Part I

The Analysis of the Television Product

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Part I is a collection of chapters offering a number of perspectives on television discourse by academics working in the fields of media and discourse analysis. While the practitioners’ contributions in the following section address the preparation and the production stage of the television product, revealing choices made on the ‘other side of the screen’ invisible to viewers, the studies in this section address what appears on the viewers’ side. Practitioners’ choices are principally dictated by pressing pragmatic and contingent reasons, deriving for example from time, money or marketing constraints. Academics, while not ignoring this, tend to analyse the finished broadcast product, offering a reading of its multiple aspects. From this perspective the product may be seen as having entailed other kinds of choices, which, rather than by practical imperatives, are motivated by adherence to a system of cultural values and personal or social beliefs.

Similar to the practitioners’ part, this collection is characterised by its multidisciplinarity. The authors represent different theoretical and methodological backgrounds, some of them bringing in expertise derived from a professional past in the production of news. The analytical approach is prevalently comparative (either across countries or private and public networks), for, as Entman (1991) notes, it is precisely through the careful comparison of texts that features peculiar to one or the other emerge, features that would have otherwise remained unremarkable.

Part I opens with a comparative analysis by Bednarek and Caple on the way four British and Australian news providers (BBC World and ABC News 24, The Guardian and Sydney Morning Herald) represent themselves in promotional television advertisements. Taking a multimodal approach, the authors show the different types of engagement that the
news media aspire to achieve with their audiences, and the journalistic values that they claim for themselves.

This is followed by chapters focusing specifically on television news and other factual programming. In Chapter 2, Duguid explores values which emerge in the visual and verbal texts of four English language world news channels (France 24, Russia Today, Al Jazeera and China’s CCTV) whose mission statements characterise them in contraposition to the hegemonic power of older world news channels BBC and CNN. She is followed by Koga-Browes (Chapter 3), who analyses a corpus of British and Japanese news images and discusses how camera angles may impose particular standpoints on viewers from which to position themselves vis-à-vis the image. Writing from previous experience as a practising television camera man, he gives examples of how practical problems in filming may determine a certain kind of shot which in turn may suggest a ‘meaning’ to viewers beyond any intentionality on the part of the producer. In Chapter 4, Bonfiglioli offers a quantitative analysis of news angles and frames. Starting from the assumption that news media language and images help shape our understandings, she discusses ideological positioning in news coverage of overweight and obesity by investigating their reported causes, attributions of responsibility and promotion of solutions. In Chapter 5, Lorenzo-Dus addresses the representation of commemorative events by CNN and by British, Argentinian and Spanish broadcasters in television news and documentaries. Her analysis points out similarities and differences in the television data and emphasises the cross-cultural valence of such manifestations in memorialising the cultural traumas of the past.

The two final chapters on factual programming are also carried out in a comparative perspective. In Chapter 6 Piazza discusses the role of the omniscient narrator in the realisation of two documentary films on commercial and public networks (Channel 5 and BBC) regarding Britain’s mobile community of travellers. Piazza’s analysis highlights the interplay of the representation of a disenfranchised group with, in one case, the desire to entertain and, in the other, the desire to offer as far as possible an objective ethnographic report. The closing chapter is a reflection on an example of reality, lifestyle-based programming, the cooking competition, in which Haarman compares British, Australian and American versions of MasterChef. Focusing on the various formats, production strategies and broadcasting styles, she highlights the choices which, within the limits of the programme franchise, enable the country versions to adapt to and represent stereotypical characteristics of the different cultural contexts.
By adopting a comparative and often interdisciplinary approach that considers both the verbal and visual planes, these academic reflections on television discourse in news and other factual programmes bring to the fore the ideological, cultural and commercial choices that can be identified in the discourse of television, choices whose motivations will be discussed by practitioners in Part II of the book.