Arranging reality: The editing mechanisms of the world's first Yiddish newspaper, the Kurant (Amsterdam, 1686-1687)

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7. The sources of the Kurant

As was made clear in Chapter 3, the leading Dutch newspapers acquired most of their news from correspondents and foreign newspapers. Less prominent newspapers could not afford the services of correspondents and used other Dutch newspapers as sources. The same goes for the newspapers published by David de Castro Tartas, the Spanish Gazeta de Amsterdam and the Italian Gazzetta d’Amsterdam. They, too, made use of Dutch newspapers. And so, we can assume, did the Kurant. Although newspapers used the same sources and sometimes copied each other’s texts, each retained its own character. They were hardly voicing opinions, yet by selecting certain reports and leaving out others, by stressing certain subjects more than others, they presented their readers with a certain world view and thus – as I pointed out in the Introduction – may have helped creating an imagined community of readers.¹

According to Broersma, a newspaper offers a representation of reality, it arranges reality by selection and interpretation. Thus it presents its readers with a certain view of reality. Broersma distinguishes three levels in journalism: the gathering of news, the selection of news, and the presentation of news.² I will try to distinguish these levels for the Kurant. For the gathering of the news I will look at the sources used by the Kurant; for the selection I will look at the method of selection of reports from the several Dutch sources; and for the presentation I will examine the editing, inclusive of the changes in dating and in the geographical order. My search results in three chapters in which we can see the editor at work, ‘arranging reality’.

In this chapter I will examine what sources the editor of the Kurant used. To this aim I carried out a sample survey of two issues of the Kurant (K) a month and compared them to the Dutch newspapers available from that period,³ the Oprechte Haerlemse Courant (HC), the Amsterdamse Courant (AC), the Ordinaire Leydse Courant and the Opregte Leydse Courant (both LC).

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¹ Broersma, Beschaafde vooruitgang, 15-20; Anderson, Imagined Communities, 35.
² Broersma, Beschaafde vooruitgang, 17-18.
³ See 3.9.
7. The sources of the Kurant

Dutch newspapers usually appeared three times a week, whereas the Kurant was published twice or once a week. This implies that one issue of the Kurant could borrow from more than one issue of the Dutch newspapers.

Theoretically, the *Gazeta de Amsterdam* (extant between 1672 and 1702), printed by David de Castro Tartas, may have been a source as well. As I pointed out earlier, there is no way to know, because no matching copies have been preserved, but it is unlikely that the editor of the Kurant knew Spanish. Yet the *Gazeta*, and possibly also the Italian-language *Gazzetta d’Amsterdam*, may well have been sources of inspiration for the first publisher and the editor. Thus I will compare the method of selection and editing of the Kurant also to that of the *Gazeta* and the *Gazzetta*.

7.1. What is a source?
The Kurant does not mention its sources. Neither do Dutch newspapers. They give the impression that they collect their own news.

It is not always easy to determine whether a piece of text in a Dutch newspaper was really a source for the Kurant, or just a report that deals with the same subject. Wording, word and sentence order and grammatical structure can help to determine this, but never with absolute certainty, especially because Dutch papers also frequently copied each other’s reports. The Dutch newspapers I studied all have their own distinct style, yet even they use the same wording from time to time. Besides, it is impossible to know whether a report is taken from one of the extant papers or from a paper that is not available anymore. So the percentages discussed below must be understood in this context.

7.2. Tables
The percentages listed in the tables below are based on the number of lines in each issue of the Kurant that can be traced back to a certain source.

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4 See 3.9.

5 In 3.3 I showed that the Leeuwarder Courant from 1753 until 1803 copied at least 25 percent of other Dutch newspapers and that the Courante from Delft from 1624 copied almost all its reports.

6 One issue of the Kuranten printed by Uri Faybesh Halevi contains an average of 269 lines (= 100 %) of plain text, exclusive of headings, indications of place and time, and colophon, one issue of the Kurant printed by David de Castro Tartas has an average of 265 lines (= 100 %).
Table 1: All samples

September 3, 1686 – December 5, 1687

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>HC %</th>
<th>AC %</th>
<th>LC %</th>
<th>Unknown %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T Sep 3, 1686</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Sep 6, 1686</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Oct 15, 1686</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Oct 18, 1686</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Nov 19, 1686</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Nov 22, 1686</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Dec 20, 1686</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Dec 27, 1686</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Jan 4, 1687</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Jan 31, 1687</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Feb 18, 1687</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Feb 21, 1687</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Mar 11, 1687</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Mar 14, 1687</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Apr 3, 1687</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Apr 8, 1687</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T May 6, 1687</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F May 9, 1687</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Jun 3, 1687</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Jun 6, 1687</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Jul 15, 1687</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Jul 18, 1687</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Aug 2, 1687</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Aug 27(26), 1687</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Sep 13(12), 1687</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>0.0^d</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Sep 19, 1687^a</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>0.0^d</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Sep 26, 1687^a</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Oct 17, 1687^a</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Nov 21, 1687</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Dec 5, 1687^a</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>56.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>30.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>9.9</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^a Once a week

