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Nations in News

Ordinary Stereotypes in National TV News Coverage of Spain and Germany

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Abstract

This contribution investigates the stereotyping of nations in TV news text. It compares the headline appearances of the names *Germany* and *Spain* on each other's leading national evening TV news program during the peak of the European financial crisis (2011-13). The paper combines quantitative analysis of word-frequency and topic-distribution in a 621 headline-corpus, with in-depth case analysis of news values underpinning 32 extracted headline examples. A discussion of literature in media anthropology and Critical Discourse Analysis concludes with the argument that intentions and consequences of media discourse should be separated, whereas differences between ordinary and official language should not be overvalued. The case study shows how the textual display of Germans and Spaniards supports the everyday imagining of national belonging, how othering works through the labelling of nations as "economies", and how negativity, competition and relatedness are prevailing values underlying the examined news headlines.

Keywords

TV News; Germany; Spain; Media Anthropology; Critical Discourse Analysis; national stereotyping; Othering; *Tagesschau*; *Telediario*

Introduction

Nationalism is one of the main ideologies underlying the construction and maintenance of cultural boundaries in the contemporary world (Eriksen 2001: 289). Modern nation-state ideology has historically enforced a specific ability for establishing a fundamental we/they perception, operating on the borderline between local social environment and the outside world. For instance, a central social ordering principle in contemporary

travellers' experience is that of being from, relating to and forced to talk about *our* and *their* nation (Blommaert 2005: 203, 206).

The practical encounter between ordinary experience and nationalist ideology is communicatively established by specific institutions. The rhetoric of these does not normally address the constructed nature of nationality (Wodak et al.: 1999). National mass media, national education and national languages are three central cultural engines that encourage the emotional link between individuals beyond the confines of the face-to-face and space-centered collectivities such as kinship, friendship or a neighborhood. "[D]iscursive and affective constructs like a 'society', a 'nation', or a 'culture' depend, for their apparent self-evidence, on mediations [...] that they must ultimately deny" (Mazarella 2004: 357).

In particular, the national public television evening news, a specific medium of modernity, condenses 'nationalized' language, information, education, space and time. Watching the evening news is a widespread routine of the nation-state citizen in Europe. It temporarily structures everyday life, even of those who are not watching. In Germany and Spain, it constitutes a symbolically important organizer of social time, a transition from the public work sphere to private evening leisure activity. TV news consumption is also an important catalyzer for everyday conversations. As "national television is a significant presence in quotidian life" (Abu-Lughod 2005: 4), it ritualizes an everyday *we* experience in nationalist terms by telling stories for *us*, living *here*, in *our* language that are then shared, potentially as a common knowledge of what is happening in the world outside *our* world. "We" only make sense through "them", since with every form of nationalism there is the "reactive by-product" of a counter-nationalism and they are "feeding each other" (Appadurai 1996: 162). In this sense, a comparative or cross-cultural angle is important to the understanding of the social construction of nationhood, as the national reification on TV news works through the projection of significant others (Wodak et al. 1999: 3) and these may be either threatening or inspiring (Simonsen 2004: 357).

Images of threat and inspiration associated with nations in Europe have been reassembled following the financial crisis of 2008, which led to a revival of nationalism in the European Union (Wodak and Boukala 2015). A new core-periphery discourse has emerged, as the rhetoric of distinction has shifted from East-West to North-South

(Green 2013: 353), leading to an under-communication of other types of own-other dichotomies and “altering the meaning, purpose, and form of European borders” (Green 2013: 345). The increased relevance of nationalist, so called populist or Euro-skeptical political parties and discourses since the 2014 European election campaigns, was an indicator of the reinforcement of nationalism throughout the old continent. In this context, Spain and Germany can be seen as the ideal-typical national clusters symbolizing this regenerated North-South dichotomy. Spain, thus, is a “crypto-colonial state” (Herzfeld 2005: 67) within the emergent “German Europe” (Beck 2012). Taken together, this is the socio-political context in which my contribution critically targets the current mutual labelling processes of the Spanish and the Germans on each other’s national public TV news broadcasting systems. I believe that such an analysis can shed light on more general semiotic logics on the contemporary construction of national belonging in Europe.

The gross armature of the paper is as follows. First, I discuss some of the current and classic research on media and nationhood in anthropology and sociolinguistics. In the second and third sections, I justify, display and interpret my data, a corpus of 621 TV news headline texts, asking if, when, and how Germany/Germans and Spain/Spanish appear as significant others on each other’s national TV news broadcasts. In the conclusions, I summarize my argument and discuss its scope and consequences.

The pragmatics of othering: mass media, nationhood and everyday life

The nation-state and mass media have not been traditional fields of research for anthropologists (Spitulnik 1993: 294; Abu-Lughod 2005: 25, 30). In the 1990s, Spitulnik argued that the study of national media in anthropology had just begun (1993: 306). The intimate relation between particular media and particular social forms (Mazarrella 2004: 358), such as national TV broadcasting systems and nationalism, was especially fuelled by Anderson’s idea of nations as something that needed to be imagined through written language (Wodak et al. 1999: 22). Consequently, one had to look analytically at where the visual and textual images constitutive of nationalism were produced (Anderson 2001; Abu-Lughod 2005: 8). But this “top-down account of nation-state” seems to be incompatible with the anthropological project of in-depth

