GENDER ASYMMETRIES IN NEWS REPORTS

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Abstract

Women have traditionally been defined in journalistic studies as the 'unaccessed voice group' due to their underrepresentation in most media coverage, a fact commonly described in linguistics as 'symbolic annihilation' (Caldas-Coulthard 2002; Armstrong 2004). Although many scholars state that linguistic stereotypes have been weakening over time, there is a prevailing view that women are still experiencing linguistic discrimination in the age of digital storytelling. This paper discusses gender inequality by means of an in-depth study of females as sources of information in newspaper discourse, based on a corpus of 68 online news items published in four broadsheet British and Spanish newspapers: *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *El Mundo* and *El País*. The research mainly focuses on the possible relation between the gender of the source and that of the news reporter, as well as the tendencies in the depiction of female sources in reporting segments. The analysis reveals a continuing underrepresentation of women, though less noticeable in the Spanish news group. Contrary to possible expectations, both corpora coincide in defining female sources on a professional basis. The results also suggest that the predominance of male sources of information, rather than being tied to the 'familiarity' criterion, is institutionally biased.

Keywords: journalistic studies, media coverage, linguistic stereotypes, source of information, gender.

Resumen

Tradicionalmente las mujeres han sido definidas en estudios periodísticos como 'la voz inaccesible del grupo' debido a su infrarrepresentación en la mayor parte de la cobertura mediática, un hecho que se ha descrito comúnmente en lingüística como 'aniquilación simbólica' (Caldas-Coulthard 2002; Armstrong 2004). Aunque muchos expertos afirman que los estereotipos lingüísticos se han ido reduciendo con el tiempo, hay una postura predominante que establece que las mujeres todavía están experimentando discriminación lingüística en la era de la narración digital. Este artículo aborda la desigualdad de género por medio de un estudio exhaustivo de las mujeres como fuentes de información en el discurso periodístico, basado en un corpus de 68 noticias online publicadas en cuatro periódicos británicos y españoles en línea de gran tirada: *The Times, The Guardian, El Mundo* y *El País.* La investigación se centra principalmente en la posible relación entre el género de la fuente y el del periodista, así como en las tendencias en la representación de las fuentes femeninas en los segmentos citativos. El análisis revela la continua infrarrepresentación de la mujer, aunque este hecho es menos evidente en el grupo de noticias españolas. En contra de posibles expectativas, ambos corpus coinciden en definir las fuentes femeninas según su profesión. Los resultados también sugieren que el predominio de las fuentes masculinas de información, en lugar de estar ligado al criterio de la 'familiaridad', se debe al sesgo institucional.

Palabras clave: estudios periodísticos, cobertura mediática, estereotipos lingüísticos, fuente de información, género.

1. Introduction

The question of how women are represented in discourse has been a recurring motif in feminist writings since the advent of the women's movement in the middle decades of the twentieth century, which has contributed to the creation of a rich vein of scholarship on the issue of women depiction in journalistic texts (Black 2015: 160). Although some scholars indicate that linguistic stereotypes have been weakening over time (Popp et al. 2003: 323), there is a prevailing view that women are still experiencing linguistic discrimination, not only in the way they are said to use language, but also in the way language depicts them, a theme subjected to a process of re-examination.

In the case of journalism, the language used in the mass media industry is considered as an important source of role models and, consequently, it is usually regarded as key in the reinforcement of "gender segregation and inequalities" (Kitzinger et al. 2008: 1). Newspapers appear then to "continue to encode bias

and legitimate assumptions about linguistic behaviour and social asymmetries" (Caldas-Coulthard 2002: 305), which jeopardises the image of women.

Several measures have been proposed to beat gender inequality and violence against women in the media today. For instance, the project entitled #HerNetHerRights launched in 2017 by the European Women's Lobby aimed at actively fighting violence against women in online spaces, as well as providing policy recommendations to combat abusers online (DG IPOL Policy Departments 2018: 31). There is also an interesting tool that struggles for equality in the media, the software *Bechdel Filter*, which is currently being tested in UK journals. In essence, this software is used

> to analyse the text of stories to identify the proportion of subjects and sources who are women, the proportion of female pronouns, and the gender of the journalist […] [in order to] enable journalists and section editors to 'sense-check' the gender balance of their stories and sections quickly and easily, and to thereby identify and redress any inappropriate imbalances. (DG IPOL Policy Departments 2018: 38)

Therefore, this software provides news reporters with a quantitative indication of the degree of gender underrepresentation as a measure to promote understanding of the need for effective action. Since the mass media is defined as the fourth power in democratic societies, it is crucial for digital broadcasting to tackle the social problems women are experiencing today and to raise awareness in the general public sector, these actions being a great impetus to the fight against gendered discrimination and abuse.

