

Text types in a new medium

The first newspapers (1609)

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The first printed newspapers in the modern sense of the word appeared in the seventeenth century. They were weekly publications which contained regular reports by correspondents from all over Europe, mainly on political matters. Although the new medium as such was innovative in its general organization, the individual news items were produced by following text patterns which already had a history of their own. The article reports recent research on the emerging constellation of text types in the first two German newspapers, the *Aviso* and the *Relation* of the year 1609. It is focussed on delineating a prototype-based typology of the relevant text types and on tracing back these forms of presentation of news items to earlier genres and media like chronicles, handwritten newsletters, printed pamphlets and biannual news collections. The general interest of this line of research as a contribution to historical pragmatics lies in the attempt to see historical text types in an evolutionary perspective, taking into account the context of text production and, as far as possible, the reactions of the reading public.

1. Introduction

The following article reports some recent research on text types in a new medium, not the present-day online newspapers or newspapers on CD-ROM, but the weekly newspapers which appeared for the first time in Germany in the year 1609. Similar papers appeared in the Netherlands in 1618, in London in 1620 and in Paris in 1631.¹ The research reported here is based on a corpus of the first two German newspapers, the *Aviso* and the *Relation* of the year 1609, and on a selected corpus of sixteenth/seventeenth-century texts from other

news media. The general interest of this research as a contribution to historical pragmatics lies in the attempt to see historical text types in an evolutionary perspective, taking into account the context of text production and the competing news media of the time.

The basic problem we have to deal with from the point of view of the history of text types or genres is the following. The early newspapers do not show a well-established system of text-types like news reports, features, leading articles, commentaries etc., as we know them from modern newspapers. On the other hand, the early newspapers do show quite distinctive textual features from the very beginning, features which were to remain the standard for nearly two hundred years. So what we have to do is to reconcile these two seemingly incompatible propositions. I shall try to solve this problem by applying a method of textual analysis which relies on two basic assumptions:

- a. The early newspaper writers used basic text patterns which could be extended by successively adding extra textual elements, which means that the apparent variety of textual forms is generated by a flexible system of fairly well-defined textual building blocks.
- b. There are characteristic constellations of textual building blocks which we could term *text prototypes*. Such a collection of text prototypes forms an early stage of development of a system of text types.

2. News media in the year 1600

In order to understand the kind of innovation which weekly newspapers presented in 1609, we have to look at the world of news media in Germany around 1600.² At that time, there were basically three types of news media:

- a. Handwritten newsletters which were collected and exchanged between politicians, government officials and merchants. By the end of the sixteenth century there were already professional agencies who collected news from all over Europe, copied the texts, and sold their collections to the governments of smaller states, to the administrations of cities and to well-to-do merchants.
- b. Printed news pamphlets which were printed and sold in the wake of particular events, e.g. after important battles and the signing of peace treaties, during religious controversies and after catastrophes like earthquakes or floods. In many cases news pamphlets were illustrated in order to attract the attention of the public. They appeared at irregular intervals.

c. Printed biannual news collections which were compiled from handwritten letters and news pamphlets and were sold at the big fairs in spring and autumn, e.g. the Frankfurt Fair and the Leipzig Fair.³ These biannual collections had an intermediate status between a news medium and a history book. Their authors conceived of themselves as historians of the present time. Generally speaking, historical writing and news writing were much more closely related in the seventeenth century than they are today. But, of course, at a time when information travelled much more slowly than it does today, these news collections still carried a certain amount of topical information.

Compared with these three media, the new weekly newspapers had four remarkable properties:

- a. They were publicly available, which handwritten newsletters were not — at least not generally.
- b. They had highly up-to-date information, which the biannual collections could not provide.
- c. They appeared at regular intervals. At the beginning they were weeklies, from the middle of the seventeenth century onward some papers appeared twice weekly, and by the end of the century the first daily newspapers appeared.
- d. They covered a wide range of topics, which individual news pamphlets did not.

These four properties are also characteristic of modern newspapers.

3. The structure of weekly newspapers

An annual set of newspaper issues consisted of about 50 weekly issues. Each weekly issue consisted of a varying number of dispatches from several European cities (e.g. Antwerp, Cologne, Prague, Vienna, Venice, and Rome), which again contained a varying number of news items. These news items were often not topically connected beyond the fact that sometimes several items originated from the same city or the same region. Readers complained about this lack of topical connectedness from the very beginning. However, as this textual structure was the result of a highly efficient production process, no fundamental changes were made by the publishers of newspapers for nearly two centuries.

