



Photograph by Chris Lund, reproduced by courtesy of Information Canada.

Eskimo stone carving of two faces. It appears to convey the atmosphere of television viewing — a glow of reflected light and different audience reactions.

Television and the Eskimo People of Frobisher Bay

SHELDON O'CONNELL¹

In 1972, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) extended its Frontier Television Service to the people of Frobisher Bay in the Northwest Territories. Although certain other northern communities had been receiving the service for more than a year, no television programmes had ever before been transmitted to a predominantly Eskimo community lacking any previous experience of the medium.

Radio service was already well established in the North. In 1958, legislation passed by the Government of Canada enabled the CBC to extend its radio facilities to the arctic and sub-arctic communities of the Yukon and Northwest Territories. In the beginning the local stations received tape-recorded network programmes by weekly shipment. Later however some stations were linked by land-line to main centres and so could broadcast "live".

The Frobisher Bay radio station began to receive recorded programmes in 1961, but did not commence "live" broadcasting until Canada launched its ANIK communications satellite in 1973. The network service was augmented by locally-produced programmes, including community interest reports, often in the Eskimo language.

The programmes of the Frontier Television Service for the people of Frobisher Bay were pre-recorded and broadcast daily between 7 p.m. and 11 p.m. They were wide-ranging in content, including variety, drama, sport, quizzes and educational subjects, news and commentaries on public affairs.

The reaction of the Eskimo people to the service was investigated after a year by means of a survey. A questionnaire was distributed to heads of households, not only in the area served, but also, for purposes of comparison, in the community of Fort Chimo, Quebec, which was without television.

Commencing in February 1973, 131 out of a total of 200 Eskimo heads of household within the Frobisher Bay community were interviewed, and in mid-July 1973, 84 out of a total of 96 heads of household in the community of Fort Chimo were surveyed. Illness or absence on seasonal hunting or fishing expeditions accounted for the non-inclusion of a certain number of heads of household.

The selection of survey personnel on the basis of fluency in the Eskimo language was of critical importance. Interviews were, therefore, conducted by Eskimo people native to, and familiar with, the study areas and the local dialects. The questionnaires had been translated into regional dialects, represented in syllabics, and checked for possible ambiguity or unidiomatic syntax by experienced translators, and then taken into Fort Chimo and Frobisher Bay, ready for the survey.

¹Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Northern Service, Montreal, Quebec.

In the preparation of the questionnaires, account was taken of the way in which indigenous people perceive and react to their environment. Respondents were encouraged to provide answers to hypothetical questions, even though the native person, as has been observed, talks far more in concrete than abstract terms.

Many participants, upon being asked what they normally did during the day, replied that they did what needed to be done, and identified as favourite radio programmes those they listened to more than others. Some, questioned concerning their radio listening habits, stated that they listened when there was something they liked to hear. An aged respondent, asked where he would go if he were free to travel, replied emphatically that he was free to go where he wished. Questions reflected an understanding of the respondents' frames of reference. For example, non-native persons who live in the North refer to southern latitudes as "outside". The Eskimo refer to it as "the white man's land". Interviewers made this and other distinctions, and responses were translated simultaneously into English for content analysis and coding.

By 1973, little remained of the traditional life style of Eskimo people in Frobisher Bay. Heads of households enjoyed hunting and fishing periodically, but there were few traces of the former nomadic style of life of the people. Years had passed since those times when the people of the North were alleged to have been a happy and self-sufficient population. The population had become generally sedentary and were mostly dependent on social assistance in a community newly-rich in depiction by television of other ways of life.

Fort Chimo had undergone considerable change since its early days as a trading post, but when the present research was conducted it was still an isolated community in terms of communication service. The only access it had to news, or to programmed information, was through the northern shortwave radio service of the CBC.

At the time of the introduction of a television service to Frobisher Bay, both it and Fort Chimo depended upon the same transmissions of national news in Eskimo and English by shortwave radio. Other telecommunications contact with Fort Chimo was by radio telephone, difficult to arrange and uncertain in transmission.

Most of the Eskimos interviewed at both Frobisher Bay and Fort Chimo were without formal education. They had about the same numbers of sons and daughters. Their main source of income was from seasonal employment, usually as unskilled labourers on construction projects in the summer. They also engaged in hunting, trapping and fishing. Eskimo was the primary language in both communities. About a quarter of those interviewed in both groups could also speak some English, and about half had experience of travel outside the North — in the main to hospitals in southern Canada. For the purposes of the present study, these visits to southern centres for treatment were considered as extensions of local medical care rather than as true experiences of travel as a form of learning. In fact respondents, when isolated in "outside" hospitals, had suffered great linguistic and cultural deprivation. Those interviewed from the two communities were in the main between 30 and 50 years of age, and none was less than 20. Thus, on the basis of demographic indices, the samples of the two

populations were remarkably alike in educational level, occupation, language skill, family composition and travel experience.