ethnography (Herzfeld 2005: 5). In addition, today the supposed decline of both television and state (Appadurai 1996: 158; Abu-Lughod 2005: 26), especially in Europe (Eriksen 1997: 255-261), has led to a switch of academic interests towards digital media and trans/intra-national forces such as development, neoliberalism, Islamism, European integration or globalization. In his influential anthropological account of globalization, Appadurai (1996) argues in favour of analytically separating ideology (ideoscape), media (mediascape), and their fragmented and de-territorialized collective identifications (ethnoscape). The mediascape, and explicitly television, is a provider of ethnoscapings that “help to constitute narratives of the Other” (1996: 35-36). But these narratives have switched from Anderson’s imagined (national) communities to more complex “imagined worlds” (Appadurai 1996: 33). Therefore, nationalism continues to be an all-encompassing social marker; and neo-nationalism (nationalism as a reaction to globalization) is especially on the rise in Europe, restoring “familiar forms of identification” (Banks and Gingrich 2006: 2, 5, 16). Analogous to this, Spitulnik reminds us that there is a “significant continuity in the semiotics of news genres [...] despite the pervasive perception of newness and radical difference” (2010: 373). Using Gershon’s classification (2010: 283), the contemporary fascination with ‘new’ media shaping contemporary societies obscures the semiotic systems of signification through language as a medium.

A second debate relates to a fundamental methodological problem concerning universalizing categories such as media and the state and their influence in particular life worlds. Anthropologists have been particularly critical of these concepts. Eric Wolf famously wrote that “concepts like ‘nation’, ‘society’, and ‘culture’ name bits and threaten to turn names into things” (1982: 3). A participative research approach leads the focus to the particularistic meanings of, for instance, the nation, in confined cultural contexts of kinship and community. But with disciplinary de-territorialization, the loss of the fixed community, mass media came increasingly under the anthropological focus (Spitulnik 1993: 293), as did the state and nationalism (Herzfeld 2005: 1; Eriksen 2010: 118). If anthropology principally looks at how the nation-state *becomes* a social subject in everyday-life, as Aretxaga (2003) suggests, recent theorizing opts for the circular relationship between official self-presentation and the privacy of collective introspection (Herzfeld 2005: 14), or the links between formal and informal nationalism (Eriksen 1993).

In this sense, some recent ethnographies relating media to the state try to conceal large-scale phenomenon and the particularities of every-day social practices. Abu-Lughod in “Dramas of Nationhood” (2005) does combine both content analysis of popular state-television series and the ethnography of the specific contexts of their consumption. The result, nothing less than an “ethnography of Egypt as a nation”, nevertheless lacks (as the author acknowledges) ethnographic information about the practices of the intelligentsia behind the scenes. Inversely, this is exactly the concern of Colleen Cotter’s “News Talk” (2010) where the author draws on her experience as a journalist in media like the Washington Post, to show how a specific habitus and practices among the professionals influence form and content of the news discourse. A similar approach is to be found in a book by Ulf Hannerz (2004) where he explores the social practices and backgrounds of foreign news correspondents. What may be learned by these recent ethnographies relating television, news and the state is that the content of mass media is not an easily separable realm from the symbolic worlds of their producers and consumers. Therefore, distinguishing categorically the ordinary meaning and the official news discourse, or formal and informal nationalism, might be misleading. For instance, the storyline Hannerz refers to as the ordering principle for particular events reified by the news professionals he has interviewed, is also “my” story-line. Things occurring in Israel relate “naturally” or “normally” to the conflict with Palestinians and the binary opposition Israelis-Palestinians is the basic ontological ground for making sense of this news. Thus, by exploring the multiple local contexts of consumers (as does Abu-Lughod) or the local contexts of producers (as do Cotter and Hannerz), we find a widely shared pragmatics of ‘othering’, that is the creation of we/they classifications that constitute common-sense, both ordinary and official.

If ordinary people use state propaganda strategically for their own goals (see Herzfeld 2005), then why are researchers less disposed to think that official media reproduce ordinary language unintentionally? TV news broadcasting draws mainly on ordinary knowledge, also because its messages are designed to be of interest for everyone, both in content (what is displayed) and how it is displayed as a drama (see Bourdieu 1997: 22, 25). In this line, Spitulnik holds that production-text-reception dimensions of mediated communication are more interconnected than is commonly assumed in academia and that “language ideologies” are mutually informing and circulating between these dimensions (2010: 373). Therefore, I argue that investigating national TV

news texts provides insights into the everyday labelling of others – not only by the broadcaster but also to some degree by the wider (national) audience.

A third layer of theoretical discussion on state, media, and state-media might be the traditional system-agency distinction, where the state-media are often the villains. The structural impositions of omnipresent institutions such as television and the state compete with the freedom of agency to reinterpret, resist, and strategically use the symbolic violence emitted by these institutions. For instance, Mazarrella observes the “fetishization of media per se as utopian or apocalyptic technologies” (2004: 357). We find these moralities both in the media and the everyday language: compare for instance the popular portraying of Facebook as a data hunter, the news images on the liberating Twitter-revolution of ordinary people’s media production during the Arab spring, or the idea of television as ‘opium for the people’. Thus the systems point of view, predominant (for pedagogical reasons, as the author acknowledges) for instance in Bourdieu’s account of television (1997), tends to emphasize the “invisible censorship of television”, created by the imposition of specific forms of communication based on the scarcity of time, the interests of the channel-owners or the competition for high audience ratings. Meanwhile, looking at agency, as Abu-Lughod does, the system of impositions appears to be substituted by the conflict of actors, generating “encounters of cultural industry elite producers and subaltern audiences that interpret in relation to their life-worlds” (Abu-Lughod 2005: 12).

