Canadian-U.S. News Flow: The Continuing Asymmetry

By Akira Ichikawa
Department of Political Science
University of Lethbridge

An examination of the flow of news in 1976 between Canada and the United States in seven selected daily newspapers revealed an asymmetry as severe as that detected in 1962 when a significant imbalance of American news in Canadian dailies was documented. The extent of the disproportionate flow in 1976 was especially striking given the surge of nationalism, often expressed in anti-American terms, that touched most of Canada's mass media system since the earlier study.

Notable expressions of that nationalism included the 1963 governmental and professional debates concerning foreign ownership of Canadian newspapers; the 1965 federal legislation taxing advertising revenues of foreign magazines doing business in the country, Canadian editions of Time and Reader's Digest having been exempted as domestic publications until 1976 when their special status was eliminated; the late '60s and early '70s rules directing radio and television stations to increase Canadian content programming; the 1969 Special Senate Committee on Mass Media examining all aspects of mass media in the country; the 1971 Ontario Royal Commission on Book Publishing looking into the financial status of the trade and distribution within that province; and squabbles in the mid-'70s involving the distribution of foreign—mainly American—feature-length films, employment of non-Canadian actors, singers, musicians, and production personnel in television and film, and cable television operations near the U.S. border.

While no claim is made that the pattern found in the two studies continued unchanged throughout the near decade-and-a-half, supplementary research of news gathering and coverage suggest the persistence of the asymmetry throughout much of the interim period. In this study, following closely a number of points explored by Hart in 1962, the purpose is to examine anew the quantitative exchange of
news between selected English-language dailies in the two countries.

PROCEDURE

Hart studied newspapers mainly from the populous St. Lawrence seaway area. For several reasons, this study chose newspapers published in western provinces and states and in cities which geographically and historically were believed sensitive to the other country. First, the selected newspapers were easily available. Second, and more important, an attempt was made to ascertain, however superficially and despite the 14-year gap between Hart’s and this study, whether geography, i.e., west versus east, might make a difference in the flow.

The Canadian selections were the Vancouver Sun, the Calgary Herald, and the Winnipeg Free Press, this last being the only choice overlapping with dailies in Hart’s sample. The three, all afternoon dailies, had a combined circulation of 472,359.

The three U.S. papers were the Seattle Times, The Spokesman-Review, (Spokane, Wash.), and the Minneapolis Tribune, representing the largest metropolitan areas in two western states bordering Canada. The Spokesman-Review and the Tribune are morning papers; the Times, afternoon. **Combined weekday circulation was 514,739** (Sunday: 1,028,282). The New York Times, with a weekday circulation of 806,495 (Sunday: 1,415,515), was included in this study for its large foreign news coverage, the very reason Hart included it in his work.

A three-month period in early 1976 was chosen for the study, with newspapers published during one week of each month being analyzed (February 23-29, March 8-14, and April 5-11; Hart chose March 19-24, April 2-7, and May 7-12, 1962) In the Canadian case, there were six weekday editions of each newspaper for a total of 54 newspapers. **Neither in this nor the 1962 study did the Canadian dailies publish a Sunday edition; the Saturday number, however, could be considered comparable in size and scope to the U.S. Sunday papers, including as it does magazine sections and comics. In the American case, the six weekday and Sunday editions were measured, for a total of 63 newspapers (Hart excluded the U.S. Sunday papers). Advertising stuffers; magazine supplements; entertain guides which included radio-telephone logs, theatre advertisements, dining directories; and daily and weekend comic sections were not included in
the tabulations.

Records kept of American items appearing in the Canadian newspapers and of Canadian items in the U.S. papers included the following:

1) Length of the item in column inches, adjustments being made for variable column makeup, e.g., six or eight-column dailies.

2) Type of news, according to three categories: Hard, Soft and Spot. (4) Hard included news, commentaries, editorials, analyses and "backgrounders" dealing with government, politics, economic and business, science and medicine. Soft news included sport, cultural affairs (the arts, entertainment, religion, personalities), human-interest features, tourist and travel information, and syndicated features such as humor, lovelorn, household hints, horoscope and other columns. Spot news, which could have either a soft or hard news quality, was a category for items about natural disasters and accidents, e.g., earthquakes, floods, weather, freak phenomena, automobile and other fatalities.