Gender imbalance is not only reflected in the media, but it is also present in the working environment. In fact, the European Commission elaborated a gender balance on corporate boards in 2015, which concluded that "women are [still] outnumbered by men in leadership positions in the corporate sector in the EU", constituting "a waste of talent and a loss of economic growth potential". To minimise the disparities universally favouring the male, scholars have suggested ways to help redress women discrimination in the media sector. For example, following a top-down approach, i.e. "ensuring women occupy all roles in the newsroom to a commitment to diversity from the top", "not simply filling low-level research or editorial roles" (Davidson 2016). A study released by the non-profit organisation Catalyst (2014) proved that "companies with a higher representation of women in senior management positions financially outperform companies with proportionally fewer women at the top". Thus, having a larger and more diverse personnel in the newsroom may encompass financial benefits. The journalist Casserly (2016), on her part, posits providing new role models for women as leaders, as well as putting them on the political agenda so as to make the media industry more inclusive and thereby guarantee diversity in the newsroom.

When analysing gender discrimination in the media, it is well worth remembering that women journalists had more difficulties than male reporters to break into the broadcast news field decades ago. Indeed, as Irvin points out, "in the late 1970s and early 1980s, only 13% of reporters were women, whereas today about half of reporters are women" (2013: 39-40). Although these figures have slightly increased over the years, women are still experiencing gender inequality in the media sector, as indicated above. As an example, "women reporters are frequently relegated to soft news stories, like health and entertainment news, whereas their male counterparts are given stories of political and international importance" (Irvin 2013: 39). In fact, Cullity and Younger found out in a research carried out in 2009 that in news stories featuring hard political news on the BBC website, women and men were present in a ratio of 1:4.

As I indicated above, gender imbalance does not only affect women journalists, but also women as sources of information in newspaper discourse, as in this report published by *The Times* (2014a): "'He was very sorry about the loss, especially for her parents, the suffering they are going through,' Ms van Schalkwyk said", where the source of evidence is a female entity. One of the factors that has been mentioned as a potential source of women underrepresentation in current media is the gender of the news reporter, mostly men. There is a widespread belief that female writers choose female sources because both parties share the same gender, i.e. as a matter of the familiarity (Armstrong 2004; Irvin 2013). A study conducted by Liebler and Smith (1997) of 159 stories broadcast on major news networks demonstrated that female information sources were more likely to appear in stories reported by women. Zoch and Turk support this fact by stating that "female journalists might attach greater credibility to female sources than do male reporters and thus use proportionally more of them in their stories" (1998: 772). However, Irvin found out in a research on the 2012 Presidential Election in the United States that "female reporters [rely] on males as expert sources more than male reporters" (2013: 39). At all events, evidence seems to indicate that the gender of the news reporter "is a statistically significant predictor of the gender of the source given attention and emphasis within the story", which may affect the retention of traditional sex-role stereotypes and thus constitutes a field subjected to further review (Armstrong 2004: 143).

The present paper on sex-role inequality considers the gender of the writer as a factor which hypothetically influences the presence of females as sources of information in the media. In order to prove the actual extent of the connection between gender and news coverage, an in-depth corpus-based study of female sources of information is carried out. The research is based on a corpus of 68 online news items published in British and Spanish quality papers. It is organised

as follows: section 2 discusses the literature on the role of women in journalistic discourse and then the way female sources may connect to certain paradigms of gender disparities in news stories is analysed in section 3. Section 4 explains and justifies the sort of data studied in the corpus. The quantitative results and discussion are presented in section 5 and, finally, section 6 is devoted to the conclusions and suggests lines for further research in this field. Due to the relatively small size of the collection of reporting segments analysed, the value of the results is limited with regard to an ultimate explanation for the connection between the gender of the source and that of the news writer, though I launch some preliminary findings in the paper as a prelude to having more consistent results.