^b First issue by David de Castro Tartas

^c Last known issue of *Ordinaire Leydse Courant* in the sample survey

^d *Opregte Leydse Courant* extant
7. The sources of the Kurant

The first table shows the sources of all samples of the *Kuranten*, printed between September 3, 1686 and June 3, 1687 by Uri Faybesh Halevi, and of the *Kurant*, printed between June 6, 1687 and December 5, 1687 by David de Castro Tartas. It seems that the *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant* is the main source (56.1 %), followed by the *Amsterdamse Courant* (30.7 %), unknown sources (9.9 %) and the *Ordinaire Leydse Courant* (3.3%). However, at a single glance it becomes clear that the editor chose different sources in different periods. So let us take a closer look.

Table 2: All samples by Uri Faybesh Halevi in which the Amsterdamse Courant is not used as a source

September 3, 1686 – January 31, 1687

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>HC %</th>
<th>AC %</th>
<th>LC %</th>
<th>Unknown %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T Sep 3, 1686</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Sep 6, 1686</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Oct 15, 1686</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Oct 18, 1686</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Nov 19, 1686</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Nov 22, 1686</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Dec 20, 1686</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Jan 24, 1687</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Jan 31, 1687</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Once a week

Table 2 shows the sources of the samples from the *Kurant* printed by Uri Faybesh Halevi, from September 3, 1686 to January 31, 1687, in which the *Amsterdamse Courant*, although extant, is not – or perhaps once – used as a source.7 Between September 3, 1686 and December 27, 1686 the *Ordinaire Leydse Courant* is used as a source several times. However, it is clear that the *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant* is the main source. Even though the

7 I checked that in the issues between January 31 and February 18, 1687, which are not part of the sample, the *Amsterdamse Courant* was not used as a source.
7. The sources of the Kurant

*Ordinaire Leydse Courant* is extant until January 2, 1687, it seems from December 20, 1686 it is not used anymore.\(^8\) Probably one or more other unknown sources have been used by the editor, especially in the first months, because not all reports can be traced back to the *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant*, the *Amsterdamse Courant* or the *Ordinaire Leydse Courant*.

**Table 3: All samples by Uri Faybesh Halevi in which the Amsterdamse Courant is used as a source**

**February 18, 1687 – June 3, 1687**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>K HC</th>
<th>AC</th>
<th>LC</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T Feb 18, 1687</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Feb 21, 1687</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Mar 11, 1687</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Mar 14, 1687</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Apr 3, 1687</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Apr 8, 1687</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T May 6, 1687</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F May 9, 1687</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Jun 3, 1687</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows the sources of the samples from the *Kurant*, printed by Uri Faybesh Halevi, from the period in which the *Amsterdamse Courant* is used on a regular base, between February 18, 1687 and June 3, 1687. Some of the reports mentioned under ‘unknown’ may stem from the *Ordinaire Leydse Courant*, or its successor the *Opregte Leydse Courant* (also called LC here), of which no issues are extant from this period. In any case, it is clear that the *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant* and the *Amsterdamse Courant* are the main sources.

**Table 4: All samples by David de Castro Tartas**

**June 6, 1687 – December 5, 1687**

\(^8\) The last issue of the *Ordinaire Leydse Courant* in the volume containing it, from January 2, 1687, not part of the sample, did not serve as a source for the *Kurant*. Whether the newspaper existed after January 2 is unknown.
Table 4 shows the sources of all samples from the *Kurant*, printed by David de Castro Tartas, between June 6, 1687 and December 5, 1687. The outcome is similar to that in Table 3: the *Amsterdamse Courant* becomes an even – slightly – more important source than the *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant*. The *Kurant* of September 12, 1687\(^9\) and September 19, 1687 have been compared to the only two issues available from the *Opregte Leydse Courant* in 1687, September 10 and September 17, but apparently these issues did not serve as a source. As the two issues of the *Kurant* contain unknown sources, it is clear that the *Kurant* in this period must have used still other sources than the *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant*, the *Amsterdamse Courant* and the *Opregte Leydse Courant*.

### 7.3. Conclusions

It seems that it took the editor of the *Kurant* some time to find his way in the sources. In the first five months the *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant* was his primary source, followed by the *Ordinaire Leydse Courant* and one or more unknown sources. From December 1687 the *Ordinaire Leydse Courant* disappeared as a source, possibly because it did not exist anymore. Soon afterwards, from February 1687, the *Amsterdamse Courant* started to fill the gap. From this moment on the *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant* and the *Amsterdamse Courant* became equally important sources. From the moment the editor started to use the *Amsterdamse Courant*

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\(^9\) Incorrectly dated September 13, 1687.
7. The sources of the Kurant

*Courant* as a source it seems there is no difference in the use of sources between the newspapers printed by Halevi and those printed by Tartas. The average percentage of reports from unknown sources stayed more or less the same (around ten percent) during the whole period. In neither of the periods can a significant difference between the Tuesday and Friday issues (and one Thursday issue) be discerned.