Globalization discussion in the Finnish national newspaper Helsingin Sanomat

Lounasmeri, Lotta Inari

University of Helsinki
2006


http://hdl.handle.net/10138/25295

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.
This is an electronic reprint of the original article.
This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.
Please cite the original version.
GLOBALIZATION DISCUSSION IN THE FINNISH NATIONAL NEWSPAPER HELSINGIN SANOMAT

Birth and rise of a new political concept and the struggle over it.
The power and powerlessness of journalism in modern democracy

Lotta Lounasmeri

Department of Communication, University of Helsinki

Department of Communication
P.O. Box 54 (Unioninkatu 37)
00014 University of Helsinki
Finland
Telephone: +358 9 191 24852
Fax: +358 9 191 24849
Internet: http://www.valt.helsinki.fi/comm/fi/english/

Key words: globalization, journalism, discourses, power struggle, knowledge

* Paper was first presented at the 17th Nordic Conference on Media and Communication Research 11-14th August 2005, University of Aalborg, Denmark.
1. Setting the research agenda: globalization – what about it?

Globalization has been given countless definitions from different perspectives. The concept has been the object of dispute and argument, but what does it really mean? When we wish to define or explain globalization scientifically, we are considering it as a merely descriptive concept. However, it has also gained a lot of political baggage. From this perspective it should be considered from the angle of its political connotations and power implications. All in all, the discourses on globalization are at the same time explaining and creating the phenomenon.

The prevailing interpretation of globalization in social sciences is connected to the modernisation theory. According to it, globalization is only a part of a more wider societal phenomenon, that is carrying us from modern times to postmodern. (Väyrynen 1998, 64.) Robertson (1992, 9) says globalization consists of intertwining processes like societalisation, individualisation, strengthening of the international social system and the concretisation of the idea of a mankind. He sees it also as coming together of the world; as the increasing consciousness of the globe as one entity. Giddens (1990, 64) defines globalization as the compression of social relations, the uniting of different localities so that faraway events affect local ones and vice versa.

There is plenty of international research about the ways of talking about globalization: speeches made by politicians, official documents as well as scientific texts have been analysed. Certain established and hegemonic characteristics have been found. (see for example Hay & Rosamond 2002, 151-153.) Some work on journalistic texts has been done as well. Robertson states that a new kind of rhetoric of ‘the global and globalization’ has been spreading world wide quite quickly. This kind of ‘globe talk’ has become relatively independent, even though its contents and the interests behind them vary between and inside societies. All in all, this discourse is an important part of the present day global culture. (Robertson 1992, 113.)

The word ‘globalization’ is used to describe the same phenomenon we used to describe with westernisation, modernisation and progress. If the word has such “undramatic” roots, why has it become so common in public political discussion? Wallgren (2002) thinks globalization serves as a new myth or story explaining modern phenomena, when the concepts of modern and postmodern are
not enough anymore, and different interest groups try to give the word meaningful content. Globalization is also used as a ‘scapegoat’ to justify unpopular political decisions (see Rosamond 1999, Alasuutari&Ruuska 1999, Marcussen 2000, Pardo 2001, Wallgren 2002, Hay&Rosamond 2002, Fairclough 2003). In my research, I wish to study these attempts to give meanings to the word. The topicality of globalization seems obvious, but what is behind this trendy expression? Are we actually living at the dawn of a new revolutionary era or are we just trying to create an image of one?

Globalization can be seen as part of a continuum or as a completely new kind of phenomenon. There seems to be a constant change going on in our society and culture, as if we were living in a constant ‘state of emergency’. The role of media in relation to societal developments and changes goes two ways: on the one side society affects and shapes the media, which on the other side reflect and also shape societal and cultural changes, and stimulate them further to become more widespread. Societal and cultural contradictions and tendencies become visible in the ambiguous media texts. (Fairclough 1997, 50-51, 72,76,83, 193).