2. Women in journalistic discourse

Journalism is an excellent arena for the analysis of gender-related differences in speech style since the media still perpetuates certain sex-role stereotypes, though in a more subtle way than in former times (Hinnosaar 2017). Women have been traditionally described by their "irrationality, familial dependence, powerlessness and sexual and physical excess" (Fowler 1994: 95), and regarding job functions conventional stereotypical ideas tended to relate them to "specific domestic situations, such as housewives [or] mothers", while men were more likely to be identified by positions of power in society (Popa and Gavriliu 2015: 1203), that is, "*outside* the home and family" (Fowler 1994: 102).

Modern journalistic style guides try to diminish those generally-accepted attributes given to women. As a matter of fact, the *Reuters Handbook of Journalism* (2008) advises news writers to take into consideration the following:

> Do not assume police, firefighters or soldiers are men. Do not refer to a woman's looks, hairstyle or clothing unless the details are relevant to the story and similar remarks would be made about men. Where possible use the same term for men and women, e.g., actor, comedian, poet; not actress, comedienne, poetess.

These pieces of advice aimed at preventing the use of sexist language are also in accordance with *The Guardian and Observer Style Guide*, which was published in 2015. This style guide recommends writers be cautious about the use of certain terms to describe the profession of female entities since they are considered to "reinforce outdated stereotypes", more specifically "businessmen, housewives, male nurse, woman driver, woman (lady!) doctor". Moreover, it suggests not "gratuitously describ[ing] a woman as a 'mother-of-three' [as] family details and marital status are only relevant in stories about families or marriage". The basis of all these suggestions lies in the tenet of inclusiveness, i.e. the avoidance of

taken-for-granted assumptions uncritically accepted with respect to "the range of roles women can inhabit" (Black 2015: 160).

According to Caldas-Coulthard, the portrayal of conventional female work may find its source in the fact that women are "generally dissociated from power structures", whilst men are mostly "represented speaking in their public or professional roles" (2004: 198). By extension, women in the press media tend to be depicted "in terms of marital or family relations, especially in their relationship with a man", that is, on a personal basis; as opposed to men, who are usually "glossed by their professional designations or position in the government or in some kind of public institution" (2004: 205).

As a consequence of the above, readers may end up assigning, almost unconsciously, gender stereotypes regarding the occupation status of the information source. For instance, the readership might assume that a police officer quoted in a news article is male, even though the gender has not been explicitly mentioned in the discourse (Armstrong and Nelson 2005: 822). Not only that, "the appearance in discourse of a large number of expressions mentioning powerful social categories and referring to men as incumbents of those categories" can instil the idea that "this is the natural order of things, and so strengthens resistance to women actually being admitted to the positions concerned" (Fowler 1994: 104). Therefore, the negative portrayal of women together with the realm in which they are usually framed in journalistic discourse may impact on readers' role identification. Besides, the existing female depiction may reinforce the maintenance of the status quo which prevents the rise of women from positions of power. The media serves then as a 'cultural looking glass' that shows the social and cultural patterns that are ingrained in people's minds, which, in turn, may affect the readership's cognition.

In terms of the study at hand, this paper examines newspaper coverage of women to flesh out which factor(s) can be regarded as predictor(s) for the occurrence of female sources of information in the mass media industry, which will be discussed in section 3 below. The main objective is to prove the actual extent of the misrepresentation of women in the contemporary quality press as was described in the traditional literature, considering the gender of the writer as a potential factor that influences their presence as sources of information in news coverage.

3. Female sources of information

News articles are traditionally required to respond to "the five W's and H's" of events, namely who, when, where, how and why (Bell 2001: 175). The detachment from the events in terms of space makes writers depend largely on those who have

participated (either directly or indirectly), witnessed or just have an "overall knowledge or demonstrated competence" regarding the state of events to be reported, the so-called sources of information (Armstrong and Nelson 2005: 820).

From the array of available sources, "those with economic or political power are more likely to influence news reports than those who lack power", and therefore, they are more likely to be contacted by journalists (Zoch and Turk 1998: 764). Despite the growing participation of women in public life, the news is still largely male-dominated and the editorial leaders tend not to reflect in the news of the day the wide range of cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds present in our society. Instead, "public figures and other prominent people generally make news" (Armstrong and Gao 2011: 493). Hence, news coverage is dominated by the presence of men if compared to the number of women portrayed, generally for a male audience (2011: 492).