The following discussion of the influential and ongoing socio-linguistic work of Ruth Wodak and colleagues (1998, 1999, 2015) on the discursive construction of national identity in Europe and Austria allows me to relate this system-agency debate to the specific topic of this article. As a major exponent of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Wodak is especially interested in the relation between language and power, and her research on Austrian identity seeks to identify responsibilities for the mental construct of the *homo nationalis*. In a critical assessment of the tension between structural determinism and individual freedom in discourse (read system versus agency), she relates the search for responsibility directly to CDA, “as any critical investigation would be superfluous if those criticized could skirt responsibility of their (discursive) actions by simply shifting it to discourse or a discursive formation” (Wodak et al. 1999: 32).

This emphasis on intentionality, goals, strategies and motives in CDA of national identity ultimately reduces nationhood to a construction of the elites, because

the analysis of discursive construction of national identity [...] serve[s] to uncover *manipulative manœuvres* in politics and the media, which *aim* at linguistic *homogenization* or *discriminatory exclusion* of human beings, and to heighten the awareness of the rhetorical *strategies* which are used to *impose* certain political beliefs, values and goals. (Wodak et al. 1999: 9; my italics)

For Wodak and her team, the political and media elites in Austria propagated discursive identity constructs which only took into account certain identity demands from the target audiences in order to use these strategically by constructing, downplaying or emphasizing existing expectations (Wodak et al. 1999: 202). For instance, the authors detected a demand of Austrians for their self-identification as an internationally neutral nation (the “neutrality myth”) which the elites, press and politicians, aimed to reject. Also methodologically, the identification of discursive *strategies* is a cornerstone in Wodak’s analysis (Wodak et al. 1999: 31-41). The content of discourse and the forms of its realization are the consequences of different classes of strategies such as *justification*, *perpetuation*, *transformation*, *Demontage*, as these strategies lie ‘within’ or ‘behind’ actions of realization and content. While the authors recognize that strategy does not always implicate “consciousness” or “plans”, it is particularly the elites that are held to communicate strategically (hence “have” agency), while ordinary conversations have a lesser degree of intentionality.

This fixation on the part that agency plays in the workings and effects of nationalism in discourse, loses sight of the larger, complex historical forces of which the nation in language and its evolution are part of. It also overestimates, as do many anthropologically works on national identity construction, the predictability of the consequences of intentional or strategic speaking (Ortner 2006: 131-133). In his 2005 seminal introduction to critical analysis of discourse, Jan Blommaert, by no means a fierce critic of CDA, reminds us that one should examine the effects of power, not power itself – which in effect means looking at outcomes, not at intentions of language use (2005: 1-2). In the end, the irony is that we as researchers are ourselves trapped in the language of nationalism, its methodological homogenization, a contradiction not

only underlying my current text when speaking about “German” and “Spanish” TV news; also Wodak, for instance, shortly after discussing the intentional linguistic homogenization of the media and the basic pattern of identity politics, namely discursively creating difference, discusses the differences of the “British”, the “Dutch”, the “German” in order to finally present her own “Viennese” CDA tradition (Wodak et al. 1999: 7-9, 30). The researchers’ *intention* here is *not* a homogenization or exclusivist vision of national identity; nevertheless, the speaking of national research traditions in academic circles contributes to this common sense of the nation as bound, time-less, and doted with a specific collective genius. For example, by differentiating the “Viennese” from the “German” tradition, she too engages in outward generalization and inward specification – a typical feature of othering in discourse.

Summing up this theoretical discussion, various premises for, and consequences of the following presentation and analysis of my empirical material can be identified. There is a shared concern between anthropology, sociolinguistics, and in particular CDA and recent ethnographies of the State and State media, with regard to understanding the relationship between an official idiom and the life world of ordinary people (see also Blommaert 2005: 6, 16, 33-35). This common interest focuses on the process of social categorization or othering, as this is how selfhood and otherness is established through utterance that groups people into categories (Blommaert 2005: 205). Nationhood is one of the major all-encompassing social markers in the contemporary world, particularly in post-financial-crisis Europe. National belonging needs to be investigated from a comparative angle, in relation to significant (this is means frequently addressed) “other” nations. Both nationalism and television have not disappeared with the advent of globalization and network communication, but they are fuelled by, merged with, or relegated to specific social contexts, such as the language communities of many European nation-states; as such, they continue to be a relevant subject of inquiry. Talk from the political elites (and in general, mass mediated speech-content) cannot be distinguished straightforwardly from lay voices and everyday discourse because it always *also* gives insights into deeper structural and historical patterns of categories of social difference in language practice. In addition, official idioms, such as TV news talk and its social consequences (contributing to social inclusion or exclusion) can be analyzed in its own right, separately from the intentions, strategies or calculations of the

powerful elites, precisely because the connection is not always necessarily a straightforward one.

Cross-national comparison of TV news headlines on Spain and Germany

Germany and Spain are both major countries of the European Union in terms of population, GDP and extension. There are several historical analogies between both countries, such as the fact that they are ‘defeated’ (colonial) empires, or the prevalence of authoritarian regimes in their recent histories. Therefore, today in both countries there exist relatively new public TV broadcasting systems, legally embedded in constitutions committed to freedom of speech and democracy. *Radio y Televisión Española*, the Spanish Radio and Television Corporation (RTVE), was founded in 1937 (as *Radio Nacional de España*) and consolidated as a democratic institution in 1977, when its autonomy was implemented. It is financed by public subsidies, and broadcasts prominently on Channel One (*La Una*). It was the first Spanish TV channel and the evening news edition, the TV Daily News (*Telediario*) is broadcast daily without exception from 9 to 10 pm. In Germany, the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, the Consortium of Public Broadcasters in Germany (ARD) was founded in 1950 in West Germany (and expanded to the East in the 1990s); it is financed by license fees from households and institutions, and broadcasts on Channel One (*Das Erste*). Channel One’s Daily News (*Tagesschau*) is the oldest news program of the Republic and is broadcast daily without exception from 8 to 8:15 pm.

