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Abstract

A new 24 credit point Graduate Certificate in Multicultural Journalism is being offered by the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of Wollongong. The curriculum is being developed in consultation with the Special Broadcasting Services Radio division and will emphasise cultural sensitivity in the presentation of news and current affairs. The curriculum is especially focused to provide skills for news media professionals in making translations of news from English to other languages. This is often the case in SBS radio where mainstream English language (sourced from various wire services and other sources) is translated into 68 different languages. Thus in developing the curriculum, SBS Radio becomes a valuable resource for case studies and experience.

***Five-past-two in
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***Developing a
Cross Cultural
Journalism
Course***

Peter White
David Blackall

A new 24 credit point Graduate Certificate in Multicultural Journalism is being offered by the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of Wollongong. The curriculum is being developed in consultation with the Special Broadcasting Services Radio division and will emphasise cultural sensitivity in the presentation of news and current affairs. The curriculum is especially focused to provide skills for news media professionals in making translations of news from English to other languages. This is often the case in SBS radio where mainstream English language (sourced from various wire services and other sources) is translated into 68 different languages. Thus in developing the curriculum, SBS Radio becomes a valuable resource for case studies and experience.

Background

The mass news-media in multicultural countries such as Australia are notable for their linguistic and cultural diversity. Sydney and Melbourne in particular, feature many newspapers in languages other than English as well as a diversity of non-English language programming, both from community-funded radio and television broadcasters, and from the government-funded Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). This diversity raises a number of interesting challenges and opportunities for media educators and curriculum designers.

The established tradition of journalism training is almost invariably designed for mainstream, mono-lingual and largely mono-cultural mass-media news rooms. The tradition, therefore, assumes the professional practices, the cultural contexts and social and political objectives that are learnt in such news rooms. Journalism Educators who are seeking to offer courses for journalists from more culturally and linguistically diverse contexts, must of necessity, give pause before applying educational models from this mono-cultural mainstream. They need, at the very least, to interrogate the assumption that the English-language mainstream necessarily provides the only legitimate approach to the journalistic enterprise.

The Graduate Certificate Course, in Multicultural Journalism, is intended to provide training for journalists who wish to develop a culturally and linguistically diverse approach to their journalism. It is expected much of the interest in the course will come from journalists working in community radio and at SBS. It is hoped, however, that practitioners from English-language mass-media organisations will also be attracted to the course as a means of developing a professional

expertise better equipped to deal with the multicultural and multilingual reality of many contemporary societies. The 1997 SBS based enrolments have, in fact, included broadcasters from both the English-language ABC regional radio sector and from the non-English language radio sectors of both SBS and community radio.

Interactive curriculum by way of a web site

The course includes subjects in journalistic research and investigation and in journalistic ethics and the law. Its centrepiece, is the subject, Multicultural Journalism, which explores the theory and practice of a journalism that is both informed about the multicultural diversity of contemporary Australian society and which is, in its own practices, reflexive on and informed by that diversity.

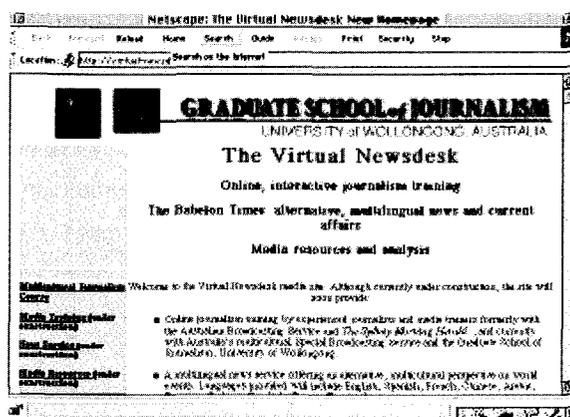
In turn, Multicultural Journalism informs and resources the whole Graduate Certificate. The curriculum develops interactively; as much from the culturally diverse and professional student body at SBS Radio as it can from the resources within the Graduate School of Journalism and from international sources. The SBS Radio experience, combining the SBS Code of Ethical Practice and its broad Charter become valuable resources for informing the curriculum. The SBS philosophy and experience in cross-cultural communication, offers a unique and powerful curriculum development opportunity between the SBS and the Graduate School of Journalism.

The course will be informed by on-going research into the experiences of SBS radio and television journalists (some of whom are students), consultations with community broadcasters, a study of journalistic practices in societies outside Australia and the previous journalistic experience of one the course presenters as ethnic affairs reporter for the Sydney Morning Herald.