According to Armstrong, "women have historically been both underrepresented and misrepresented in media coverage", a fact which has been commonly described in linguistics as a 'symbolic annihilation' (2004: 139). This concept, first proposed by Tuchman et al. (1978) and limited to television, implies that "portrayals of minority groups in mass media are generally superficial, distorted, or absent in news coverage compared to portrayals of members of dominant groups" (Armstrong and Boyle 2011: 155). Thus, it appears that there is "a rhetoric of silencing and alienation at work" as regards the way women are (under)represented in news coverage, making female sources part of the "unaccessed voice group" in the newsroom (Caldas-Coulthard 2002: 304, 307).

Despite occupying more and more high-level positions, women's progress has not been completely mirrored by the press media, probably due to the lack of newsworthy consideration when sourcing, which correlates with past beliefs (Armstrong et al. 2010: 90). According to Caldas-Coulthard, quality papers appear to be influenced by the traditional ideology of "male supremacy", excluding women from the speaking position (2002: 304). Thus, it seems that "men dominate news coverage" (Armstrong et al. 2010: 80), a statement that applies not only to news sources of information, but also to the television newscast representation of sources and news reporters in general. Indeed, according to the press release on progress for women in news media published by the UN Women in 2015, "women make up about 50 per cent of the general population" but the percentage of the persons heard, read about or seen in newspaper, television and radio news drops to 24.

Not only are women outnumbered by men, but they also seem not to fit properly in the traditional definition of 'experts', in the sense of sources with official status quoted on a professional basis (Armstrong and Nelson 2005: 831; Irvin 2013: 39). A study by Freedman et al. (2008) of governor's races in nine states discovered

that only 10% of all experts used were female political experts. Besides, more recent work in gender scholarship concludes that women just comprise 20% of the experts interviewed in the news (*Global Media Monitoring Project* 2015). These figures appear to confirm that men and women are treated differently as regards the level of expertise when sourcing information.

In addition, the citation segment that depicts female voices is said to be more negatively charged and prone to reductive portrayal. Two relevant references are Black's (2015) analysis of the representation of offending women in the Irish press and Gidengil and Everitt's (2003) study on the news coverage of the 1993 and 1997 Canadian elections. There is in fact a "gendered mediation" in the sense that news reports treat the male as normative and, in turn, women are more subjected to evaluation and interpretation (Gidengil and Everitt 2003: 2; Black 2015: 160). In particular, Gidengil and Everitt proved that the speech of female leaders was more likely to be reported using verbs with negative nuances such as 'lambast', 'rebuff' or 'hammer', rather than more neutral verbs such as 'say' or 'tell' (2003: 226-227).

Numerous researchers have attempted to isolate probable predictors for the existing gender disparity in the news information sources, mainly focused on the examination of sources themselves, authorship and subjects in news content. Four possible theories have been put forth to explain the way news content is shaped: accessibility, familiarity, time pressure and institutional bias (Turk 1987; Liebler and Smith 1997; Armstrong 2004; Armstrong and Nelson 2005), which will be defined below.

Accessibility (proximity or availability) is thought to be one of the central criteria to select the source. It primarily claims that those who are appointed as spokespeople or representatives in their companies or government agencies, generally high-ranking executives, are routinely the ones appearing in news content (Armstrong 2004: 142). Considering the present gender imbalance, women would have less chance of appearing in the news due to their low-level working role in their agencies which is far from serving as spokespeople, whereas male sources are more likely to be accessible and/or available since they tend to hold more positions of power, that is, due to their prominence value (Armstrong 2004: 148, 149).

Besides, since men tend to belong to 'the elite', male sources commonly fit in the criterion of "suitability", which means that they are considered to be appropriate for supplying "a great deal of information without unduly taxing their organizations or the resources of journalists, [as they are] more likely to meet standard definitions of reliability, trustworthiness, authoritativeness and articulateness" (Diedong 2016: 43). This leads us to think that news reporters tend to produce biased coverage through their focus on high-profile officials, commonly men, whilst almost disregarding the remaining portion of society, women in particular (Silver 1986: 145).

Further, sourcing powerful members of society in the press implies reciprocity, in the sense that

> [t]he media conventionally expect and receive the right of access to the statements of these individuals, because the individuals have roles in the public domain; and reciprocally these people receive access to the columns of the papers when they wish to air their views. (Fowler 1994: 22)

This biased treatment of sources of information appears therefore to legitimate the status quo, defined by the underrepresentation (and misrepresentation) of female voices as part of the unaccessed news group.