Photographs and art work, either editorial cartoons or drawings accompanying news items, were classified according to the hard-soft-spot categories.

3) Source of News: wire service, staff, syndicate, special correspondents, and others, which included unidentified sources or round-up stories based on items from several different sources.

FINDINGS (5)

Extent of News Coverage. The three Canadian newspapers devoted 49,974 column inches of their combined 179,650 column inches of news space to foreign news, 26.7 per cent of all news published. The quantity of news from or about the United States amounted to 28,261, or 15.7 per cent (13.6) (6) of total available news space and 58.9 per cent (55.7) of the foreign news printed during the period studied (See Table 1).

The three American dailies, during the same period, printed 144,650 column inches, of which 11,727 or 8.1 per cent, were foreign news. A total of 742 column inches of news from or about Canada translated into 0.5 per cent (0.5) of the total newshole. Canadian items accounted for
4.3 per cent (5.8) of all foreign news in the U.S. dailies. (See Table 2)

The New York Times had a total newshole of 104,792 column inches, of which 16,725 column inches or 15.9 per cent (19.1) were devoted to foreign news. The 722 column inches about Canada constituted 0.7 per cent (1.3) of total news space and 4.3 per cent (7.5) of the total foreign news published. (See Table 2)

Type of News Coverage. In breaking down the 28,261 column inches of news from and about the United States in the Canadian newspapers, the following percentages obtained: hard, 29 per cent (48.2); soft, 61.3 per cent (46.8); and spot, 9.7 per cent (3.0).

Of the 742 column inches of Canadian news in the three U.S. dailies, 37.3 per cent (51.7) could be considered hard, 55.1 per cent (39.9) soft, and 7.6 per cent (8.0) spot. In the New York Times, 47.4 per cent (66.5) of the 722 column inches of Canadian items qualified as hard, 51.0 per cent (27.0) soft, and 1.6 per cent (5.3) spot. While the categories employed by Hart and this study ultimately cannot be made coextensive, it would seem as far as types of news are concerned that the greater play has moved to soft news. (See Table 3). An explanation for this may be the inclusion of material in the 1976 study which was excluded in the 1962 work.

Separate totals were not kept for art work or photographs, but the general impression tended to be one of lopsidedness as in the case of news exchange. Canadian newspapers regularly published art work from or about the United States while little Canadian art appeared in the American dailies. One Canadian picture receiving prominent play in several of the U.S. papers studied involved a construction mishap and fatalities at the Montreal Olympic Games site.

Comics as a separate category were not included in the final count, but if they had been the American totals would have been greater than they were since, with minor exception, the strips originated from feature syndicates based in the United States.

Sources of News Coverage. By far the greatest amount of American news and photographs came across the wires of the Associated Press, a service to which all the newspapers studied subscribed: 44.6 per cent (compared with a combined Associate Press-United Press International total of
32.3 per cent in 1962). United Press International, to which only the Vancouver Sun was a subscriber among the Canadian papers, accounted for 1.7 per cent of the American news appearing in that newspaper. The remainder of American news was provided by a number of services, mainly American. Only 1.4 per cent of the material was attributed to the newspapers' staff, as compared with 13.4 per cent in the 1962 study. Table 4 lists the major news sources for both total foreign and American news in the case of the three Canadian newspapers, and total foreign and Canadian news for the four American dailies.

In the American case, AP, which has an arrangement with the Canadian Press, provided the bulk of Canadian news to the three U.S. newspapers, 46 per cent (24.0) as against 26.3 per cent (40.8) provided by own correspondents.