The SBS programmers and journalists studying the course, contribute interactively on a World Wide Web

homepage. Here, they access weekly lectures, file assignments, have those assignments published in cyberspace in English and their own language, and in turn, *inform the course curriculum*. The developing site, known as 'The Virtual Newsdesk' or 'Global Voice' at <http://virtual-newsdesk.web2010.com/> was established by Peter White, lecturer of the Multicultural Journalism subject. Alternatively known as 'The Babelon Times', it operates as an alternative, multilingual news and current affairs media resources and analysis site that also serves as an online, interactive journalism training environment.

Figure 1 The Virtual Newsdesk or Global Voice at <http://virtual-newsdesk.web2010.com/>



The prospect of putting students' work out in their own (including Chinese) language accompanied by an English version is exciting and will provide more insights and case studies for developing the curriculum. The site will publish students' work in November and will be presenting 1200 word print-style features in the first instance and later moving into a more news oriented approach.

The idea is to run a kind of news tracking and analysis service which focuses on a few key areas, like racism around the world, or resistance movements, or the indigenous people's battles with big business etc. In this way, participants in the Graduate School's various courses (including our Masters of Journalism students based in Hong Kong) would actually be putting stories to air, so to speak, producing journalism that potentially millions of people might read. The lecturers acting as

news editors or chief of staff/sub editors will shepherd the stories through the writing, editing and legal stages to a point where they're publishable.

The SBS student from the Bosnian program has just prepared an eloquent presentation on the Western media's coverage of the war in former Yugoslavia. Lecturer Peter White is organising a range of such presentations: a perspective on the coverage of human rights in Burma by the Burmese broadcaster; media coverage of Iraq and Iran by the Persian/Farsi broadcaster; coverage of resistance movements in Latin America by the Spanish-language broadcaster; how the world views Lebanon by the Arabic broadcaster, and so on.

The curriculum's theoretical basis will be both sociological and linguistic. In terms of social theory it will rely on recent work into culture, identity, racism and the media from a post-colonial perspective. (See, for example, Joel S. Kahn's recent, *Culture, Multiculture, Postculture*, and the collection of essays, *Racism, Ethnicity and the Media*, edited by Andrew Jakubowicz).

It will also bring insights into the language, textual structure and rhetorical impact of news writing provided by the sociologically informed theory of language known as Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). This linguistic theory has been developed over the past several decades by the linguist M.A.K. Halliday and his followers at the University of Sydney and other universities in Australia and internationally. Functional grammar provides the tools to go beyond simple content analysis to explore how basic vocabulary choices, grammatical structures and general patterns of textual development may reflect the unstated but nevertheless powerful cultural, social and ideological values and objectives. Functional grammar provides the tool to develop systematic comparisons of the rhetoric of news reporting across languages and across cultures.

The Multicultural Journalism subject contributes to the course in a non-mainstream fashion in that it actually

acknowledges and addresses the realities of multicultural diversity in contemporary Australian society. It does this equitably by its acknowledgement of the SBS experience, theoretical understandings and the students' knowledge.

Conclusion

It is not possible in the current context to provide a more detailed account of the cross-cultural comparisons and the curriculum development which informs the course. It is possible, however, to provide a brief exemplification of one of the phenomena which will be central to the course's theoretical agenda. Those familiar with traditional journalistic training texts will be aware of the importance of the so-called 'inverted pyramid' as the primary model of news reporting textual structure. The 'inverted pyramid' is typically presented as the 'standard' in English language reporting and, in some cases, the only mode of 'hard news' reporting. Cross cultural and cross-linguistic analysis, however, quickly reveals that the 'inverted pyramid' structure is by no means so dominant nor so widespread in non-English language journalism. To go beyond English-language 'hard news' reporting is to immediately encounter a range of alternative 'standards' for 'hard news' reporting. One such alternative is illustrated by the following translation of a front page report from the leading French daily, *Libération*. The coverage of the unsuccessful 1984 IRA bombing attack on the then British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, could never have been structured in this way if *Libération* had been subject to the English-language régime of the 'inverted pyramid'.

Five-past-two in the morning, yesterday, in the town of Brighton, in the south of England. In the bar of the Grand Hotel, the last Conservative Party parliamentarians prepare to return to their rooms. Margaret Thatcher, in her office, puts the finishing touches to the closing speech of the annual conference of her party. The hotel is inhabited by almost the entirety of her cabinet, politicians and deputies. Suddenly there is an explosion.

The Irish Republican Army has planted a bomb on the third storey. Margaret Thatcher is alive but four people have been killed, thirty others injured including a minister and deputy. After the shock passes, faithful to her image, the British Prime Minister announces that the conference will continue (Libération, 13–14 Octobre 1984, p. 1).