609. In any case for this number relating to 1609, we can imagine a flow pattern something like this[*].

The flow pattern of newsletters to gazettes is still a matter of conjecture. By a fortunate coincidence, made famous by Mario Infelise, we know the relation between a Venice newsletter from 1648 [*] and the printed Gazzetta di Bologna of the same year– because they were both collected in the same volume of the Codici Ottoboniani in the Vatican Library. The information in these texts suggests an interesting fallacy as well as an interesting itinerary. The story is about Turkish incursions in Venetian Dalmatia. Please observe the place names, which are the key to the story here. They are somewhat misleading, because the Venetian historian Battista Nani [*], referring to the action in question, talks about Dernis, not Bernizza or Dernissa, and judging from the Blaeu Atlas from just these years, the news must have made a trip something like this ([*]) – from Dernis or Dernischi just north of Mocuo, to Scardona, and from San Cassiano just south of Zara, also to Scardona, where this ship was docked. How it got there we don't know. Anyway the news apparently then boarded the ship at Scardona and made way for Venice; whence the Venetian newsletter apparently traveled down to Bologna. Other itineraries are even more speculative; but we press on.

[*]The Sultan's favorite here is a bit of news (pun intended) that traveled from Constantinople to Venice where presumably it was written up. The news reached Hamburg, Paris and London, but we don't know in what order. Just the bare dates suggest Paris came first even keeping in mind that the English calendar was some 11 days later.

The French and English texts are almost identical, with one key difference, i.e. the girl is only a favorite in England but becomes a favorite Sultana in France – as also in Germany. I leave you to speculate on why. The German version is missing important aspects, so perhaps depends on a missing original from Venice.[*] Here is a possible itinerary.

Examples keep popping up. [*] A collaborator working in the news archive in Bremen, uros urosevic, helped make up a list of intertextualities between the English and German papers by comparing the papers there to the Lancaster news books. Here are a few of his results.[*][*] [*] Some of these I matched with the respective numbers of the French Gazette and sometimes the Dutch corantos and here are some clear ringers. [*] This is the story of the battle of Recife in Brazil, an episode in the world dimension of the colonial struggle between Holland and Portugal, reported in four papers. The number 40 occurs in the Hamburg paper and the London one,

although in different connections, and no ships or towns are mentioned in either the French or the Dutch papers. I thought the Dutch paper seemed almost identical to the account in Paris; but I couldn't make up my mind which way the news was traveling. As for the other accounts the German one claims to get the information from Antwerp by way of England; but it is crucially different from the news printed in the English newspaper, which claims to get the news from Paris – obviously not the same Gazette as the one that resembles Amsterdam, but some other news source. So we get this diagram[*]

Here [*] again is a story from the same time. I like to call it the the diamond cross affair. the matter in question concerns a gift by pope Innocent X to Lucrezia Barberini, grand niece of the previous pope, a significant sign of favor whose purpose has unfortunately not been recorded. Between the reporting in Several Proceedings and the Sambstagige Zeitung and the Perfect Diurnal we note significant similarities, illustrated in the next scheme. Here [*] the green yellow and blue portions are the same across the sample; whereas purple appears only in these two different numbers of Several Proceedings. Now if we take the last example from the Perfect Diurnal at the bottom [*] and compare it to a fifth paper, the French Gazette, we would get near perfect score according to Andrew's Crouch method – i.e. a voluminous borrowing of text amounting to practically a translation of one into the other – in this case most probably of the French into the English.

Let's apply the same criteria to another story[*], of somewhat greater impact: the flight of the English King Charles I from Hampton Court at the end of 1647, during the English Civil War. On the left we have the Weekly Intelligencer and on the right, the Bologna newspaper. In the next slide[*]we see which portions of the story are picked up, presumably going from left to right. There are some crucial differences. On the left is mentioned the discovery of three letters, which are four on the right and on the left the letter informing about the parliament's plan to kill the King is signed E. R., whereas on the right it is supposed to be unsigned.

Such examples could be repeated almost ad infinitum, and within certain limitations would have to be, in order to gain a realistic picture of the news networks of early modern Europe. The preconditions for such a study would be the availability of some more of the crucial collections: readable corpora of the newsletters of Venice and Rome, and more than scattered numbers of the dutch corantos. Then we would have to tabulate the results in terms of vectors from place to place and from time to time. Finally, we would have to devise a clever way of representing the results, something like what the Republic of Letters projects at Stanford and Oxford are attempting to do for learned correspondence.

But rather than reading out the grant proposal, for the time being I'd like to move on to the comparative stylistic aspects of journalistic prose across several cultures, using the same texts we just examined.

Clearly if we are considering the early media to have functioned as a content delivery system we must pay some attention to how the news was conveyed stylistically as well as what was conveyed. The question then is what are the forms of journalistic narrative in the 17th century? Nick Brownlees has offered some very suggestive conclusions regarding narrative in English Corantos and news books, differentiating basically between two more or less coexisting approaches to delivering news – namely, the continuous narrative approach and the discontinuous narrative approach.