The *Tagesschau* and the *Telediario* lend themselves to comparison because of their similar position and history in the German and the Spanish public broadcasting systems, both in the media landscape and as their respective news broadcast flagships. They are equally popular, being the most watched TV news in both countries. During the year 2012, the *Tagesschau* had a daily average audience of 4.92 million spectators, that is a market share of 18% (Spiegel Online 2012); the *Telediario* had a 2.17 million audience, with a market share of 14% (my own estimates, based on data provided by *Barlovento Comunicación* 2013: 23). Despite slowly but constantly declining audience rates in recent years, the total viewer ratings still allow to interpret these programs as central

sources of news provision in both countries. Also, supporting my earlier argument of an underestimation of the prevalence of classic forms of state-linked media, it is interesting to note that the news headlines reporting on these audience ratings tend to highlight the decrease, rather than focusing on the continued maintenance of the significant total audience numbers (for instance Spiegel Online 2012).

In both countries, as a result of a historically consolidated (symbolic) hierarchy of TV channels, the same expression “Channel One” is used. The timeframe of both broadcasters is the starting point for the general evening entertainment program on all other TV channels. Therefore it is a cultural time-marker also adapted to, for instance, dinner, work, and sleeping habits in both countries. The names of both programs, *Telediario* and *Tagesschau*, are themselves symbols of news broadcasting in general, as both names are often employed in ordinary spoken German/Spanish language as synonym for TV news. Compared to the commercial competition, both programs may be considered ‘quality news’ (based on categories such as independence or public funding), while the format itself could be labelled ‘popular’ (television free of direct charges, with a high audience share). In conclusion, the centrality of both TV news formats in their respective national media landscapes allows regarding them as valid indicators of prevalent perceptions and assumptions concerning belonging and alterity in both countries. Analogies in their position, history, format and symbolic significance justify the present attempt at a transnational comparison of both programs and the binary character of their respective national identities.

The guiding question of my research was when the words ‘Germany’ and ‘Spain’ appear on the national news stage, as a category that is both significant in itself and different from other nations in relation to the implicit self-category of *us*. The tracking of both keywords in the news text was conducted using the database and the search engine provided by both corporations’ online media centres. For both TV programs, I focused the enquiry on the headlines and the summary texts of headlines mentioning Spain and Germany. By doing so, I compensate for the different timeframe of both news programs. The *Telediario* is four times as long as the *Tagesschau*, but the numbers of daily headlines published on their media centres were similar, that is, usually between five and fifteen. By analyzing only the titles and summaries I also avoided measuring casual and insignificant references to the respective other nation. The period

of my survey covered two years, focusing on the daily TV news broadcast between July 2011 and August 2013.

In a second step, I have grouped the news headlines around universal or common-sense content categories. First, I build on the semiotic existence, both in official and vernacular idiom, of a reduced amount of news topics, such as the economy, politics, culture, sports, and weather forecasts. The politics and economy genres have been merged into a common category (political economy) because the data did not allow a clear distinction of headline topics into two separate categories. This is because Spanish news about foreign economies is already news on economies of States and in our case addresses explicitly the German or Spanish economy, businesses, unemployment rates, etc. This means that the category of nation-state itself is the framework for news on the economy. On the other hand, my data did not show many headlines that related exclusively to the political issues of either the German or Spanish State. I was able to isolate these few cases and group them into a separate category, particularly news on general elections.

I have excluded the usual distinction within news genres between, local, national and international news because my research deals exclusively with news commonly labelled as 'foreign news' or as news on international sport competitions. In the weather forecast, the national other is normally absent but at times briefly mentioned to build socio-climatological binaries, such as warm/cold weather coming from or in Spain/Germany. Nevertheless, I have excluded the weather forecast category, as no headlines are produced for this news segment by both broadcasters. Finally, I have included some more categories that are not part of the standard news genres, but have emerged inductively from the data as independent categories related to my subject of inquiry. This is the case for news related to migration and ethnicity. These news items potentially erode the one-dimensional vision of the other as a bound and coherent entity (Spain and Germany) in favour of more complex internal and transnational divisions of these others (now in the plural). Here, one may find news focusing on different nationalities within the other society, the liquid character of societies (the constant in-and-out flows of social groups within nation states) and the proper ethnic-cultural diversity of citizens within the other nation state (for instance Basques in Spain or Bavarians in Germany). Another group of headlines that justified a proper classification

because it cannot be clearly assigned to the conventional genre categories is the one I have labelled ‘disasters’.

The results of this procedure can be seen in Chart 1. It shows the (1) total number of headlines, as (2) organized by news topics, containing the word Germany/Germans in the *Telediario* and Spain/Spanish in the *Tagesschau* (both cases refer to the evening edition) during a 2 year period from July 2011 to August 2013 as extracted by the author from the ARD and RTVE online media centres.