The *Global Media Monitoring Project* did interesting research in 2015 on the kind of roles performed by women in digital news (figure 1). It concluded that there is "a breakdown of the people by sex, by the roles they fulfil in stories published on news websites" (2015: 11). This study confirmed that among all news sources women are "likely to appear as subjects and as persons interviewed based on personal experience in online published stories", providing evidence for the assumption that women commonly do not belong to the elite group. As a matter of fact, according to this research the vast majority of women included in news published by the web are portrayed as popular opinion providers rather than experts or spokespeople (2015: 11), as may be seen in figure 1, depicted by the author of this paper from thee data provided in the publication.

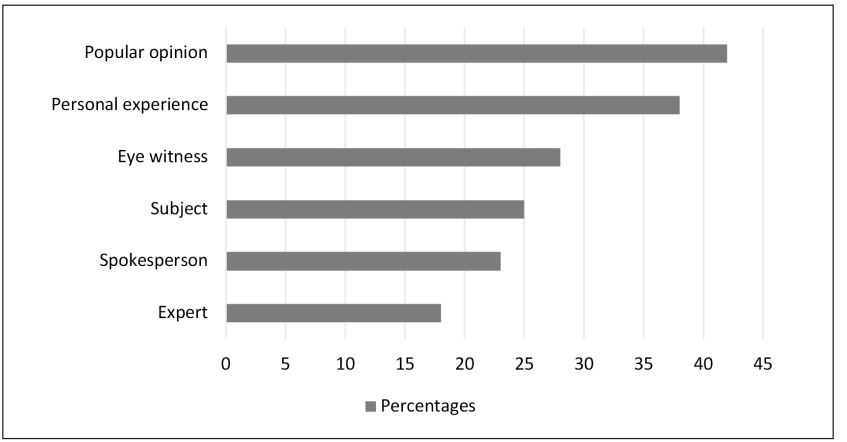

Figure 1. Distribution of female sources of information in the media by function (source: *Global Media Mentoring Project* 2015)

The unequal coverage of women in media content has also been justified alluding to the 'familiarity' criterion. According to it, journalists tend to seek "sources that [they] know instead of seeking out sources with a more diverse background" (Armstrong and Nelson 2005: 832). Thus, newspaper reporters appear to employ sources of their same gender in their news stories with whom they seem to have a better cordial relationship (Armstrong 2004). Considering women do not hold as many positions of power as men in their media agencies, nor in the departments that are contacted to report the evidence, and given the fact that the relationship between reporters (mostly men) and sources serves as a starting point for journalists in determining from whom information is sought (Gans 2004), statistically women must be quoted less in the press media. This line of thought may also lead us to deduce that female writers would use more female sources in their news articles, an issue which would deserve a comprehensive examination.

Gender inequality in news coverage has also been explained on the basis of time pressure. Journalists commonly refer to the underlying reason of time constraints and working to deadlines to account for the lack of diversity in news sources of information (Zoch and Turk 1998: 764). As was indicated above, reporters tend to get into contact with the first available sources, normally male spokespeople appointed by their agencies, which results in the disparity in treatment between men and women relative to source representation.

Finally, another key indicator of the appearance of male source is the criterion of 'institutional bias', i.e. the organisational-level influences and group-level decisions within the editorial department which decides who and what constitutes news, affecting the retention of traditional sex-role stereotypes in news coverage (Armstrong 2004: 149). This principle implies a dispute between the news writer's own criterion and the one imposed by the news organisational structures, typically occupied by male top-executives. The argument of the institutional bias would justify the fact that "although women may constitute a critical mass in network newsrooms, their presence has seemingly had little impact on the way news is reported" (Liebler and Smith 1997: 66). Following Armstrong and Boyle, "agents for social change generally seek power, recognition, and favorable treatment, but the existing social system —and those who hold power positions within it— seeks to maintain control" (2011: 158). The institutional conventions appear then to be aimed at preserving the male viewpoint, more particularly, they seem to strengthen social conventions concerning a male-dominated coverage that relegates women to secondary importance (Armstrong and Boyle 2011: 156). Given this scenario, one might infer that even though female writers report news or occupy high-level positions in the departments that are contacted by news agencies, the status quo will be kept, i.e. driving the story selection from a male-centric newsroom.