This model works rather well also for cross-border analyses; and here [*] are our two accounts again of the flight of the King from Hampton Court. The one on the left breaks up the narration with what purports to be an original document – in this case a letter written by the King to justify his flight to the Isle of Wight. The story on the right from the *Gazzetta di Bologna*, is formulated according to the typical rhetorical conventions not only of the newsletter but also of the printed news story. I'd like to focus on this type of continuous narrative for the time being. [*] How can we characterize it stylistically? The grammatical structure seems to involve long run-on sentences. A quick analysis of the text suggests this. We've had to write out abbreviations so as not to confuse the computer program, which essentially is counting punctuation marks. Measurements are of course highly misleading especially as punctuation practices could still vary widely in the mid-17th century. The same went for average sentence length, which here is stated as 77 words, with a maximum length of 153 words. But let's compare the average sentence length here to some other narrative text in Italy from the time. [*] And here is a history of Umbria from 1642 where the average sentence length is 48 words, with a max of 111; and here again [*] is a short story from Maiolino Bisaccioni published in 1664. In this one the sentence length of 42 words with a max of 184 words at least conforms to the general category of long, to which the journalistic example also belongs. These brief excerpts obviously do not fit the criteria for a corpus-based approach; but they may suggest corpora that could be constructed for the purposes of analysis along such lines.

Now, examining journalistic texts like the one from the *Gazzetta di Bologna*, what ought to be our unit of analysis? I.e., what makes up a text—apart from the words? Will Slauter whom I mentioned at the beginning, has proposed the “paragraph” as the unit of news in the early modern, although in his article in the *Annales* he focuses on the 18th century, not on earlier news. Looking at the question from the standpoint of the very origins of news, namely, the letter and eventually the newsletter, and keeping in mind the examples we have just seen, I would argue that the material seems to be more often laid out in what at the time would have been called a “period” rather than the more vaguely defined notion of paragraph. Paragraph must be

understood of course in context – the concept of *paragrafo* appears already in Dante as a metaphor for a highlighted text drawn from the legal tradition of scholars marking off sections of the law i.e. paragraphs, by a sign, or *paragrafós*. On the other hand according to the definition in Giuseppe Manuzzi's "corrected" edition of the Florentine vocabulary of the academicians of the Crusca, which he published in Turin in 1863, a period is "a certain number of words formed of several members or clauses (*incisi*) the union of which gives a complete sentence." This seems like a more suitable definition for what we see in the text of the *Gazzetta di Bologna*. Let's keep in mind that the Crusca vocabulary of 1691 gave the following definition of a period: to wit, "a certain composition of words which circulate [*raggirano*]" as the word 'periodós' would suggest, and the dictionary entry points to the early 17th century Segni translation of the fourth century BC rhetorical handbook by Demetrius Phalereus which elaborates in some detail on what is a period.

What seems common to all definitions of the period is the concept of segmentation, in contrast to continuousness. A period always involves a concatenation of elements.

Let's look at some of our examples from the standpoint of the concatenation of elements or clauses in a discourse. And we're not talking here about anything so sophisticated as the situating of events in a chronological sequence, which Nick has identified in his *corantos* and newsbooks. We are interested in quantity, not quality. [*] And let's see how items are concatenated in the *Gazzetta di Bologna* example. Not just by the frequent semicolons; but also by the frequent uses of the word "che"-- a simple functional word which in this case I think is highly significant keeping in mind all the caveats of Andrew and Nick about allowing too many noisy functionals to spoil our data. We have in essence a series of subordinate clauses related to the opening gambit, which is, letters have come in from a certain place. By the way, roughly chronological order appears to have been maintained, after the initial announcement of what the story is about ("la scritta fuga del re").

Looking across various examples, we find that in the Italian media these features fit a common pattern.

[*]Here on top is another example from Italy, this time from the section devoted to *Avvisi* in the Vatican Archive. We see a period composed of several members, shall we say, each adding to the story. I've separated out the clauses and numbered them from 1 to 4. All four clauses then appear in the bottom example, which is the *Gazzetta di Bologna* carrying the same story, but in a different order. The difference does not seem to be so much in chronology as in emphasis, suggested by the order of elements. For the manuscript newsletter above, the big story appears to be the Turkish arsenalotto who escaped because of the workload; in the printed gazette below, the big story is the arrival of the Venetian fleet in the Dardanelles. Each

example contains material not in the other. The top one, after the four points about the Turks, goes on in the same vein (colored in bluish). The bottom example changes the subject completely and reports at least three other stories, all in green. In different media where there is copying across the media, we find that the concatenation of elements may change depending on the circumstances.

According to Will Slauter, it was precisely in the aspect of mobility that the paragraph asserted its particular usefulness in the 18th century, easily detachable from its moorings in a specific text and transportable lock stock and barrel into another text, where it might be embedded in an entirely different context, surrounded with entirely different ideas.

We find that in the Italian cases the clauses of a period have the same utility. Easily movable from place to place, removable and exchangeable, they are the building blocks of stories, the seeds of narrative, and ultimately the stock in trade of the vast stream of exchangeable information coursing through the networks of early modern news. Like the packets of data passing through the Internet, and almost said and also through the silos of the cyberspooks in Ft Meade MD, they can be traced – although this will clearly require some time and a good amount of machinery.