INSERT CHART 1 HERE

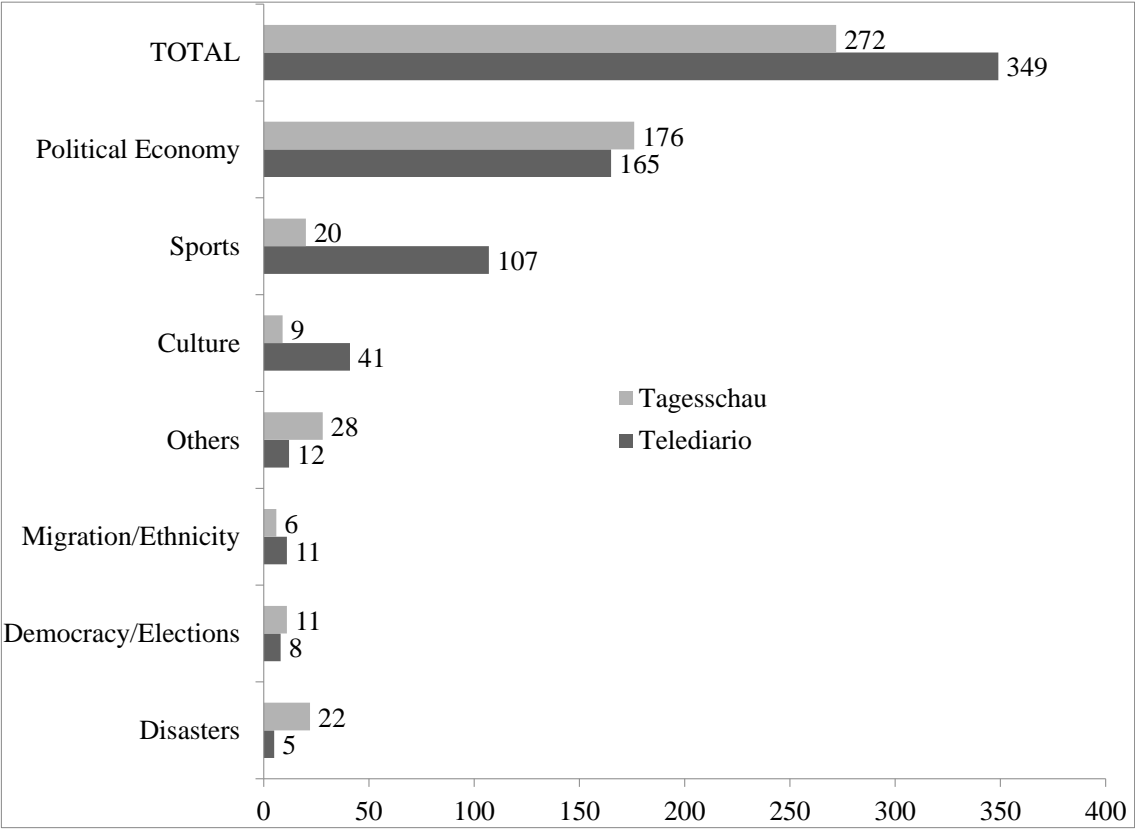


Chart 1. Number of headlines including the name Germany/Spain in the Telediario/Tagesschau. Source: author sources based on data from ARD and RTVE media centres.

Supported by this filtering of keywords, a frequency analysis and topic classification, I have selected example headline data to explore the values and discursive conventions

that enhance the everyday construction of national belonging and alterity through the naming of nations in news. The total amount of the headline corpus could not be reproduced literally in German, Spanish and English translations in the Appendix because of the extensiveness of the material (621 headlines in total). The selection of 32 instances of headline-texts was translated by myself; the original source texts in Spanish and German are found in the Appendix. All instances are numbered, followed by the source and the day of broadcasting in brackets. The national names are highlighted in bold letters, the discursive devices under scrutiny are underlined, while names and original text are marked in italics.

The detailed selection of example headlines has been the result of two filtering processes of the material. First, the previous quantification and categorization of the data allowed a screening of possible particularities within genres (for instance a particular linguistic repertoire in Spanish sports news on Germany), and a judgment of the overall importance of the examples (frequent or rare broadcasting of news employing this repertoire). For instance, Chart 1 shows that economic news in Germany related to Spain is especially significant in absolute terms and that sports news in Spain relating to Germany is statistically significant in comparative terms but also, though to a lesser extent, in absolute terms.

When screening/reading the immediate co-textual environments of the words ‘Germany’ and ‘Spain’, I considered the possibility of applying the news values explained in table 1. This inspiration stems from the methodological framework and the news value categories suggested by Bednarek and Caple (2014: 155-158); it was largely congruent with my own theoretical background, as these authors consider news values as ideologies in their own terms. Based on this exercise, I adapted the categories for the interpretation of the material. Also, different news values have emerged inductively, such as “relatedness” (the connection of two nations in an event) or “competition” (the rivalry of two nations in an event).

News value	Explanation
Negativity	the negative aspects of an event
Timeliness	the relevance of an event in terms of time: recent, ongoing, about to happen, impacting on the present, or seasonal
Proximity	the geographical or cultural nearness of an event
Superlativeness	the maximised or intensified aspects of an event
Eliteness	the high status of individuals, organisations or nations involved in an event
Impact	the significance of an event in terms of its effects/consequences
Novelty	the new and/or unexpected aspects of an event

Personalisation	the personal or 'human' face of an event, including eyewitness reports
Consonance	the stereotypical aspects of an event; adherence to expectations

Table 1. News values. Source: Bednarek and Caple (2014: 155-158)

Daily spotlights of German opponents and bad news from Spain

The first finding of the word frequency analysis is that the discursive binary, Germany as different from Spain, is introduced by means of TV news information on a daily basis to the respective audiences. The *Telediario* used the words 'Germany/Germans' on 349 occasions as a specific, other-nation-centred headline during the two-year period of my enquiry – an average of nearly one headline every two days on Germans/Germany. Spain is less present as a part of the relevant social reality on the *Tagesschau* but still, Spain and Spaniards are habitually referred to on television. A total number of 272 headlines included the words 'Spain/Spanish' during the period of enquiry; this is a headline related to these 'others' every two to three days during the financial crisis.