The incidence of some of these paradigms will be scrutinised in this research in order to ascertain the level of women's underrepresentation in media coverage, concretely the way female sourcing and representation may be affected by certain predictors.

4. Data and methodology

The corpus of the present investigation comprises contemporary articles published in four broadsheet newspapers in Spain and Great Britain: *El Mundo*, *El País, The Times* and *The Guardian*. To simplify data collection, I opted for digital news published during a two-month period (from May 7 to June 30, 2014); in that time I randomly chose a total number of 68 articles with an extension ranging from 164 to 1,122 words in length, including headlines and subheadings. The British and Spanish press constitute a corpus with a total number of 40,478 words (20,001 and 20,477 words, respectively), comprising a total sum of 519 and 461 reporting expressions, respectively. Both corpora were manually-annotated in an Excel database, which in essence categorised reporting expressions with regard to the gender of the writer who by-lined the news article: male, female, both or the equitable representation of both genders (e.g. Jill Treanor and Larry Elliott) and unknown, which refers to press agencies, such as 'EFE'. The database also included reference to the type of source of the reported information, comprising its animacy value (human vs. inanimate), the specification of the source gender (female, male or unknown) and the general way the source is described in the reporting segment, for example 'The Finnish prime minister [source head on professional basis], Alexander Stubb' (*The Times* 2014b). The category of 'unknown' sources alludes to plural and/or collective sources, such as 'authorities' or 'police', as well as reporting expressions whose source is non-specified ('apparently') or inanimate ('Israel radio'), in which case the gender identity of the source of information does not fit in the conventional female-male dichotomy.

Furthermore, for sampling purposes I restricted my study to journalistic texts whose primary concern was to inform the readership about a particular happening, i.e. articles which do not overtly persuade readers' perception of the events in a particular direction (as editorials do); the news sections chosen for the research have been Sports, Education, Economy, International News and National News.

Regarding the portrayal of female sources in the citation segment, these are some of the common patterns found in my corpus: social / courtesy title + surname ('Mrs Merkel', 'Ms van Schalkwyk', 'Dame Ellen MacArthur'); full name ('Yvette van Schalkwyk', 'Montserrat González Fernández'); surname ('Lundgren', 'Colau'); definite article + head on a professional basis ('the president', 'la juez' [the judge]),

among others. In the case of males, these sources of information are also usually depicted by courtesy title followed by the surname ('Dr Carter', 'Mr Cameron'), as well as their full name ('Alberto Casillas Asenjo') and surname ('Farage'); the portrayal of men by mentioning the profession is much more common ('the Conservative Leader', 'the Foreign Secretary'), especially in the Spanish corpus.

The data seeks to clarify whether or not the new media confirms the periphery roles incarnated in female sources of information as was described in the literature, along with an analysis of women portrayal and their relation to the gender of the writer.

Two research questions are thus formulated:

RQ1: Does a contemporary corpus still preserve traditional sex-role stereotypes?

RQ2: Is the gender of the writer a potential factor that influences the presence of women in news coverage?

5. Results and discussion

The quantitative results for the different source categories concerning the gender parameter in the British and Spanish press are shown in table 1. Since the number of words in each group of newspapers differs, the results are given in both raw numbers (N) and frequency per thousand words (R) in order to normalise the data.

Gender of the source	British press 20,001 words		Spanish press 20,477 words		P
	N	R	N	R	
Female	34	1.70	59	2.88	0.0010
Male	270	13.50	200	9.77	0.0072
Unknown	215	10.75	202	9.86	0.4766
Total	519	25.95	461	22.51	

Table 1. Distribution of information sources in the British and Spanish press

The overall presence of female information sources is reduced in comparison with the presence of male counterparts, whose distribution in both the British and the Spanish corpora is extremely statistically-significant ($P<0.05$) according to the chi-square test. This finding suggests that there has been little progress in comparison with the "biased and imbalanced gender portrayal in old media" which depicted women "consistently less frequently than men" (Armstrong and Gao 2011: 491).

The underrepresentation of women in the press media is also noticeable if comparing the ratio per thousand words for female and male sources in the two news groups (1.70 vs. 13.50 and 2.88 vs. 9.77 in the British and the Spanish press, respectively), with a difference of 11.80 in the case of the British corpus. This fact might indicate a greater approval for the use of men playing the role of experts as a newsworthy marker on the part of the British media reporters, for instance, "A Coast Guard spokesman in Boston said: 'I can confirm that the United States Coast Guard is resuming the search at the request of the British government'" (*The Times* 2014c).