This production process was very simple: A newspaper had its correspondents in, say, Amsterdam, Prague, Vienna and Venice. Those correspondents collected all the bits of news they could get hold of in the city and from the region and wrote them down more or less in random sequence. The correspondent

Avifo

29

Relation oder Zeitung.

Was sich begeben vnd

zugetragen hat/ in Deutsch: vnd Welsch-
lant / Spanien/ Niederlant/ Engellant / Frankreich/
Vnger: / Osterreich / Schweden / Polen / vnd
in allen Provinzien / in Ost: vnd West
Indien etc.

So allhie den 2. Augusti. angelange.



Gedruckt im 1609. Jahr.

Aus Köln den 24. Julij/ Anno 1609.

Als dem Haag hat man/ daß sich die General Staaten daselbst/ wieder versambeln/ in wichtigen sachen sich mit einander zu berathen/ schlagen.

Sonsten ist in gemein grosse klag / wegen so viel Schiff von Seeraubern vnd andern Feinden/ hin vnd wieder genommen werden/ welches den Kauffleuten zu mercklichem schaden vnd nachtheil gereichen thut/ vnd in fünfzig viel Saltimenta abgeben möchte.

Etliche so von Lüttich kommen melden/ das der Herzog von Newers 7000. zu Fuß vnd 3000. zu Ross starck / bey Namers antommen sey / vnd sich starck bemühe / den Paasß auff die Süch. Landt zu erlangen/ der solle auch 18. doppelte Carthausen bey sich haben/ daher zu besorgen/ es ohne Krieg nit abgehen werde.

Sonsten haben wir von Disseldorff/ daß beyde Fürsten/ Brandenburg vnd Newburg/ von den Erenden gute satisfaction/ auff ihre Propositionen erlangt/ Die gewesene Räthe aber/ vnd mehrer theils der Süchsen Erende/ haben sich noch nicht rotunde erklären wollen/ sondern begeren zu vor Keyf. M. ders pretension/ zu contentiren/ darauff dann erfolgt ist/ das Erzhertzog Leopold / vorgeföhrt mit etlich wenig Personen / vnbefandter weise/ in die Stadt Süch kommen vnd daselbst für ihr Keyf. M. die vöslige Posses eingenommen/ deswegen man daselbst etliche Freundschaften gerhan.

Als beyde Fürsten Brandenburg. vnd Newburg. zu Disseldorff dñ ver-
nommen / haben sie in aller eyl beyde Grafen von Solms auch dahin abge-
fertiaet/ vmb zu vernemen/ ob gemeldte beyde Fürsten auch eingelassen wer-
den sollen/ damit sie sich weiter zu verhalten wüßten / was nun darauff er-
folget/ gibt zeit.

Aus Andorff vom 24. Ditto.

Des Grafen von Embden Regiment / wil dem drittenthail ihres
bezahlung gang vnd gar nicht annemen/ haben derowegen mutinirt / sollen
das Streitein lingen innen haben vnd gedacht. Grafen sampt allen Haupt-
leuten / daselbst gefangen halten/ es solle auch bereit ein Capitain von ih-
nen erschossen seyn/ J. S. D. vñ der Spinola / haben bey 7. Zehnen Reu-
ter / aus etlichen Quartieren dahin geordnet / die Paasß zu besetzen / damit
sich das ander Kriegsvold / mit denen man in Accords ist / vnd sonderlich
die abgedancete Soldaten nicht auch zu ihnen begeben/ man besorge aber/

A ij weilen

from Venice, for example, collected news from the whole Mediterranean, where the Italian cities were at war with the Turks. Once a week, the correspondent sent his collection of news items to the newspaper's headquarters, e.g. in Strasbourg. This, of course, presupposes a regular mail service between the major cities in Europe, which had been available since the middle of the sixteenth century. At the editor's office, the dispatches were given to the printing press in the sequence of arrival, normally without any further editorial processing. So the quality of the paper mainly depended on the work of the correspondents. Normally, they just collected and transmitted information without trying to form a coherent whole of their dispatches. In some cases, however, the correspondents must have been well-informed people with good connections to the respective governments, who not only presented bits of second-hand information but sometimes tried to give a coherent picture of important developments and also added their own assessments of the political situation. In our corpus it is the *Aviso* correspondent from Prague who obviously had such a status.