The mutual newsworthiness of both nations to each other's audiences could be explained using Galtung and Ruge's classic argument that negative events and events concerning "elite nations" are a basic pattern of foreign news (1965: 68-71). Both the "eliteness" of Germany and the "crisis" of Spain was sometimes explicit headline content, as in the following instances.

- 01 The Spanish Eurocrisis (ARD 10/06/2012)
- 02 German gold reserves (RTVE 26/10/2012)
- 03 Success of the German labor-market (ARD 03/03/2012)

The crisis was often Spanish, while success was often German. This also occurred in news concerning the eliteness of a person that was labelled as a national, which again underlined the eliteness of Germany and the crisis of Spain: for instance, the German or Spanish pope, Nobel laureate, or banned judge, as displayed in the following headlines:

- 04 Georg Ratzinger, the elder brother of Benedict XVI (RTVE 27/02/2013)
- 05 Criticisms of writer Günter Grass (RTVE 09/04/2012)

06 Supreme Court in **Spain** sentences judge Garzón to an eleven year employment ban (ARD 09/02/2012)

However, both nations were also newsworthy because of their reciprocal recognition on TV as similar types of national clusters, in terms of their *comparability*. Many messages transmitted that these others were at eye level or that these are the ones you would compare yourself with. Thus, whereas the news value underpinning many headlines was *proximity*, in our case *relatedness* may be a more precise category, as some of the news headlines worked as rhetoric mirrors for the national self. Often, discursive devices of relatedness, interdependence, comparison or contrast were employed, for instance in these headlines:

07 **Spain** already thinks of **Germany** (RTVE 22/01/2013)

08 Risks of the **Spanish** crisis for **Germany** (ARD 07/06/2012)

09 Worries about **Spain**, critique on **Germany** (ARD 31/05/2012)

10 **Spain** goes for **Germany** (RTVE 17/08/2013)

11 This is how pensions are in **Italy, UK** and **Germany** (RTVE 07/06/2013)

12 **Spaniards** in **Germany** (RTVE 08/04/2013)

Routine talking about these others on a daily basis in national terms (there is normally always an issue ‘on’ Germany and Spain during TV evening news) reinforces both the existence and suitability of the category of the homogenous national cluster. This is especially the case when headlines confuse, entangle, or merge political, geographic and socio-cultural borders through language. Language, territory and society (Spanish, Spain, Spaniards and German, Germany, Germans) build a knot of a specific otherness that is mutually reinforced as self-evident in the everyday employment of the nation as a classifier. Individuals, collectivities and even animals are reduced to their nation; their actions and identity related to homogeneous societies, as in the following headlines.

13 Reactions of the **Spanish** to the rescue package (ARD 12/06/2012)

14 De Guindos meets with his **German** counterpart (RTVE 31/05/2012)

15 A **German** hippopotamus in *Cantabria* (RTVE 30/12/2012)

Note also that specific names of individuals and regions (in italics/boldface), when compared with the gross category of a national other, contribute to a dichotomy where

selfhood has an intimate-local character and is opposed to an impersonal or unspecific other. The reduction of the complexity of the others to a bounded mass is the operative contrast for mutual national identity building by means of national media. I may therefore state, following Eric Wolf, that current national news media in Europe constitute a specific practice of stereotyping because they treat nations semantically as “billiard balls” (Wolf 1982: 7; compare also exactly the same terms used by Blommaert 2005: 207).

I now switch my attention from the more non-reflexive or implicit assumptions of nationhood on national TV news to what is explicitly constructed as information or “newness” related to other nations, and to the kind of messages that are absent. When news frequently talks about certain issues in relation to a certain nation, it leads to a semiotic symbiosis of the information (what is happening), and the ontology of a nation (what the other nation “is”; Bednarek and Caple 2014: 137). Thus, the textual environments in which the names ‘Germany’ and ‘Spain’ are employed reflect back onto the meaning of these names.

Also in the data, regular news coverage of each nation was associated with “their” economy. The communicative logic of such labelling is the preference for, and reduction of events to, the interplay of collective actors, the nations, rendered as sources of collective livelihood and subsistence. The “foreign” political-economic units are essentially detached and abstract entities, because they get on stage in terms of the others’ production, employment, finance, business, GDP, investment, budget, labour, trade, taxation, debt, banks, etc. This close association of nations with depersonalized entities, referred to in crude terms (the other appearing merely as a “bank” or an “economy”), contributes to what Herzfeld has called the “awkward character” of outsiders (2005). Nearly fifty per cent of the *Telediario* headlines concerning Germany talk about these others as “an economy”. Even more significantly is the case of the *Tagesschau*, where nearly two-thirds of the headlines reduce Spain and Spaniards to their economic dimension.

16 *Bundestag* decides on **Spain-aid** (ARD 19/07/2012)

17 **Spanish** handling of the debt-crisis (ARD 11/06/2012)

18 Self-employment as a way out: how **Spaniards** deal with the crisis (ARD 12/02/2012)

19 **Spanish** banks need 60 billion Euro (ARD 22/12/2012)

20 **Spanish** banks need massive financial injection (ARD 06/06/2012)

The meaning of the nation-state underlying the names Germany and Spain is a conceptual conjunction of cultural, political and geographical borders. Nationalisms are “ideological constructions seeking to forge a link between [...] cultural group and state” (Eriksen 2010: 120). This link is mutually constitutive and legitimizing, as the existence of a state justifies and reinforces the existence of a community, and the nation justifies and underlines the sovereignty of a state and its geographical boundaries.