The distribution of newspaper reporters in the two corpora concerning the gender factor is registered in figure 2 below. Tokens have been divided into the following categories: 'male', 'female', 'both' or equitable representation of both genders, and 'unknown (press agencies)', which refers to those articles whose story content is by-lined by the press agency, for instance, 'Associated Press in Bethlehem' or 'EFE'.

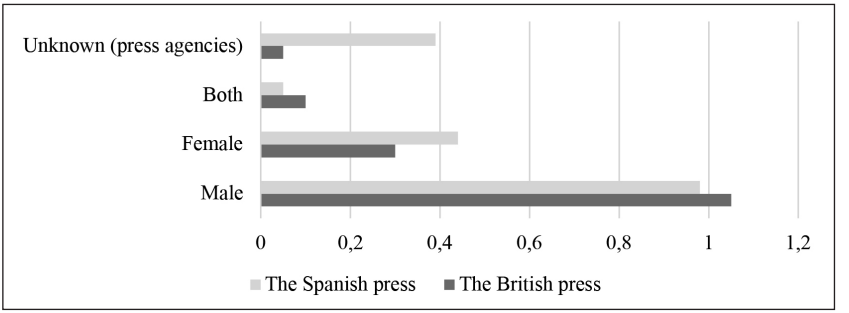

Figure 2. Distribution of news writers concerning the gender parameter (ratio per thousand words)

Considering the results obtained from this analysis, one can infer that there is a general trend to specify the author of the article; in particular, this figure shows that the presence of men vastly outnumbers female authorship in the British and Spanish corpora (21 out of 30 and 20 out of 38 total number of occurrences, respectively). However, the Spanish news industry seems to be more prone to gender balance in the newsroom.

The use of reporting depending on the gender of the journalist is shown in table 2 below. As may be deduced, male writers are more prone to cite other sources of information, particularly in the Spanish press (the comparison between the Spanish

and the British press is statistically-significant [P<0.05] according to the chi-square test). In this news group male writers present a difference of 7.79 points in the ratio per thousand words when compared to the presence of their female counterparts.

Writer's gender	British press 20,001 words		Spanish press 20,477 words		P
	Information sources		Information sources		
	N	R	N	R	
Female	73	3.65	107	5.22	0.0127
Male	113	5.65	266	13.01	
Total	186	9.30	373	18.23	

Table 2. The use of reporting with respect to the gender of the news writer

Table 3 further analyses the issue of gender by means of a comparative study of the gender of the writer and the information source.

Writer's gender	British press 20,001 words				Spanish press 20,477 words				P	
	Female sources		Male sources		Female sources		Male sources		Female sources	Male sources
	N	R	N	R	N	R	N	R		
Female	12	0.60	61	3.05	25	1.22	44	2.15	0.0053	0.5810
Male	21	1.05	181	9.05	30	1.46	122	5.96	0.0370	0.0204
Total	33	1.65	242	12.10	55	2.68	166	8.11		

Table 3. The gender of the writer and the information source: a comparative analysis

Male journalists appear to advocate for reporting more male voices in both news groups, 9.05 and 5.96 in the British and the Spanish press, respectively, which leads to a statistically-significant difference (the p-value has been obtained below 0.05 after comparing the number of male sources reported by male reporters and the rest of occurrences in both corpora). Although the distribution of female writers using male sources does not lead to a statistically-significant difference according to the chi-square test, women writers also seem to be inclined to use male voices as information sources in the newspaper articles. Contrary to possible expectations, the presence of female sources reported by women writers is reduced in both corpora, especially in the British press (12 out of 33 total number of occurrences). This data further indicates a more noticeable presence of female

sources in Spanish than in British digital news, presenting a statistically-significant difference. Therefore, it appears that women reporters still maintain the societal status quo which is male-dominated and, accordingly, "even if women have power over their stories, their work looks much like that of their male counterparts" (Liebler and Smith 1997: 65). As a matter of fact, most work in gender scholarship argues that "the disparity between male and female portrayals is an outcome of a male-dominated culture, where men are the decision makers and the authorities, and women are the subordinates within society" (Armstrong and Boyle 2011: 155-156).