4. Text prototypes in the early newspapers

As I stated at the beginning of this article, the early newspapers had no well-established system of text types as we know them from modern newspapers. There is no division into news items, news reports, commentaries and so on. There is also no division into thematic sections like politics, the economy, culture and sports. It is, however, possible to describe certain prototypes of texts, which give the early newspapers their distinctive appearance. The following are the four basic types of text in the early newspapers:

- a. The basic news item
- b. The description of a state or event
- c. The narration of an event
- d. The reprint of an official document (e.g. an imperial decree or edict or the wording of a peace treaty)

In the course of the seventeenth century we also find advertisements in increasing number, but not in the very first years. The first advertisement I found in German newspapers dates back to 1622, a short notice by the publisher of the newspaper advertising a book that was also produced by his own printer's office.

Generally speaking, the early newspapers are characterized by rather short

texts. 66 per cent of the individual texts in the 1609 issue of the *Relation* consist of less than 50 words, and only 14 per cent run up to more than 90 words (cf. Schröder 1995: 149).

Let us briefly turn our attention to the fourth item on our list of text prototypes. Official document reprints have a special status. They are usually written in legal language and style, with comparatively complicated syntax and a high percentage of foreign vocabulary, mostly Latin. Linguistically, they are very different from the rest of the newspaper texts. As they do not strictly speaking belong to the area of news reports, and as they only form a minority of the newspaper texts, I shall say no more about them here.

4.1 The basic news item

The first textual prototype is the basic news item. Texts of this kind are rather short and present one single fact or event. The following is an example taken from correspondence from Rome.

- (1) Das Bistumb Bavia mit 10000. Cronen einkommens ist dem *Signor Billio* Maylender durch den Cardinal *Montaldo* verliehen worden. (*Relation* 17, 26f.)

The bishopric of Pavia, providing an income of 10000 crowns, has been given to Signor Billio by Cardinal Montaldo.

These news items generally present the respective event by answering the four basic questions: What happened? When did it happen? Where did it happen? Who was involved? The latter aspect is quite prominent. News reports in the early newspapers very often focus on important personages and their actions: The Emperor, the King of Austria, the Ambassador from Rome, the Duke of Nevers and so on. Simple news items of this kind make up about 25 per cent of the total amount of text in the early newspapers.

In many cases several completely heterogeneous news items of this type follow one another without any indication in the layout that they do not belong to the same event or topic. This is true of the following sequence which contains the news item just mentioned:

- (2) Der *Signor Cesare Zatore* Genovesischen Handelsmann / so vor einem jar die Marggrafschaft *Marignavo* erkaufft / ist gehling gestorben / verlest in 300000. Cronen Reichthumb / welches alles seinen Brüdern zufelt / weil er kein Testamente gemacht. Das Bistumb Bavia mit 10000. Cronen einkommens ist dem *Signor Billio* Maylender durch den Cardinal Montaldo

verliehen worden. Der *Signor Tarquinio Trossino Vincentiner* so zu Mayland wegen Argwohn eines Rahtherrn todts gefangen gelegen [...] / (ist) gefenglichen allhier bracht worden" (Relation 17, 23ff., Auß Rom / vom 10. Jenner).

Signor Caesare Zatore, a merchant of Genoa [...] suddenly died, leaving 300000 crowns of riches, which all go to his brothers as he died intestate. The bishopric of Pavia, providing an income of 10000 crowns, has been given to Signor Billio by the Cardinal Montaldo. Signor Tarquinio Trossino, who had been held in Milan on the suspicion of having killed a councillor [...], has been brought as a prisoner to Rome (Relation 17, 23ff.; correspondence from Rome dated January 10th, 1609).

Such news items are syntactically very simple and present no particular problems of comprehensibility, apart from the fact that the reader must have some general geographical and political knowledge. They can be extended by means of extra functional elements which serve to build up somewhat more complex versions of this simple text pattern. Most of these functional elements belong to the general inventory of event-relating, but some of them are linguistically quite typical of the early newspapers. In the following examples the respective textual elements are marked in italics.