Taking this meaning of the word ‘nation’ as a departure, the detected propensity of relegating a political-cultural-geographical entity to an economic entity is an interesting semantic shift in foreign news. An important feature of “domestic” news is culture (religion, leisure, theatre, music, cuisine, fine arts, cinema, life-style, trends, books, housing, and fashion) and politics (mainly party politics and government-opposition controversies); by contrast, news on these aspects of the others is nearly absent in our corpus. Only 3% of news related to Spain in Germany deals with “society and culture”, whereas in the case of headlines dealing with “society and culture” in Germany, this number rises to a comparatively high 12% – something that might be explained by referring to “eliteness” as an intrinsic news value of Germany in Europe’s southern reaches. Nevertheless, during the financial crisis, both national news broadcasts had little to say about the traditions, worldviews, rituals and everyday practices of their European counterpart or its internal political heterogeneity. The same occurs with news topics that potentially reveal the internal diversity of nation-states, such as information related to migrants and minorities. Even the sporadic newsworthiness of socio-cultural issues during the two-year timeframe fits with the stereotypical aspects of the other nation. This “consonance” news value, that adheres to previous expectations of the audience, can be appreciated in the two headlines below.

21 Millions in Christmas-lottery winnings in **Spain** (ARD 22/12/2012).

22 **Germany** in Nazi alert (RTVE 15/11/2011)

The first instance on the Spanish Christmas lottery, considered one of the major lotteries worldwide, is a news vignette from Spain that repeats annually on German news in the

(pre-Christmas) silly season, while the proverbial “German Nazi” is a globally shared cognitive representation.

In addition to this economic reductionism and the hidden or stereotypical references to the others’ “culture”, there is a significant amount of news related to nations in terms of sports, especially in the *Telediario* (31%; related to soccer 22%), and to a less extent on the *Tagesschau* (a 7% share of sports news). Partly, this is due to the greater importance given to soccer by the Spanish broadcaster in general. Nevertheless, the total numbers continue to be surprising. On average, every four days Germany or a German team or player is displayed as relevant opponents to Spain (sometimes to other nations). This implies that the news value operating here is a special dimension of “proximity”, namely “competition”, the rivalry or enmity of two nations in relation to a sports event. The following are examples of soccer news on Germany in the *Telediario*.

- 23 **Germany** dominates **European** soccer (RTVE 02/05/2013)
- 24 The **German** curse beat **Madrid** again (RTVE 25/04/2013)
- 25 The double **hispanic-german** duel begins (RTVE 22/04/2013)
- 26 The **German** machinery crushes **Brasil** (RTVE 11/08/2011)
- 27 **Germany** came close to the **Spanish** record (RTVE 30/06/2012)

The underlined words transmit a warlike atmosphere of threat, violence and ferocity. In addition, these martial attributes are semantically associated with the confrontation of nations, as the names of teams and players often are used as synonymous with the nation. This also explains why these headlines are timeless representations of historical inherited struggles of ‘us’ against ‘them’. Taken together, this again reinforces the mutual labelling based on national dichotomies.

A basic news value in any event is ‘negativity’. It is no surprise that negative headlines were abundant during the peak of the European financial crisis. Nevertheless, the sheer amount and frequency of negative news on the air during the examined period, especially in news on Spain in Germany, is worth highlighting. Two-thirds of the *Tagesschau* messages related to Spain in our corpus can be related to the “crisis” (either literally or in the context), and are associated with content related to unemployment, protests, austerity politics. US rating agencies make up 14 headlines during the two year period alone. Including the category ‘disasters’, more than 80% of the news on Spain is

bad news in our corpus. The following headlines from the *Tagesschau* and the *Telediario* give an impression of negativity as a basic news value, underpinning national otherness.

- 28 Hopeless situation: youth unemployment in Spain (ARD 04/07/2013)
- 29 US-rating-agency Moody's downgrades the Spanish creditworthiness (ARD 14/10/2012)
- 30 Living conditions during the Spanish crisis (ARD 12/05/2013)
- 31 German mistrust (RTVE 07/08/2012)
- 32 German benefactor (RTVE 02/03/2012)

As may be easily seen, a moralizing language is abundant in these negative headlines through the employment of words such as trust, hopelessness, or the German word *Schuld*, which may mean both ‘guilt’ and ‘debt’. In return, much of the negative *Telediario* headlines on Germany read as a response from the periphery to the core. From this comparative angle, Spanish “hopelessness and crisis” on German TV meet with German “mistrust and benefactors” on Spanish TV.

Conclusions

The main aim of this paper has been to explore, through the comparative lens Germany/Spain, the ways in which national TV news messages employed nationhood as a basic social ordering principle during the peak of the European financial crisis. A core subject of anthropology (examining the construction of group belonging through cross-cultural comparison) was investigated using a linguistic method (the discourse analysis of mass media messages). I suggest that such a trans-disciplinary formula fits in with recent discussions in media anthropology and CDA about the everydayness of official idiom and debates over the difference between elite intentions and the popular effects of discursive identity constructs. The common off-stage/on-display distinction regarding the mass mediation of cultural intimacy vs. alterity has come increasingly under fire (Herzfeld 2005: 44). This makes it important for linguists to engage with some ethnographical themes and findings, and for anthropologists to do the same with some linguistic methods and subjects.

