# Content Analysis of Violence Appearing in Japanese News Programs:

## Its Characteristic Features Compared to the Real World and Other TV Genres

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The purpose of this study is to analyze Japanese TV news programs to determine the level of violent content and to examine its relation to patterns of violence in the real world. The study also examines the difference between news programs and other TV program genres–drama, animation, and variety–using a content analysis method developed by the National Television Violence Study. Fifty-four hours of TV news programs broadcast in Tokyo between January 13 and 19, 2004, were selected and assessed by coders. Resulting news items on crime were the most frequently observed programs, and no correspondences were found between low rates of arrest and high rates of murder, with the patterns in the real world. These patterns may increase the likelihood that viewers perceive the real world negatively. Compared with the contextual patterns of other TV genres, news programs focused most frequently on punishing violence.

Key words: content analysis, television news, violence

## Introduction

Previous studies revealed that television violence negatively influences the viewers, and that the effect depended on the contextual characteristics of violent content. For example, the depiction of reward and punishment for violent behavior influences the viewer's learning of aggressive behavior (Bandura, 1965; Bandura, Ross, and Ross, 1961, 1963), and the depiction of extensive violence, such as the depiction of blood and body parts, is likely to either frighten viewers or decrease their sensitivity to violence (Potter and Smith, 2000; Linz, Donnerstein, and Penrod, 1988). According to these studies, it is important to examine the contextual characteristics of violent TV programs in order to investigate the effect of television violence.

Content analyses have examined the contextual characteristics of violence depiction in TV programs, but, most of these studies analyzed the violence in fictional programs,

and there are few studies of violent television news (e.g., Johnson, 1996; Potter et al., 1997).

However, the effect of violence shown on television news may have a greater impact than that on fictional programs because television news reports violent incidents that occur in the real world. Berkowitz and Alioto (1973) found that when the violence was perceived to be real by the viewers, it might elicit more viewer aggression. Moreover, news programs are likely to be accepted as reflecting reality, and to the extent of violence contents in news programs, viewers would negatively perceive the real world (Doob and MacDonald, 1979).

Our research project, The Japanese Television Violence Study (JTVS, 2003–2007), used the content analysis method developed by the National Television Violence Study (NTVS, 1996–1998), the largest study of media content ever undertaken, and analyzed the violence shown on Japanese television programs including both fictional programs and regularly scheduled news programs.

Suzuki, Sado, and Sakamoto (2004) analyzed 18 Japanese television news programs and suggested that the coding system available for fictional programs could be applied to news programs. Using the method of Suzuki et al. (2004), Horiuchi, Sado, Suzuki, Hasegawa, and Sakamoto (2006) analyzed Japanese television news and examined one contextual characteristic, the depiction of punishment for violence. They found that the news programs depicted the punishment for violence more than programs of other TV genres. However, Horiuchi et al. (2006) did not report other contextual characteristics of violent content, except for the depiction of punishment, and did not compare the characteristics to the other TV genres broadcast during same period and the real world.

In this study, we analyzed the other contextual characteristics and examined the relation of violent news to patterns of violence in the real world, in order to examine the potentiality of violent news effects on viewer's aggression, fear, and perceptions of reality. The data of the other TV genres, compared with the data of television news in this study, was taken from JTVS data (Sakamoto, 2006).

## METHOD

### Objects of analysis

We recorded television programs broadcast in Tokyo between January 13 and 19, 2004. The main news topics of this recording period were the dispatch of Japanese Self-Defense Forces to Iraq and avian influenza. We selected 54 hours of television news programs from the recorded television programs. News programs were defined as regularly scheduled news programs that reported current events or situations.

### Coding manual and code form

The coding manual and the code form in Suzuki et al. (2004) were used. The coding manual developed by the NTVS was translated into Japanese, and altered for application to Japanese television programs.

### Definition of violence

The same definition of violence was used as the NTVS (1996–1998), "Evidence of a credible threat of physical force or actual use of such force intended to physically harm or intimidate an animate being or group of beings. Violence also includes certain depictions of physically harmful consequences against an animate being that occur as a result of violent means."

### Level of analysis

In the NTVS (1996–1998), television programs were analyzed at three levels—program, segment, and violent incident. Segment was defined for reality shows as, "a coherent part of a broadcast, a partitioned narrative within a program that exhibits unity within itself and separation, by topic and/or central focal character, from other segments within a program." In this study, two NTVS (1996–1998) levels, segment and violent incidence, were used in news pro-

Table 1    Analysis items

| Issue | Categories |
| --- | --- |
| Topics | politics, war and force, business, crime, entertainment and sports, family, leisure, man-made disaster, other |
| Location | Europe, Russia, Middle East, Africa, Asia (excluding Japan), North America, Middle and South America, Japan, Unknown |
| Means of violence | physical, unconventional weapon, conventional weapon (non-firearm), conventional weapon (firearm), heavy weaponry |
| Reward | self-praise, praise from others, material reward |
| Punishment | self-condemnation, condemnation by others, non-violent reactions, violent reactions |
| Graphic: violence acts | not depicted, close-up shots, long shots, not applicable (the depiction of credible threat or physically harmful consequence) |
| Blood and gore | none, little, moderate, gratuitous, not applicable (the depiction of credible threat) |
| Crime | murder, robbery, violence and bodily harm, intimidation and extortion, rape |

gram analysis.