My objective in my research is to draw a picture of the globalization discussion and debate in the Finnish national newspaper Helsingin Sanomat (HS) during the years 1992-2004. I wish to see, how the debate has evolved over the years, how globalization as a phenomenon has been represented, what kind of discourses have become dominant and what kind of elements of struggle can be found. I also wish to find out, which parties engage in the discussion and what kind of roles are they given. Through this analysis I aspire to study journalism as a societal institution and structure as well as an exerciser of power. Journalism can be seen as an instrument of democracy, but also as a mechanism bolstering up existing power relations. Through the globalization discussion it is possible to consider journalism’s ability and possibilities to organise public discussion and create meaningful explanations and concepts about modern phenomena for the general public. Among others, following questions could be raised: What does public discussion in a newspaper really mean? Is it engaged in only by the elites – how do ordinary people participate? Does the newspaper encourage to discuss public matters – how does it represent today’s important phenomena and the debate over them in its columns? What kind of identities does it give or create to the people? Does it alienate people from public discussion?
The globalization debate or discussion can be portrayed as a struggle over meanings and the reality surrounding us, as creating social imaginaries about our future, our possibilities and our choices. Do newspapers create alternative illusions for us or do they force us to accept the “facts” without questioning them? An imagined community refers to imagining, what is society and people in it. Social imaginaries (see Anderson 1991) are related to power: who has the power to define or imagine, what society could be like. It seems that the dominant imaginary or utopia we have in Finland these days is one of a competitive information society. Agamben (2001, 40) speaks of a state of emergency created in the society, as a result of which possible imaginary spaces start to close up.

2. Journalism as a context for the globalization discourses

In this paper I am trying to outline the context in which I am researching the globalization discourses of Helsingin Sanomat (HS). In my study I want to make an effort to combine the approaches of researching text and context. As primary context of my study, I see journalism as a societal institution along with its connections to the wider society. Journalistic texts can be evaluated in the light of the factors affecting the formation of these texts (See for example Möriä 1999 or Shoemaker & Reese 1996). This could also be called context awareness, which is relevant to the discourse analytical approach: in which context are journalistic texts generated? According to Van Dijk (1988, 176) textual analysis concentrates on the structures of news discourse etc., whereas contextual analysis focuses on the cognitive and social factors, circumstances, limitations and consequences of textual structures, as well as their economic, cultural and historical backgrounds. Society at large, including the dominant economical, political and cultural circumstances as well as society’s power relations influence newspaper discourses.

Institutional practices affecting the newspaper discourses have to do with the institutional and economic structure of the newspaper industry (Fowler 1991, 90). In the industrial environment there are several factors affecting contents: technology, markets, legislation, relations to other industry fields and political organisations as well as sources used by a newspaper – these are often legitimate institutions. Inside the newspaper there are factors like the organisation and its culture, media routines and individual characteristics of a journalist. (see Shoemaker & Reese 1996).
Journalism and its texts can also be approached by considering journalism’s role, functions and characteristics, that could help explain the contents it produces. In this paper I wish to approach journalism from angles that seem relevant to the Finnish globalization debate and the role of HS in it. Firstly, I will discuss journalism from the perspective of public discussion. Second, I will move on to considering it as a system of knowledge. This leads me to the perspective of journalism and power, and finally to the economic structures surrounding journalism.

2.1 Journalism as public discussion

Creating and upholding public discussion is seen as one of media’s tasks in a democratic society. This can be regarded on the one hand as upholding fair and unbiased discussion in a newspaper, on the other as creating preconditions for civil discussion outside a newspaper. Public discussion can also be seen as a political struggle in public space, where ‘informed’ elites and other parties bring their own points of view to the fore. The objective of this struggle is perhaps to reach some kind of a solution to shared problems, and also to give material to civil discussions. Reunanen (2003, 10) says the challenge with journalism and public discussion is not that there is not enough information available, but that the information is not related to the experiences of citizens themselves. The citizens are thought to become an alienated audience that only follows events from a distance, which in itself withers democratic public life.

The traditional role of newspapers, especially in the minds of journalists, has been bearer of information instead of creator of public discussion – discussion, that could produce new knowledge and solutions to societal problems. A newspaper often assumes that there is always only one reasonable point of view to any subject. Editorials emphasize this visibly, and also news and other sections of the paper assume this view to be natural and commonsense – self evident. (Fowler 1991, 231-232). Why has the media taken this role? Schudson (1978, 149) proposes, that after the First World War the media in the US took on a new role and started functioning according to scientific logic: They concentrated on collecting and presenting the facts. Instead of trying to represent the democratic ideal of offering information from the standpoint of competitive journalism, the media and journalists saw themselves as mediators of social reality. Professional journalists did not trust public opinion as reasonable and
rational anymore. (Tuchman 1978, 161, 210). Nevertheless, as Tuchman argues (1978, 12), making news is not so much creating an image of reality as it is constructing one.

