

Postprint of the Professional Encoding Space of Television News Discourse

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Abstract

The production of television news discourse exhibits typical spatial characteristics; its production system, that is, the encoding system, is the product of the convergence and interaction of multiple social spaces. The spatial form generated by this system may be termed encoding space. Professional encoding space serves as the foundational space of encoding space, concentrating the status, function, and interrelationships of various spatial factors in the symbolic operation of television news discourse, and reproducing the encoding meaning, production process, and production characteristics of television news discourse; furthermore, it enables an examination of the restrictive influences of real social space on discourse production, allowing for a more accurate grasp of the generation and production patterns of television news discourse.

Full Text

Abstract

The production of television news discourse exhibits distinct spatial characteristics. Its production system—the encoding system—represents the product of converging multiple social spaces. The spatial form generated by this system can be termed “encoding space.” Professional encoding space constitutes the foundational layer of encoding space, concentrating the status, functions, and interrelationships of various spatial factors within the symbolic operations of television news discourse. It reproduces the encoding significance, production processes, and production features of television news discourse, while also enabling examination of the constraining influences that real social space exerts on discourse production, thereby facilitating more accurate comprehension of the generative and productive regularities of television news discourse.

Keywords: television news discourse; professional encoding space; spatial production

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Introduction

Since spatial studies emerged as a prominent postmodern discipline in the latter half of the 20th century, conceptualizations of space have generally followed two dimensions. Space is regarded both as concrete material form that can be marked, analyzed, and interpreted, and as mental construction—a conceptual form representing spatial and lived meaning [?]. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre characterized space as a social product, a component of production relations and productive forces, and a support for economic and social relations. Grounded in spatial theory, we can conceptualize the production of television news discourse—the space generated by its encoding system—as an organic component of social space, namely encoding space, through which we can investigate the spatiality and spatial relations of discourse production.

From the perspective of spatial attributes, encoding space is both a product of social space and a producer of social space. It possesses material form—television acquisition, editing, broadcasting, transmission, and reception equipment, as well as linguistic symbols such as images, sound, and text—and mental construction—the production, dissemination, and expression of discourse meaning. It functions both as space of representation and as representational space, continuously participating in the production and reproduction of social space. In the production of encoding space, it generates designs, conceptions, plans, and guidance for real social life, analogous to Lefebvre’s “representations of space.” It also produces space lived directly through related images and symbols (the large-scale, long-term production and reproduction of television news discourse has become part of people’s lives, helping them achieve holistic description, imagination, and comprehension of social space), analogous to Lefebvre’s “representational spaces” and Soja’s “thirdspace.”

The encoding space structure of television news discourse is intricate. However, careful investigation of its generation and production processes reveals two primary and critical spaces among all encoding spaces: first, the foundational space—“professional encoding space”; second, the subjective space—“meaning encoding space.” All other spaces rely upon and attach themselves to these two spaces to complete their generative, productive, and operational processes. This article focuses on analyzing professional encoding space.

2. Professional Encoding Space

Professional encoding space constitutes a news discourse production space formed by journalistic professional norms, standards, and television acquisition, editing, broadcasting, transmission, and reception equipment and technical means. It serves as the material foundation and professional-technical means upon which other encoding spaces depend for generation and production. Professional encoding space is the space of material form and expressive mode

for producing television news discourse, primarily comprising subordinate spaces including news space, virtual space, and technical space.

(1) News Space is the formal and modal production space for television news discourse, as well as the framework and support for other encoding spaces, accommodating and sustaining their production and reproduction. Since its inception, television news has been integrated into the journalistic system, possessing professional journalistic attributes. Consequently, television news discourse encoding must conform to general journalistic laws, ethics, and professional norms; television news must embody professional elements and characteristics such as news value, news function, news structure, and news form. This is determined by professional journalistic attributes and represents the inevitable result of specialized, standardized, and normalized production in news space.

Television news does not constitute mechanical replication of raw events, as “an ‘unprocessed’ historical event cannot be disseminated through television news in that form. The event must be symbolized within the audio-visual scope of television discourse” [?] to be transmitted as news. “News texts constantly strive to confine various events and their potential multiple meanings within their own conventions. Like other television forms, news has conventions” [?]. Therefore, only events with news value, processed by encoders according to television news protocols, can become transmissible news. The facts capable of being transmitted are already symbolized facts that have been encoded and encrypted, as well as “news facts” infused with various meanings. This is determined by the productive attributes and communicative functions of news space. The process of transforming facts into news discourse constitutes the production and reproduction of news space.

News space represents the foundational, professional, and normative space for television news discourse production. The construction and production of news space cannot be separated from the support and collaboration of material and operational virtual space and technical space.