The New York Times' operations during the study period showed that 77.8 per cent (6.4) of the Canadian items originated with its own staff, the prestigious daily being the only one of the U.S. newspapers in the study with a regular correspondent assigned to Canada (Since the study was completed, the Seattle Times has added a regular Canadian feature on Sunday by a correspondent in Victoria, B.C.) Others, including the (Toronto) Globe and Mail, accounted for 11.5 per cent; AP, 5.4 per cent; and UPI, 5.3 per cent. (See Table 4)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Canadian-American news flow, as reflected in the selected newspapers, has not changed appreciably between 1962 and 1976, although minor qualitative shifts were discernible, e.g., the emphasis from hard to soft news. In keeping with principles respecting the free flow of information, the news flow between the two countries during the interim period was relatively free of capricious impediments, subject mainly to limitations imposed by interest, taste and libel laws. Despite the growing nationalism in Canada against American imports in all areas, including news, the imbalance confirmed by Hart remained untouched where news exchange in newspapers was concerned. That imbalance, echoed in a host of other research, bespeaks of the disproportionate interest the press of one country has of other. (8)

The conventional wisdom regarding that imbalance - that little nations next to big can expect to be swamped on a wholesale basis by the big - received a twist from Robinson.
and Sparkes who argued that when the news flow between the
two countries is measured against trade, population and
gross national product, the United States actually suffered
from under-representation and not over-representation in
the pages of most Canadian newspapers. (9)

Several factors restrict the generalizability of the
findings, although in comparison to Hart the larger point
about continuing and increasing differences in the news
flow seem to be borne out. This and Hart's study, obviously,
do not constitute a longitudinal study which could
reveal a number of different points about the news flow.
No claim, moreover, about the representativeness of the
selected newspapers was made for several reasons: (1) no
French-language newspaper was included: (10) (2) none of
the six papers, with the possible exception of the Winnipeg
Free Press, approached the "prestige" rating of the control
daily, The New York Times; (11) and (3) all the newspapers
were published in cities located in the western half of
the North American continent, a fact which may have signif-
icance although examination of its implications was beyond
the scope of the immediate study.

With reference to Hart's summation, the findings of this
study revealed the following:

1) They supported Hart's conclusion that while the Canadian
newspapers had a smaller combined circulation than the
American counterparts, they had a larger total news space.
While Hart's proffered partial explanation that the dif-
cERENCE was great enough that it could account for the
Canadian papers' printing more foreign news than the
U.S. papers held for this later study, it does not begin
to say anything about the economics of publishing which
often favors the use of readily-available, hence less
expensive, syndicated material provided by American,
thus foreign in Canada, agencies over any that may be
available domestically.

2) The amount of American news printed by the three Cana-
dian dailies was consistent, the range between the high
and the low being one percentage point. The performance
of the four American newspapers was even more remarkable,
with the high-low difference being 0.2 per cent; the
New York Times devoted 0.7 per cent of its space to
Canadian news while the other three each devoted 0.5
per cent. There was, as in the case of the 1962 study,
a high degree of apparent accord regarding the selection
of news about the other country.
3) While no correlation appeared between the amount of news published about the other country and distance to the border from the city in which the newspaper was published, e.g., more news in newspapers published in cities closer to the border, the lack of such a correlation may be a function of selection, that is, American newspapers were chosen on the basis of their publication in border states. In the Canadian instance, the majority of the nation's population resides within 150 miles of the border, easily reached by radio, cable television, and printed media originating in the United States. A better control of this point might have been the inclusion of an American newspaper far removed from the border, e.g., Los Angeles or New Orleans.

4) With the exception of the New York Times, which relied most heavily on its own staff for Canadian news, both American and Canadian newspapers used AP services in most instances. The use of own or special correspondents from 1962 study was down significantly, although the lower figure in this study may be accounted for by practices different from those employed by eastern newspapers studies by Hart.(12)

5) Since 1962, soft news such as sport and cultural events appeared to have supplanted hard news as far as quantity of published news was concerned. The figures from the later study may be skewed because of the inclusion of much material, mostly soft, that Hart deliberately excluded. Since separate running totals were not kept according to the 1962 categories, it cannot be determined where the changes have occurred. In general terms, however, the newspapers of 1976 were reflecting values which may have been only embryonic, if existent, in 1962, e.g., the emphasis placed upon leisure and greater disposable income in 1976 could be manifested in greater coverage of travel news and household and food information in the mid-70s than in the early '60s.