1. The first and very frequent additional element is the indication of the source where the news item came from. The following is an example of this type:

- (3) *AVß dem Haag hat man* / daß sich die General Staaden daselbst / wieder versambeln / in wichtigen sachen sich mit einander zu berathschlagen (Aviso 1609, 235, 2ff.; Aus Cöln den 26. Julij / Anno 1609).

From the Hague there is information that the States General (the representatives of the Protestant Dutch) are about to convene again in order to discuss important matters (Aviso 1609, 23ff.; correspondence from Cologne dated July 26th, 1609).

In this case we find the basic pragmatic structure: indication of source plus presentation of event. Syntactically, the event is presented by means of a subordinate clause. This standard pattern partly accounts for the high percentage of sentences with one subordinate clause in the early newspapers.

2. The second type of additional textual element is explanatory. e.g.:

- (4) [...] vnnd ist solches allein wegen des quartiers zuthun gewest [...] (Relation 19, 13ff.; Auß Wien / vom 15. Dito).

(two enemy groups of soldiers came so close to one another that they could shoot at each other with pistols) and this only happened because they wanted to make use of the same quarters [...] (Relation 19, 13ff.; correspondence from Vienna dated January 15th, 1609).

3. Frequently plans and intentions of the actants are mentioned:

- (5) In verfertigung vnd siegelung der Friedensartickel / haben Ihr Kön. Maystt. an die Stende begehrt / jhr zu gehorsam auff ein zeit nicht predigen zu lassen / welches sie dann zugesagt / *vnd solle die Huldigung von den vntr Enserischen Stenden / den 27. April [...] beschehen* (Aviso 98, 22ff.; Aus Wien vom 28. Martij)

(the Protestants consented to refrain from preaching in the churches for the next few weeks) *and it is planned for the Protestants to swear their oath of allegiance on the 27th of April* (Aviso 98, 22ff.; correspondence from Vienna dated March 28th, 1609).

4. Addition of descriptive elements

If we add an extra descriptive element we get an extended news item like the following, which reports that Galileo Galilei was presented with a generous gift by the city of Venice on account of his invention of the telescope, which must have been very useful for the Venetian Navy. Part of this text is the description of the remarkable properties of his newly-invented telescope.

- (6) Hiesige Herrschaft hat dem Signor Gallileo von Florentz professoren in der Mathematica zu Padua ein stattliche verehrung getan, auch seine Provision vmb 100. Cronen jährlich gebessert / weil er durch sein embsigs studiren *ein Regel vnd Augenmaß erfunden / durch welche man einerseits auff 30. Meil entlegene ortt sehen kann / als were solches in der nehe / anderseits aber erscheinen die anwesenden noch so viel grösser / als sie vor Augen sein / welche Kunst er dann zu gemeiner Statt nutzen präsentiert habe.* (Relation 1609, 154; 15ff.; Auß Venedig vom 4. Septemb.)

[...] because, in the course of his diligent studies, he invented a principle / by the application of which one can on the one hand see places at a distance of 30 miles / as if they were close by / on the other hand persons who are immediately present appear much taller than they actually are / [...] (Relation 1609, 154, 15ff.; correspondence from Venice dated September 4th, 1609)

With its number of 78 words this text is already noticeably above the average length of texts in the 1609 newspapers.

5. Predictions and the expression of apprehensions:

- (7) Vnnd weil der Illischazi auch tödlich kranck liegen sol / haben Ihre Mayst. jhme dero LeibDoctor hinabgeschickt / wann er sterben solte / wurde es ein grosse Verenderung geben (Aviso 115, 30ff.; Aus Wien den 15. Aprilis)

And as Illischazi (an important politician in the following of the Emperor) is said to be dangerously ill, his Majesty has sent his personal doctor to him. *If he should die the whole situation would change altogether.* (Aviso 115, 30ff.; correspondence from Vienna dated April 15th, 1609)

4.2 Situation reports

The combination of these building blocks results in longer texts like descriptions of situations or events. Typical descriptions of this kind concern the state of political negotiations or the situation during a state of siege. The following is an example of a description of the political situation in Prague in early February 1609:

- (8) Das hießige Wesen / hat auch ein weit außsehen / vnd zu besorgen es noch Kappen setzen dörrft / weil die Böheimischen Stendt bey jhrem Landtag / noch nicht in dem einigen Religion puncten richtig / vnd sehr schwierig durch einander sein / auch jrer schon gar viel / wieder von hinnen verreiset / vnd einen Ausschuß hinder jhnen gelassen / vnd sein heut die Protestierende / in der Landstuben erschinen / jhrer Maytt. Resolution zu zuernehmen / darauff jhnen der Herr Obr. Burgg. wegen jhrer Maytt. angezeigt / das sie sich biß morgen gedulden wollen / gemeldte Stendt sich aber erkleret / das sie zwar des morgenden Tags / erwarten wollen / aber darneben gebeten / man wolte sie lenger nicht auffhalten / sie sonst vnuerrichteter Sachen / wieder heimziehen wolten / also das man verhofft / dieses auff künfftigen Mittwochen ein entschafft zu haben. (Aviso 44, 27ff.; „Auß Praag von 9. Dito“)

The present situation looks rather uncertain / and it is to be feared that the conflict will escalate / as the Bohemian representatives have not found a compromise in the issue of religious freedom / and as they are very aggressive amongst each other / furthermore many of them have already departed / leaving the committee behind / and today the protesting representatives / appeared in the meeting-room in order to hear her Majesty's resolution / whereupon the Lord Burgrave acting for her Majesty told them / that they should be patient until tomorrow / whereupon

the representatives mentioned above declared / that they would be prepared to wait until tomorrow / but they also asked not to be delayed any longer / otherwise they would return home with nothing achieved / so there is hope / that the problem will be solved by Wednesday next. (Aviso 44, 27ff.; correspondence from Prague dated February 9th, 1609)

4.3 Narratives

Real narrative texts are rare in the early newspapers. As a rule, newspapers go for brevity. Narratives are much more frequent in news pamphlets and the biannual news collections. However, there are certain notable exceptions. A good example is a report of a catastrophe which must have impressed the contemporaries very much. During a wedding in Erfurt, the house where the celebrations were held collapsed, and the bride and 22 wedding guests were killed and another 20 guests were severely wounded. The contrast of happy celebration and instant death obviously appealed to the religious feeling of the contemporaries.

- (9) *Auß Erfurdt vom 7. Februarij.*
Heut nachmittag vmb 3 / Vhren / hat sich in vnser Statt Erfurt ein vnerhört vberauß groß Vnglück / welches mit augen nit gnugsam kan beweint werden / deßgleichen auch nie geschehen / zugetragen vnd begeben weil Erfurdt gestanden / so nach folgender massen ergangen. Es hat ein Rothgerber auff dato sein Hochzeitmal in der Braut Hauß gehalten / als nun die erbetteten Hochzeitgäst im besten essen / trincken vnnd frölichkeit waren / seind beede Stuben darin die Hochzeitleut gesessen / vber einander / vnd eingefallen / dadurch der Hochzeitgäst in 22. Personen jämmerlich erschlagen / vnd alsobald Todt geblieben / in 20. Personen auch jämmerlich / deren theils beede Schenckel vnd Arm / thei(l)s ein Schenckel vnd Arm / etliche sonst am Leib jämmerlich zerknitscht vnd beschediget worden / vnd also ein jämmerlicher Spectackel gewesen / es ist die Braut todte geblieben / der Breutigam aber ist davon kommen / vnder den Todten sind auch etliche Rahtsherren gewesen / man hat ein gantze nacht gearbeit / ehe man sie alle hat können herfür bringen / dahero etliche im Staub vnnd anderm Vnraht ersticken müßen / die vielleicht sonst davon hetten können kommen. Der trew barmhertzig Gott wölle vns vnnd männiglich für solchem jämmerlichen vnfall ferner Väterlich behüten vnd bewaren. (Relation 1609, 38, 17ff.)