Kunelius (2000, 17) proposes that as certain media critics see public discussion as producing knowledge, journalists see public discussion as based on knowledge. According to the dominant journalistic view knowledge is produced by institutions that are based on expertise or quantitative representativeness. Journalism could however be seen not as an arena or a window, but rather as a communicative method to produce knowledge about society. (Kunelius 2000, 6, 17). I agree journalism can be regarded as one way of knowing and creating knowledge about society, but one can ask how is this knowledge formed? This question can be studied in the light of Foucault’s theory on systems of truth and knowledge.

2.2 Journalism as a system of knowledge

As stated, the traditional role of journalism is often said to be mediating information. From a different point of view it could be argued that journalism does not only transmit information or knowledge but also produces it, or at least criteria for what is knowledge.

When looking at journalism as a system of knowledge, a question can be posed: how is knowledge formed in the media – for example, how and who defines what globalization is? Foucault (1980) speaks of systems of truth that define what is knowledge in society. Thought in this way, knowledge becomes something that is a result of a “building process” – journalism can also be seen like this. From this point of view questions about exercising power become relevant.

According to Foucault (1980, 131), in every society there is a system of truth; a general politics of truth which defines knowledge as true or false. For Foucault, knowledge can be produced only in the frame of these social systems of truth. These systems are nevertheless not homogeneous, and they can be changed from the inside. The same system or strategy can contain several discourses, which can be at least partly non compatible or even opposite. In relation to this Foucault speaks of discourses as tactical elements or accumulations in a field of power relations. These elements can move from one strategy to another without changing. (Foucault 1978, 102; Kusch 1993, 171). Journalism can be thought of as one system of truth with its own strategies and conventions as well as contradictions & elements of change.
Foucault states that it is necessary to study how truth is produced in discourse instead of assuming there is a non-ideological, scientific truth to be found (Gordon/Foucault 1980, 58). Absolute truth is always a problematic subject and debating about it is rather fruitless. Fairclough (1997, 66-67) suggests that the possible biases, scope and motives of representations can however be compared and conclusions can be made about their relative truthfulness.

Knowledge is in direct relationship with power: some knowledge is accepted as truth, other is rejected as deficient. (Gordon/Foucault 1980, 52, 133). The knowledge deemed deficient is shut out of the system. This knowledge Foucault calls subjugated; historical content that has been buried and hidden. In the media this could refered to as politics of silence, and it is related to the question which actors and issues are excluded from the media. Being part of a system of truth requires conforming with the rules of a "discursive police" (Gordon/Foucault 1980, 224). Journalistic discourse could be seen as a sort of discursive police that keeps the order in the pages and texts of a newspaper. Certain elements are excluded from a discourse, because they do not conform to the discursive order. This is not only a question of language, but also a question of who is making a point or presenting something. Many times a person’s position in society and the authority that comes with it gives her/him power to present something as knowledge. In the sphere of journalism, knowledge – and power – is often held by those with social status and power. Those who have no social position often do not have a voice in the public sphere – their knowledge is hidden knowledge. In my research I am trying to analyze, on whose and on what kind of terms or rules are the discourses on globalization being built.

2.2.1 A genealogical perspective to analysing the constructing of knowledge

With a genealogical approach it is possible to describe how journalism has produced the “knowledge” on globalization. The current situation can be seen as a result of definition struggles that can be traced with the help of discourse analysis.

Foucault analyzes the constructing of scientific knowledge with a genealogical approach. The idea of genealogy is not to criticize institutions and people, but to enable the criticizing of the forms of knowledge, criteria for rationality or principles of reasoning that enable these institutions and make
them rational, useful, self evident, natural and legitimate. Genealogy does not aspire to show how the past makes the present inevitable, but to show that the present is the result of different contingent and random events, power struggles, that could have ended differently. (Kusch 1993, 137, 174). Genealogy could help to analyse globalization discourses and the journalism that is producing them. This kind of analysis could be carried out by for example taking into consideration the information networks used by journalism.