NOTES


2. From a voluminous literature, the following is suggestive of the titles concerned with the effects of nationalism on the Canadian mass media. Variety, Nov. 27, 1974, devoted most of this issue to the problem. John W. Warnock, "All the News It Pays to Print," Frank Peers, "Oh Say, Can You See?" and Gail Dexter, "Yes, Cultural Imperialism Too!" in Ian Lumsden, Ed., Close the 49th


4. The classifications subsumed Hart's 12 categories as follows: Hard-commentaries, editorials, economic-business, foreign relations, health-education-welfare, judicial-legal, political, religion (1/2) and science-technical development (1/2); Soft - cultural, sport, religion (1/2) and science-technical development (1/2); and Spot - accident-death-disaster, and crime. The miscellaneous category was excluded from the threefold classification.

5. In reporting the findings, Hart's sequence and style were employed to facilitate comparison with results of his 1962 study.

6. Figures in parentheses throughout refer to comparable percentages in Hart's study.

7. The 1962 percentages in parentheses were determined by collapsing Hart's 11 news categories (i.e., 12 less the miscellaneous category) into three categories for this study. See note 4 above.

8. Lucian W. Pye, for instance, notes the difficulty among Americans in pinpointing how Canadian differ from themselves, giving rise to the attitude of taking Canadian for granted. In Sparkes, ed., News Flow Between Canada and the United States, p. 3.


12. See Scanlon's discussion about the "expanding" number of bureaus abroad in "Canada Sees the World Through U.S. Eyes," p. 36. Moreover, the national capital cities are much closer and accessible to the eastern metropolises in Hart's study than to the western cities examined here.

``

TABLE 1

Proportion of News Space Devoted to Foreign News and to U.S. News in Three Canadian Newspapers, 18 Days

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEWSPAPERS</th>
<th>Percentage of News Space Devoted to Foreign News</th>
<th>Percentage of News Space Devoted to U.S. News</th>
<th>Percentage of Foreign News Devoted to U.S. News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calgary Herald</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>63.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver Sun</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winnipeg Free Press</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Cf. Gertrude J. Robinson and Vernone M. Sparkes who studied 10 Canadian dailies, discovering the following percentages for the three categories, respectively: 27.56%, 13.52% and 49.06%. "International News in the Canadian and American Press: A Comparative News Flow Study," Gazette, 22: 211 (No. 4, 1976).
### TABLE 2

Proportion of News Space Devoted to Foreign News and to Canadian News in Four U.S. Newspapers, 21 days

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEWSPAPERS</th>
<th>Percentage of News Space Devoted to Foreign News</th>
<th>Percentage of News Space Devoted to Canadian News</th>
<th>Percentage of Foreign News Devoted to Canadian News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis Tribune</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle Times</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spokesman-Review</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### TABLE 3

Proportion of News Stories by Type in Three Canadian (18 Days) Four American (21 Days) Newspapers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of News</th>
<th>Percentage of U.S. Stories in Canadian Papers</th>
<th>Percentage of Canadian Stories in 3 U.S. Papers</th>
<th>Percentage of Canadian Stories In New York Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hard</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spot</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CANADIAN JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION 17
TABLE 4

Percentage of Foreign, Canadian, and U.S. News in
Three Canadian (18 Days) and Four U.S. (21 Days) Newspapers
According to News Source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associated Press</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others(^a)</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuters</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Correspondents</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Press</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Post</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Correspondent</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>78.4%</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Press Int'l</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Included here were items identified only as news dispatches or from unnamed newswire services, Agence-France Presse, Atlas, Chicago Daily News, Chicago Tribune, Christian Science Monitor, Des Moines Register and Tribune, Dow Jones, Field Enterprise, Financial Post, London Observer, London Telegram, Manchester Guardian, Newspaper Enterprise Alliance, North American News Alliance, Punch, San Francisco Chronicle, Times of London, Women's News Service, and a variety of features and artwork from various syndicates and other publications, mainly American.