From Erfurt, February 7th

This afternoon at 3 o'clock / an unspeakably serious accident happened in our city of Erfurt / which our eyes cannot mourn enough by tears / (and) which has not had a precedent in the whole history of Erfurt / (and) which came to pass in the following way. On this day, a tanner celebrated his wedding feast in the bride's house. When all the invited guests were eating, drinking and enjoying themselves / both rooms in which the wedding company were sitting collapsed / whereby 22 wedding guests were horribly killed straight away / about 20 more persons were horribly maimed / some of them had both thighs and arms crushed / others one thigh and one arm / others again had their body badly hurt / and it was such a sad spectacle / the bride was dead / but the groom survived / among the dead persons there were several councillors / the rescuers had to work all night / before all the victims could be freed from the debris / therefore some persons suffocated under dust and dirt / who otherwise might have been saved. May God in his constancy and mercy keep und protect us and everyone in future from such a horrible accident.

Several reports of this tragic event have come down to our time, one of them a long, emotional narrative with dialogue and other rhetorical devices. But, of course, this was printed as a news pamphlet and not in a newspaper. It was later reprinted in one of the biannual collections (cf. Glüer 2000:281f.).

5. Historical sources of early newspaper text prototypes

Following the evolutionary perspective in historical pragmatics, we shall now have to ask: What are the historical sources of these text prototypes? In this article I shall restrict myself to a few remarks on the basic news items. There are, of course, other text types whose evolution would deserve detailed analysis, especially the various forms of non-literary narrative which can be studied in pamphlets and biannual news collections, in chronicles and other contemporary historical works, and, as far as short narratives are concerned, also in the periodical newspapers. This would demand a major research effort, but it would be well worth the exertion, particularly as a background to a better understanding of contemporary literary narrative.

At first sight, an historical explanation of the basic news item may not appear necessary, as this kind of unit seems to belong to the natural kinds of

everyday reporting in spoken language. However, very often written patterns are not directly taken over from oral speech but have traditions of their own. And this is in fact the case for basic news items. On closer inspection we find that these small information units have a long tradition in written language. One important tradition is medieval annalistic history: In medieval chronicles we often find texts like the following from the year 1415:

- (10) Item uff den 17. tag desselben monets derselbe künig ist ingefarn in die gebiet und land von Arragony undhet den ymbis mit dem graven der Canety, die da ist gelegen zu Perpynian, mit dem nachtmal; und slieff ouch da derselbe unser herre der Romisch künig. (Rötteler Chronik for the Month of September 1415)

On the 17th day of this month the King of Arragon arrived back home and dined with the Earl of Canety, near Perpignan. And our Lord the Roman King also stayed there.

This pattern is also very frequent in some of the biannual news collections which are close to annalistic history (e.g. Steger 1590):

- (11) DEn Funffzehenden Septembris sind in des Bapsts Pallast oder neue Schatzkammer gelegt worden / drey Donnen Goldts.

On the 15th of September three tons of gold were deposited in the Pope's palace or in his new treasury.

News items of this type also turn up in sixteenth-century private letters, sometimes in the middle of purely personal information (cf. Gloning 1996: 203). And from there they seem to have been taken over into the handwritten newsletters, where they are as frequent as they are in the weekly newspapers. So the newspaper correspondents had various traditions from which to adopt patterns of short news presentation. The most conspicuous addition to the traditional annalistic form of event presentation is the standard indication of the source where the news item came from, e.g. *AVß dem Haag hat man*, like in example (3) above. But this was already a standard pattern in handwritten newsletters of the sixteenth century.

So what seems to have happened is that the new periodical newspapers employed textual forms that had been used in historical and news writing for a long time. The correspondents did, however, not use the longer forms of texts like narratives of battles or the presentation of theological controversies, which can be found in news pamphlets and which are sometimes reprinted in the biannual news collections. Correspondents of the new periodical newspapers

knew they were expected to write short texts and to provide a wide range of information, and they composed their dispatches accordingly. In so doing they produced the characteristic textual form of the early newspapers. So, as far as text types are concerned, the new medium was really not very innovative at all. The newspaper correspondents mainly selected the short forms of report from the pool of text types available at the time, using these patterns in a very flexible way. And this turned out to be a highly successful textual strategy for at least two hundred years.

Notes

1. For a study on the first English periodical newspapers in the period from 1620–1641 cf. Brownlees (1999).
2. Shaaber (1929) gives a comprehensive survey of the fairly similar world of news media in sixteenth-century England.
3. Glüer (2000) provides a detailed linguistic analysis of text types in late sixteenth-century German biannual news collections.

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