When tracing the information networks of journalism, one can assume that basic elements of the news is what people tell the reporter or journalist. Facts given out in the news are people’s accounts of things: a lot of what a journalist writes is quoting other people. Many events are being defined by the authorities before they become news. (Bell 1991, 53, 190-191). Fishman says the methods of making news and the dependency on external sources and documents results in a unified, ideological image of the world. (Fishman 1980, 11, 16, 92).

The world of journalistic sources is bureaucratically organised. Unofficial news sources are not very much used (Hodge&Kress 1993), and alternative sources like individuals, small parties, unions, minorities and marginal groups are often dismissed (Fishman 1980, 51).

2.3 Journalism as an exerciser of power and a watchdog of power

Media and journalism can be studied as exercisers of power in society. Media is often referred to as a fourth estate alongside the three others in society: the parliament represents legislative power, the government executive power, and the court of justice judicial power. There is also corporational power (interest organisations) and economic power (companies, markets). Economic power as non-state or private has become more significant. The independent power of the media has been questioned for example by calling them ‘the cultural extension of the industrial order’. (Gerbner 1972, 51).

Media and journalism appear as watchdogs of other exercisers of power in society, but what are the possibilities of the media to function as an independent fourth estate? Does media act as the upholder of democracy, or is it merely business aiming for ever higher profits?

The nature of the power exercised by media and journalism is linguistic and discursive (Fairclough 1997, 10). Bell (1991,1) states that the media are the dominant presenters of language in our society.
They make representations the world around us, but also construct relationships between themselves and the audience/public as well as between their audience/public and the powerful actors of different fields of society – economic life, politics and culture. The question is how are the identities and relationships of those participating in the public sphere constructed? (Fairclough 1997, 30, 56, 166). Discursive power in journalism is also used by its powerful sources – how much power is journalism giving away to its sources? Who can speak in a newspaper and how freely? How can this discursive power be analysed? By analysing the representations constructed in the media and their construction process.

2.4 Journalism as business

Journalism is part of a larger media field, a business that is aiming for maximal profits. I see business and profit making as one of the fundamental elements of media and journalism.

Newspaper publishing is part of the media industry and as such a business activity part of the national and world economy. The activities and output of the press are controlled at least by the following:
- profit demands
- economic organisation of the industry (concentration etc.)
- relations to other industries, financial institutions, public institutions
- traditional journalistic routines
- production schedules
- union relations
These factors will undoubtedly influence what is published as news and how it is represented. (Fowler 1991, 20).

Next I will briefly discuss the history of press from an economic perspective, the significance of ownership to media contents and the revenue logic of a newspaper.

2.4.1 Producing newspapers for economic gain
In the 19th century newspapers started to organise themselves for economic gain for the first time. 20th century media was already part of the new economic transformation with developments like concentration and conglomeration. It is likely that media would then justify the ‘new order’, inasmuch as many media organizations themselves are corporations, conglomerates and monopolies. They have an interest to keep things that way. (Tuchman 1978, 162). Ewen (1981, 46) sees as one of the conventions of commercial journalism a connectedness to the information structures given from outside journalism: in the life world there is chaos and disorder, but among the establishment as well as in the pages of a newspaper there is coordination and order. Can a newspaper function as an independent instrument of democracy, if it is just a ‘reflex’ of the official society? (see Pietilä&Sonnermann 1994, 180) Fairclough (1997, 24) concludes that a commercialized press diminishes the public nature of the media and shifts attention from political and societal questions to elsewhere. The audience or public is constructed as spectators following events instead of participating as citizens.

2.4.2 Who controls what is said and how in the press?

Media discourse is shaped indirectly by ownership. Newspapers are private companies and very often part of a group specialized in the cultural industries or a conglomerate. Along with other industries, media has both nationally and internationally become more clearly part of their owners’ economic aspirations. This becomes evident in many ways in the media organizations: their structures contribute to the fact that those with power and status have much more visibility and get their voice heard in the media. (Fairclough 1997, 62).