## Analysis items

Table 1 lists the items analyzed and reported in this paper. All items were coded at the segment level.

*Topic and location*: The main topic and location of the news were examined. Details of the issues are presented in Table 1.

*Means of violence*: In Japan, guns are rarely used in the commission of crimes. According to criminal statistics, guns were used in less than 0.5% of all crimes in Japan. This study examined whether the means reported on Japanese television news corresponded to the patterns in the real world.

*Reward and punishment*: According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1973), rewarded violence fosters the learning of aggression and lowers the inhibition of violence. In contrast, punished violence reduces the learning of aggression and inhibits violent acts. However, unpunished violence increases viewer fears about violence. This study examined patterns of reward and punishment and compared them with those of the real world.

*Graphic violence*: Television news programs may contain graphic violence because it is very useful for highlighting the

cruelty of reported events. However, viewing extensive violence is likely to either frighten viewers or decrease their sensitivity to violence.

In the NTVS (1996–1998), graphic violence was examined by issue, close-up shots depicting violent acts, and the blood and gore portrayed in violent scenes. This study applied these criteria in its examination of graphic violence in news programs.

## Procedure

Twenty-five university students worked as coders. They attended 20 hours of initial training to learn coding criteria, and then each coded television news programs at home.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 57 television news programs (54.5 hours) was coded. Four programs were chosen among them, and coding reliability was checked between coders. The concordance rate for violent incidents was 0.88, and the rate for segment was 0.91.

## Incidence of violence in news

In total, 42 television news programs contained violence, 73.7% of all television news programs coded. Seventy-six segments con-

tained violence, and 131 violent incidents were found in television news programs (2.9 violent incidents per hour).

News programs contained more violent incidents than other TV genres except drama and animation (Sakamoto, 2006; Table 2).

**Table 2** Amount of violence

|  | Violent incidents per hour | Programs containing violence | Programs analyzed (minutes) |
|---|---|---|---|
| News | 2.9 | 42 | 57 (3,270) |
| Drama | 6.6 | 24 | 27 (1,483) |
| Variety | 2.4 | 16 | 33 (1,913) |
| Animation | 10.5 | 17 | 25 (543) |
| Kids' programs | 2.6 | 15 | 53 (861) |

Note: The data of other TV genres taken from Sakamoto (2006).

### Topic and location

Violence was observed in various news topics: crime (35.3%), war and force (19.6%), leisure (13.7%), show business and sports (7.8%), international and national politics (7.8%), family (3.9%), and business (2.0%). Violent events in Japan were frequently broadcast in news programs (66.7%). The violence in the Middle East was televised because the war was located in Iraq (14.7%).

### Comparison between the violence in television news and other TV genres

This study compared the characteristics of violence in Japanese news programs with those in other TV genre programs broadcast during the same period (Sakamoto, 2006). The value of other TV genres, compared with the news programs, was the total value of the other four TV genres (Sakamoto, 2006).

***Reward and punishment***: In news programs, low rates of reward were broadcast

**Table 3** Comparison of violence contextual variables in television news and other TV genres

| Issue | Categories | News | | | Other (Sakamoto, 2006) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | n | % | N | n | % | N |
| Reward: Self-praise | Depicted | 4 | 5.3% | 76 | 7 | 3.1% | 223 |
|  | None | 73 | 94.7% |  | 216 | 96.9% |  |
| Reward: Praise/other | Depicted | 9 | 11.8% | 76 | 13 | 5.9% | 222 |
|  | None | 67 | 88.2% |  | 209 | 94.1% |  |
| Reward: Material praise | Depicted | 8 | 10.5% | 76 | 3 | 1.3% | 223 |
|  | None | 68 | 89.5% |  | 220 | 98.7% |  |
| Punishment | Depicted | 34 | 44.7% | 76 | 40 | 17.9% | 223 |
|  | None | 42 | 55.3% |  | 183 | 82.1% |  |
| Graphic: Violence acts | Not depicted | 28 | 36.8% | 76 | 11 | 5.0% | 221 |
|  | Close-up shots | 5 | 6.6% |  | 55 | 24.9% |  |
|  | Long shots | 22 | 28.9% |  | 131 | 59.3% |  |
|  | Not applicable | 21 | 27.6% |  | 24 | 10.9% |  |
| Blood & gore | Non | 59 | 77.6% | 76 | 178 | 81.7% | 218 |
|  | Little | 2 | 2.6% |  | 11 | 5.0% |  |
|  | Moderate | 7 | 9.2% |  | 13 | 6.0% |  |
|  | Heavily | 0 | 0.0% |  | 2 | 0.9% |  |
|  | Not applicable | 8 | 10.5% |  | 14 | 6.4% |  |