It was possible to draw certain conclusions from the results of the survey, the most striking of them concerning social attitudes. After one year of television, the Frobisher Bay respondents were more inclined to put forward ideas for the employment of their children than were the respondents in Fort Chimo. It was apparent that the role of the daughter in relation to the mother had changed, and that there was increasing acceptance of the idea that a daughter could, if she wished, seek employment.

In Frobisher Bay, there was more interest in opportunities for travel to locations outside the North, and respondents were more national than local in their preferences. They were more aware of international problems and could propose solutions to them. However, over 90% of respondents in both areas did not know the number of provinces in Canada; and few could name its prime minister, main political parties, or capital.

If one is to judge the level of the Eskimos' knowledge of current affairs in Canada from the responses of the persons questioned, the Eskimo-language radio programmes of the CBC have not been particularly informative, even though respondents identified radio as the source of information most useful in helping them to reply to a questionnaire based on a simple primer of current events. Their favourite television programmes were ones of action and adventure, together with musical ones. The programmes "most disliked" — perhaps because of being all in English — were those "when people just sit around and talk." Respondents went on to explain that, as they did not understand the language, such programmes were confusing and meaningless.

An unhappy fact which emerged from the investigation was that many participants felt their opinions were valueless. When asked to consider a main problem in the world or in the community, and to suggest a solution to it, the occasional reply was "I am not important enough to have an opinion on such things". In reflecting upon the differences in life between native northern people and others, some considered themselves to be second rate in many things, and added that they felt this to be so because white people never greeted or noticed them.

Despite lack of knowledge of the world outside their own areas, the indigenous people of both communities revealed great powers of perception in their contemplation of mankind's problems. They had an appreciation of the humour in situations involving people and nations which indicated a fundamental understanding of human affairs which existed irrespective of the presence or absence of visual or other aids.

Since the taking of the survey described above, Frontier Television Service has been replaced by a "live" television service transmitted across the North by satellite for nineteen hours a day. Some future study might serve to reveal whether the native peoples' fundamental understanding is being greatly enriched, and their horizons broadened, by visual information being presented to them over such considerably increased periods of time.

The results of the survey are indicated in the following tables: —

TABLE 1. Most desirable jobs for sons

	No answer or answer not relevant	No idea — anything they can or want to do	Same or similar work to head of household	Improvement in status	Total
Frobisher Bay (TV)	21 (16.0%)	63 (48.1%)	34 (26.0%)	13 (9.9%)	131
Fort Chimo (No TV)	15 (17.9%)	60 (71.4%)	6 (7.1%)	3 (3.6%)	84

NOTE: The calculated chi-square value (17.48) is higher than the tabulated value (11.34) for three degrees of freedom.

TABLE 2. Most desirable jobs for daughters

	No answer or answer not relevant	No idea — anything they can or want to do	Emergent role in relation to mother	Lateral role in relation to mother	Total
Frobisher Bay (TV)	18 (13.8%)	65 (49.6%)	40 (30.5%)	8 (6.1%)	131
Fort Chimo (No TV)	21 (25.0%)	54 (64.3%)	3 (3.6%)	6 (7.1%)	84

NOTE: The calculated chi-square value (24.26) is higher than the tabulated value (11.34) for three degrees of freedom.

TABLE 3. Leading problem in community

	No answer or answer not relevant	Alcoholism	Economic disparity compared to rest of Canada	Lack of Eskimo initiative in local affairs	Poor housing	Forgetting old way of life	Total
Frobisher Bay (TV)	20 (15.3%)	70 (53.4%)	3 (2.3%)	11 (8.3%)	17 (13.0%)	10 (7.7%)	131
Fort Chimo (No TV)	8 (9.5%)	34 (40.5%)	17 (20.2%)	2 (2.4%)	4 (4.8%)	19 (22.6%)	84

NOTE: The calculated chi-square value of 35.92 is higher than the tabulated value (15.09) for five degrees of freedom.

In the results represented in Tables 1-3 the probability of the differences between the chi-square and the tabulated values arising only by chance is less than 1 in 100, and it may be concluded that exposure to television did affect the responses to the questions.

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