Part of the professionalism of journalists is the claim to be able to decide what is news independently of ownership and management. This principle is however often a source of dispute, as it is in contradiction with the idea of control by owners and managers. (Tuchman 1978, 174-175). The owners who have an interest in efficiency and profits, do in the end control the editorial policy, which does effect the language in the news. Chief editors who are officially responsible for their paper’s news production, are the channel through which the owners’ policy is carried out. (Bell 1991, 38-40; Schlesinger 1987, 229) An individual journalist is not totally without influence, however. S/he is still the one who creates final texts by connecting multiple sources. (Bell 1991, 42).
2.4.3 Competition for advertising revenue: the struggle for existence

The primary source of revenue for a newspaper is advertising. The economic goal is to sell advertising space – profits are made by selling audiences to advertisers. In Finland, newspapers are an important channel for consumer advertising. From the point of view of the advertiser, the textual content and architecture of the paper have to be consistent with their products and the world view they offer. This is a recognized constraint to what newspapers can write. In addition, news and stories have to be produced continuously – if for no other reason, to have material between the ads. (see Pietilä & Sondermann 1994, 75-76; Fowler 1991, 121-122; Tuchman 1978, 16-17). Newspapers do contain so called ”must-stories” advanced by the ad department in order to satisfy the advertisers. Journalists do not like this practice, but it is recognized as an organizational constraint. (Tuchman 1978, 175).

Fierce competition for ad revenue has led the media to develop concentrated news sources that feed the newsroom with continuous information. The concentration and convergence trends have become ways to obtain as much information / news with a minimum cost. (Tuchman 1978, 19-20).

In this chapter I have discussed journalism as a phenomenon and an institution from different perspectives. At this point I turn to journalistic texts, more precisely to the globalization discussion carried on in HS during the last decade or so. I am viewing the discussion primarily as a struggle for meaning, where different interest groups are trying to bring their own interpretations to the fore.

3. Globalization discourses: the discussion on globalization as a struggle for meaning

3.1 Language as a site of struggle

Language does not offer a fixed meaning for words, but instead meanings are produced in different discourses, and they are the objects of constant struggle. (Kunelius 1996, 73, 75, 91). Discourse can be defined as an established way of understanding and representing the world. Some ways of conceptualizing are dominant or hegemonic.¹ This kind of discourses define what we understand for

¹ Laclau&Mouffe (1985) point out, that hegemony is always temporary and incomplete. They equate the concept of hegemony with myth or social imaginary.
example by globalization and what we can say about it and how. Discourses consist of representations about reality, and they always contain certain points of view, values and intentions. In my research I intend to analyze the struggle for meanings around the concept of globalization. I see this struggle as a debate between different interest groups in society – a debate where these groups try to get through their own interpretations to the public discussion in mainstream media. With data from a longer period of time (1992-2004) it is possible to analyse the evolving and changing of the debate and struggle, as well as identifying the conceptions and discourses that have become dominant during that time.

Discourses are also social practices that build social identities and form social relationships between the participants of the discourse, in addition to making representations of the world (Fairclough 1992, 39, 63; 1997, 14) When analyzing the newspaper discourses on globalization one can ask, what kind of worlds are the discourses building, what kind of roles are different actors given in those worlds and what is possible in those worlds and what is not.

The struggle over meanings in language occurs at the level of connotations, not the denotative meanings. Discourse can be studied as an agonistic (instead of antagonistic) confrontation between different groups that wish to further their own definitions and resist the definitions of others (Laclau&Mouffe1985). I can study my own data by looking for different struggles and groups from the globalization debate.

To trace societal changes or evolving of discursive struggles Laclau&Mouffe (1985) suggest studying the public sphere and public spaces as sites of struggle. By identifying moments of crisis or dislocation, one can find when change is being created as well as prevented. At these moments definitions for things and concepts are opening up for contradictions and alternative interpretations before closing up again. These moments in time Laclau&Mouffe (1985, 113) call nodal points. These points fix meanings and are therefore the points of struggle.

For the researcher of agonistic events the whole society can be seen as a battleground for individual and group interests. Each of these individuals and groups have their own unconscious or conscious

---

2 At the same time as including something, representations always exclude something else, as well as prioritize. Representations always have their origins somewhere, and certain actors and factors affect their formulations and styles, see Fairclough 1992, 1997.
strategies and tactics. They strive to keep a balance of power or to create one, they attack and make counter attacks, they withdraw or resist, they regroup, build strategic formations, and they seek their own victory and the defeat of their opponents. (Kusch 1993, 144-5). This line of thinking draws a picture of a society of battle and constant struggle, which does in fact describe the debate over globalization quite well.

REFERENCES