In the current paper, I combine a detailed analysis of news values in headline phrases with corpus linguistic analysis, such as quantification of word frequency and distribution of news topics. Basing myself on the frequency of news texts in their media landscapes, I have argued that Spain and Germany work as important daily mirrors, reflecting the respective populations' mutual imagination of what their countries represent. I show that otherness is constituted by a foreign news broadcasting routine that addresses other nations as "economies" or "competitors", in opposition to inward looking notions, like nationhood in "cultural" terms. The prevalence of "bad news" concerning the other nation, in combination with news values such as rivalry (competition for scarce symbolic items), consonance (adherence to expectable stereotypes), and relatedness (consequences for "us" of the others' actions) were some of my findings. Taken together, these neither planned nor intended outcomes of news reporting, as I understand them, contribute to the perpetuation of a persuasive, 'ordinary' nationalist ideology. This ideology obscures the complexity of human social organization involving power, gender, class, age, religion, ethnicity, and individual agency (to name but a few aspects), by substituting complexity with a totalizing binary code of "we/they" in national terms.

The news delivery under scrutiny (foreign news reporting on the core/periphery during the European financial crisis) and the differences between the news formats (for instance, the duration of the programs) could be seen as limiting the scope of the present contribution. In spite of this research initially being inspired by my own everyday experience as a viewer of the *Tagesschau* and the *Telediario* (in this order), my contribution does neither include ethnographic data on the intimate social environments of consumers/producers of news texts nor any multi-modal analyses, even though either of such exercises could be important in a future elaboration of my argument. Additionally, it may be held that the social significance of the narratives broadcast by traditional media such as TV, has shrunk considerably over recent years. Nevertheless, the viewing stats of national TV evening news in Germany and Spain, together with the centrality of the *Tagesschau* and the *Telediario*, may allow for some modest generalizations regarding semiotic practices of stereotyping in Germany, Spain and beyond. Taken together with my calculated overlooking of some of the standard focuses they may be precisely that which adds originality to my argument.

Talking about the state reifies it (Herzfeld 2005: 1). Nationalism and its reflection in nation-centred media are not just reactions to globalization, express a far right or far left ideology, or represent an ethno-political claim for self-governance. Nationalism continues to be a basic sense-maker of social belonging in the contemporary world, a crucial pattern of stereotyping in which not only ‘nationalists’ or the ‘elites’ engage. Thus, nationalism has a more “banal” (Billig 1995) dimension to it than commonly appreciated; my data suggests that the everyday reification of national clusters in TV news is widely congruent with common-sense categories among the wider public. This is in accordance with Stuart Hall’s argument from the 1970s that “newspaper[s], then, do not produce new knowledge about the world. They produce recognitions of the world as I have already learned to appropriate it” (Hall, cited in Davis 2004: 42).

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Appendix

The Appendix contains a selection of 32 instances of original headline-texts (in Spanish and German language) extracted from a corpus of 621 headlines including the word Germany/Germans in the *Telediario* (RTVE) and Spain/Spanish in the *Tagesschau* (ARD). Both cases refer to the evening edition during a 2 year period from July 2011 to August 2013 as extracted by the author from the ARD and RTVE online media centres. The numbers match with the English translations in the text. The source and the day of broadcasting are indicated in brackets.

- 01 Spaniens Eurokrise (ARD 10/06/2012)
- 02 Reservas de oro alemanas (RTVE 26/10/2012)
- 03 Éxito del mercado laboral alemán (ARD 03/03/2012)

- 04 Georg Ratzinger, el hermano mayor de Benedicto XVI (RTVE 27/02/2013)
- 05 Críticas al escritor Günter Grass (RTVE 09/04/2012)
- 06 Oberster Gerichtshof in Spanien verurteilt Richter Garzón zu elfjährigem Berufsverbot (ARD 09/02/2012)
- 07 España ya piensa en Alemania (RTVE 22/01/2013)
- 08 Risiken der spanischen Krise für Deutschland (ARD 07/06/2012)
- 09 Sorge um Spanien, Kritik an Deutschland (ARD 31/05/2012)
- 10 España, a por Alemania (RTVE 17/08/2013)
- 11 Así son las pensiones en Italia, Reino Unido y Alemania (RTVE 07/06/2013)
- 12 Españoles en Alemania (RTVE 08/04/2013)
- 13 Reaktionen der Spanier zum Rettungsschirm (ARD 12/06/2012)
- 14 De Guindos se reúne con su homólogo alemán (RTVE 31/05/2012)
- 15 Un hipopótamo alemán en Cantabria (RTVE 30/12/2012)
- 16 Bundestag entscheidet über Spanien-Hilfe (ARD 19/07/2012)
- 17 Spaniens Umgang mit der Schuldenkrise (ARD 11/06/2012)
- 18 Ausweg Selbstständigkeit: Wie Spanier mit der Krise umgehen (ARD 12/02/2012)
- 19 Spanische Banken benötigen 60 Milliarden Euro (ARD 22/12/2012)
- 20 Spanische Banken benötigen gewaltige Finanzspritze (ARD 06/06/2012)
- 21 Millionengewinne bei Weihnachtslotterie in Spanien (ARD 22/12/2012).
- 22 Alemania en alerta por los nazis (RTVE 15/11/2011)
- 23 Alemania domina el fútbol europeo (RTVE 02/05/2013)
- 24 La maldición alemana pudo de nuevo con el Madrid (RTVE 25/04/2013)
- 25 Comienza el doble duelo hispano-alemán (RTVE 22/04/2013)
- 26 La maquinaria alemana tritura a Brasil (RTVE 11/08/2011)
- 27 Alemania se quedó cerca del récord de España (RTVE 30/06/2012)
- 28 Auswegslose Situation: Jugendarbeitslosigkeit in Spanien (ARD 04/07/2013)
- 29 US-Rating-Agentur Moody's stuft Kreditwürdigkeit Spaniens herab (ARD 14/10/2012)
- 30 Lebensbedingungen in der spanischen Krise (ARD 12/05/2013)
- 31 Desconfianza alemana (RTVE 07/08/2012)
- 32 Benefactor alemán (RTVE 02/03/2012)