Note: The data of other TV genres taken from Sakamoto (2006). "n" means the frequency of each category that appeared in the segments. "N" means the amount of segments contained violence content. "Punishment" means that the segment contained either of self-condemnation, condemnation by others, non-violent reactions, or violent reactions.

(21.1%). This pattern was similar to that in other TV genres (Table 3). In contrast, in news programs, punished violence occurred at almost the same rate as unpunished (punished, 44.7%; $X^2=0.842$, $df=1$, $p=0.359$). However, this pattern in the news was not observed in other TV genres (Table 3). Note that punishments depicted in the news were not only for crime, but also for other reasons such as war and force, national politics, show business, and sports. Therefore, compared with other TV genres, the violence in television news exhibited characteristics that might reduce the risk of learning aggression and could inhibit violent acts.

*Graphic violence*: Close-up shots and blood and gore were rarely broadcast in news programs. This pattern corresponds to other TV genres (Table 3).

### Correspondence with the real world

This study compared the characteristics of violence reported in crime news with Japanese crime statistics in Tokyo for January 2004 (Metropolitan Police Department, 2004).

*Types of crime*: Figure 1 depictscrimes reported on television news and statistics. The murder rate reported in television news was much higher than in the real world. In contrast, the rates of violence and bodily harm on television news were much lower than indicated by real world statistics. Although there is rape in the real world, rape was not reported on television news. This indicated the Press might consider the feelings of sexual assault victims and control coverage. The code of broadcasting ethics established by the National Association of Commercial Broadcasters of Japan addresses consideration of crime victims' feelings. Therefore, of the violent crimes with severe consequences, murder was likely to be reported in Japanese news programs.

*Means of violence*: Non-firearms such as knives were the most frequently reported means of violence in television news (35.7%). There were also natural and unconventional means such as rope, but handguns
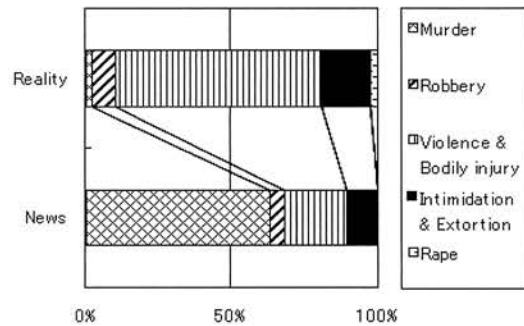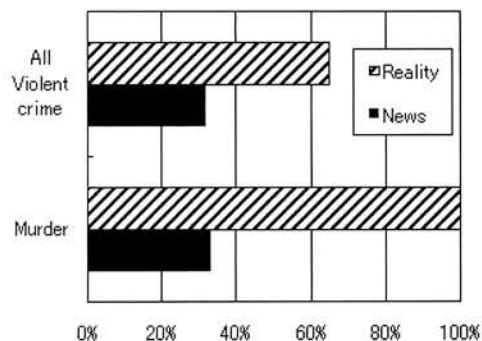


**Figure 1**  Types of crime



**Figure 2**  The arrest rate in the real world and the rate of punishment of non-violent reaction in the news

were rarely reported (7.1%). According to crime statistics, January gun crime in Tokyo amounted to less than 0.4%. Therefore, the pattern on television news was similar to that in the real world.

*Punishments:* The arrest rate for murder in the real world was much higher than the rate of punishment of non-violent reaction reported in television news (Fig. 2).

The pattern likely caused viewers to be fearful of murder and overestimate its rate of occurrence.

### CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the characteristics of violence broadcast on Japanese television programs. Japanese television news broadcasts punished violence more frequently than other Japanese TV genres. This result is consistent with that of Horiuchi et al. (2006) and indicates that the violence in television news might reduce the risk of learn-

ing aggression more than that in other TV genres. Furthermore, among crimes with severe consequence, murder was reported more frequently on the news compared with the real world. Moreover, punishment for murder was reported in television news less frequently than it occurs in the real world. This indicates that the violence in television news might increase the likelihood that viewers would view the real world negatively and be fearful of becoming a crime victim.

Further research is necessary to investigate the effects of Japanese news coverage on viewers' aggression and fear.

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