These quantitative results appear to highlight the fact that the predominance of male sources of information, rather than being tied to the 'familiarity' criterion, is institutionally biased, i.e. due to the organisational-level influences and group-level decisions within the editorial department which favour the maintenance of sex-role stereotypes in news coverage. Hence, my corpus does not seem to adhere to the assumption that journalists tend to seek out sources belonging to their gender on the basis of the 'familiarity' principle (Armstrong and Nelson 2005: 832); instead, it supports the fact that news agencies do not allow women to develop new dissemination strategies concerning sourcing.

Regarding the portrayal of female sources in the citation segment, contrary to a common perception, female sources appear to be mostly recognised by their economic role, rather than embodying the depiction of source on a personal basis. Moreover, the first most used pattern in the Spanish newspapers is 'surname'. According to Fowler, "the distinction between first and last name for women can symbolize a polarization around the issue of solidarity and dissociation" (1994: 99). Thus, this fact seems to indicate a deliberate distance on the part of Spanish writers from the quoted information provided by female sources. Nonetheless, all these aspects need to be explored more extensively and backed by a quantitative analysis to see if tendencies remain in larger corpora.

6. Conclusion

This investigation has approached the issue of women underrepresentation in the media from a corpus-based study. The research has been focused on the presence and portrayal of female sources, as well as the analysis of the gender of the journalist as a potential predictor and driver of gender imbalance. Results uncover an inadequate representation of women in the mass media, providing evidence for the first research question formulated in the methodology. Nevertheless, there seems to be a greater approval for the use of male sources as the expert voice in the British corpus, a finding which correlates with the higher gender balance present in the Spanish newsroom.

As regards the second research question posed in the methodology, results, especially those of the British corpus, also appear to indicate that the predominance of male sources of information, rather than being tied to the 'familiarity' criterion, is institutionally biased, i.e. it is due to the institutional practice of society in the news organisations which continues to maintain traditional gender roles for women. Hence, the second research question cannot be answered affirmatively since, contrary to possible expectations, women writers also appear to advocate for using more male sources of information in their articles. To provide additional insight into the analysis, a qualitative analysis of the citation segment was carried out, suggesting a change in past gender dynamics which usually depicted women sources on a personal basis. Besides, the results indicate a tendency to use more reporting on the part of male writers as a sign to present well-grounded and objective information in their news articles.

Although many scholars in the field have been claiming that female underrepresentation in the media does not reflect our present reality, but rather entails an inaccurate reflection of our society (Armstrong 2004), the present research seems to have demonstrated the existing low social status of women mirrored by the media, though hopefully in a state of transition. As Caldas-Coulthard states, "language simply reflects 'facts' and the ways society in general treats the genders, but by ignoring the asymmetries we tend to reinforce the stereotypes" (2004: 207). The new media appears then to keep on promoting stereotypes and as such, it ignores the presence of particular segments of society, concretely, women. Therefore, even though the publications analysed in this study belong to the 'new' media, online journalism appears to continue replicating the gendered hierarchies and/or disparities from the traditional newsroom (Armstrong and Gao 2011: 492). In light of the above, the study would suggest raising awareness on gender discrimination as an effective measure to combat sexism and attempt more parity in the quality newspapers. Unless citizens as a whole acknowledge the existing overwhelming situation for women, social change will be kept from attaining its goals.

Further research is required to investigate journalists' own perception of the gender-based frames encoded in the news stories, along with their impact on the readers' imagery. Audience-related studies would also be needed to analyse to whom the content is addressed, whether it is true or not that news is generally produced for a male public. Furthermore, it would be necessary to do a more detailed cognitive linguistic research to investigate whether the reduced number of female sources is sufficient to diminish the value of women in public opinion, or it is rather the source portrayal which has further influence on the mental realm of the target audience.

At all events, this paper posits that since "a reporter's selection of sources within a story is a crucial factor toward the story's overall impact for readers" (Armstrong and Nelson 2005: 832), journalists should stimulate a change in both news coverage and media outlets headed for a more comprehensive frame of voices. Hence, achieving a more encompassing and less stereotypical representation of sources in the quality newspapers requires undoubtedly invigorated efforts to instil a more pluralistic angle in the newsroom. Editorial leaders are therefore encouraged through this investigation to start walking down the path towards diversity in the new media platforms.

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