(2) Virtual Space is the audio-visual space for representation and expression of television discourse constructed by television technology and equipment—a material foundation and platform upon which television news discourse encoding, circulation, and decoding processes must rely. It utilizes television technology and equipment to construct a multi-dimensional “flowing” audio-visual simulation space within two-dimensional screens and acoustic spaces. All encoding and decoding practices of television news discourse are realized through television equipment, using symbols and codes such as images, sound, and subtitles to construct multi-dimensional virtual space; without the production and reproduction of virtual space, television news discourse would not exist.

Media environments can be understood in three ways: first, the real environment upon which media depend for survival, called “media ecological environment,” a subsystem within the social ecosystem; second, the overall atmosphere presented in the operation and management of mass communication institu-

tions, a habitual pattern formed by the aggregation of behavioral modes among participants in mass communication activities, also called “media cultural environment”; third, the virtual environment created and constructed by mass media [?]. Virtual space essentially represents the spatial manifestation of this virtual environment. Therefore, virtual space serves as the material carrier for television news discourse form, technology, content, and meaning.

(3) Technical Space is the encoding operation space constituted by television technology. The production and construction of virtual space cannot be separated from the direct manipulation of technical space, including image acquisition, sound recording, post-production editing, broadcasting, transmission, and reception, as well as selection and use of shot composition, angles, framing, lighting in filming, and the use and processing of editing techniques such as shot assembly, sound, subtitles, graphics, and special effects in post-production. This is the space where encoders’ ideological concepts, cultural cultivation, and professional competence construct and manipulate virtual space through technical systems. Television technology can create different discourse structures and textual patterns according to discourse meaning. It can encode the same fact into discourse with different content and meaning, and can also enable the same discourse content to express different connotative meanings through technical processing.

3. Production in Professional Encoding Space

In the production process of television news discourse, the first step is the production of news space: reported events must possess news value, manifesting utility and significance that satisfies the needs of the dominant encoding space [?], demonstrating characteristics such as importance, freshness, and interest. Produced texts must conform to fundamental journalistic norms and “standards.” Next, journalists excavate reporting themes based on event nature and content, conducting news interviews and editing. At this stage, spatial production requires support from virtual space and technical space: collecting audio-visual and textual materials, including oral interviews, filming, and synchronous sound interviews. Subsequently, collected materials are organized according to news text patterns to compose commentary. Finally, images and synchronous sound are edited according to commentary content and sequence, with subtitles added. This completes the basic production process of a television news item. Among these, topic selection, theme refinement, interviewing, and scriptwriting constitute the production process of general news space, while filming, recording, and post-production editing represent the unique production of virtual space and technical space in television media, with rather strict professional standards and technical requirements. Journalists, editors, and other encoders of news discourse must master and skillfully apply these professional techniques and production “conventions” and “standards” to proficiently edit and produce acquired audio-visual materials through code operations and news acculturation means, generating news discourse that satisfies the needs of dominant ideology

and social audiences.

Mass media functions to set the public agenda, employing different reporting methods for different issues to guide and control public opinion. For instance, during a certain period or within a news program, television media provide detailed, long-duration, high-density coverage for issues that conform to dominant encoding space needs, while diminishing, compressing, or simply not covering issues that do not conform to these needs from the interview stage onward. In the practice of spatial production of news discourse, the expression of reporting attitudes (positive, negative, or factual-objective reporting) is accomplished through the production of virtual space and technical space (processing of commentary, synchronous sound, subtitles, and shots). For example, positive reporting generally uses commendatory, positive, and affirmative language in commentary, selecting synchronous sound with similar attitudinal language while eliminating different voices, and generally chooses frontal, eye-level or low-angle, stable, balanced, aesthetically pleasing compositions with bright and tidy backgrounds in filming and editing, selecting natural, steady, graceful, and amiable facial expressions, postures, and movements. Conversely, negative reporting uses critical, sarcastic, and labeling pejorative terms in commentary, often employing candid or covert filming of ugly expressions, postures, and movements, accompanied by chaotic and dark backgrounds.

Through the production of technical space and virtual space, the reporting attitudes of television news discourse become fully apparent. The formation of these reporting attitudes is not arbitrary on the part of encoders but rather the product of comprehensive effects, strict control, and profound influence exerted by ideological space, institutional space, power space, and interest space that dominate encoding space. In fact, regardless of ideology or institutional form, the spatial production of television news discourse represents the result of interwoven and jointly acting various spatial relations in real society, and its production process must align with the overall pace of social space production because it itself constitutes an organic component of social space production.

In conclusion, analysis of the spatial attributes of television news discourse production and professional encoding space reveals that, as a component of social products, production relations and productive forces, and a support for economic and social relations, the encoding space of television news discourse gathers multiple spatial relations, manifesting complex institutional, social, professional, and technical characteristics. Studying the professional encoding space of television news discourse not only provides clearer insight into the status, functions, and interrelationships of various spatial factors in the symbolic operations of television news discourse, deeply revealing its encoding significance, production processes, and production features, but also enables examination of the constraining influences that real social space exerts on discourse production, allowing more accurate grasp of the generative and productive regularities of television news discourse.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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