

Gender representation and journalistic speech: Amal's case

ABSTRACT

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A reflection on the representation of women in the journalistic speech is an imperative practice in any context favorable to questions about gender ideology. Such a discussion has been on the agenda of the demands of the feminist movement since the 1960s - when it was already possible to identify the influence of the media as a promoter of representations that established and assigned attributes to a certain gender or defined its "performativity". The present article proposes to analyze an alleged good journalistic practice employing the "Amal's Case", composed of a main article and three other publications. For this purpose, the analysis will be guided by a list of indicators established and adapted from the "Practical Guide to Communication with a Gender Perspective", published by the Institute of Women of the Government of Spain and will be theoretically and methodologically based on the analysis of the speech proposed by Norman Fairclough and his critical three-dimensional model.

KEY WORDS: Gender. Representation. Performance. Journalism. Speech analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The way women are represented in the discourse of the press and the mass media has been the subject of constant debates in the present time. The possibility for reflection has occurred not only in the academic space but also in every context favorable to questions and problematizations about gender ideology.

Although the thematic is among the current issues, it should be emphasized that the concern about the representation of the female role in the media was already on the agenda of the demands of the feminist movement in the 1960s. According to Van Zoonen (1994), at that moment, it was already possible to identify the influence of the media as a promoter of representations that established and assigned attributes to a particular genre or, in other words, defined its "performativity," a concept coined by Judith Butler in 1990. This conceptual formulation demonstrates how certain discourses and their exercise delineate modes of subjectivity and identity. Thus, the gender, and also the biological sex, become pre-established, shaped by discursive practices linked to their socio-cultural context:

[...] the attributes of gender are performative, producing even the illusion of a pre-existing identity. The postulation of a "true sex" or a "truth about gender" reveals itself rather as a regulatory fiction (BUTLER, 2003).¹

As Michel Foucault shows in "The History of Sexuality" (1988), it is known that the "body" was rigorously appropriated by the scientific discourse and the way it was conceived cannot be separated from the meshes of *pouvoir-savoir* that constituted it. It is, therefore, imperative that such truths are repeatedly questioned, considering the cultural and symbolic aspects of their social formations that are still produced and reproduced, mainly, by the force of the vehicles of communication.

The media is a privileged place of creation, reinforcement and circulation of meanings, that operate in the formation of individual and social identities, as well as in the social production of inclusions, exclusions and differences. (FISCHER, 2001, p. 590)²

As Foucault (1988) writes, reiterated by Butler (2003), it is necessary, then, to consider the veiled mechanisms of power in these supposed naturalist and true conceptions of subject reinforced by the media. Language, as previously said, is a key element for a broader understanding of these constructs: everything is sketched, drawn, and produced from discourses.

It is interesting, then, to also think about the heteronormative and binary conceptions and logics that imprison the subject and place him/her on the margins of supposed normality, since what is considered normal is pure construction - neither preexisting nor natural - being imperative the development of a critical vision to identify mechanisms of the mediatic discourse in its representations, mainly concerning the women. Thus, one can verify arbitrariness, challenge them and establish through standards, parameters, and guides, a model of good journalistic practices that should promote, in the long term, freedom in the performativity of gender and equality between men and women.

In summary, it can be said that gender is a social construction that arises from the symbolic imposition of discrimination between biological sex and its manifestation in social roles and performance expectations enunciated masculine and feminine, which, in turn, are not natural, established *a priori*, but created and reinforced by representations promoted by different discourses. Among them, we have a huge variety: religious discourse; familiar; medical; school; academic; the ideology of the State; the media; the press, about which we will follow below.

The theoretical construct "social representation" has its exordium in the sociology of Emile Durkheim. Serge Moscovici, in 1961, recovers it and transforms it into a concept that later would be used extensively by the human sciences. According to the author, it is a formulation that refers to the exploration of ideas formulated about certain objects or phenomena, and they are produced collectively. According to Denise Jodelet (1984, p. 362-362):

The concept of social representation designates a specific form of knowledge, the knowledge of common sense, which contents manifest the operation of generative and functional processes socially marked. More broadly, it designates a form of social thought. Social representations are modalities of practical thinking oriented towards the communication, understanding and mastery of the social, material and ideal environment. As such, they have specific characteristics in terms of the organization of contents, mental operations and logic. The social mark of the contents or the processes of representation refers to the conditions and context from which representations emerge, to the communications through which they circulate, to the functions they have in interacting with the world and with others.³

The study of female representation in journalism is essential for a better understanding of the performativities that are being proposed, imposed, and crystallized. That is, it is a matter of normative practices that do not reflect in any way what it means to be a woman and all her infinite possibilities of being and agency. Obviously, these proposals, which are shaped by linguistic, discursive, and multimodal mechanisms often coded, are a reflection of a dominant ideology and reinforce the traditional and stereotyped role of women, quite different from the reality of contemporary women.

Thus, the present paper proposes the analysis of a supposed good journalistic practice and its representation of the woman entitled for this purpose "Amal Case", composed of the main article and three other publications that are cited and gave rise to it. To do so, the analysis will be guided by a list of indicators established and adapted from the "Practical Guide to Communication with a Gender Perspective" (2007, pp. 19-20), published by the Institute of Women of the Government of Spain and will also be based theoretical and methodologically, partially, in the discourse analysis proposed by Norman Fairclough (1992) and his three-dimensional critical model.

The Fairclough model has three analytical categories: textual - the formal aspects of the text; discursive practices - production, distribution, and consumption of the text; and social practices. To produce an investigation more circumscribed to the analysis of gender representation, the case will be examined from its textual aspects (but not only), that is, how the theme is managed by the enunciator, and its discursive practices concerning "transitoriness" of verbal

regency, that is, the use of active/passive voice, determining whether the subject is an agent of action or only related from passive states to the activity described. Such an analysis will already be done previously in the description of the following reports and recovered in the final considerations.

AMAL'S CASE

The article⁴ that gives rise to this analysis is a report published in the "Indy 100," an attached supplement under the responsibility of the British online newspaper "The Independent." According to "El País"⁵, the center-left newspaper reached its peak in the first four years of its founding (in 1989) and originally was a printed newspaper, selling more than 400,000 copies a day. It is a well-respected newspaper and known for its commitment and political headlines.

The original report (1) is a kind of denouncement that criticizes some publications that described the participation of Amal Clooney, a renowned human rights lawyer, not from her outstanding professional performance at a United Nations meeting to discuss the genocide in Iraq, but from secondary and irrelevant aspects, such as from her body (pregnancy/maternity), clothing (style and high heels) and her personal life. Amal represented a group of victims, women who were abducted and raped by militants' members of the Islamic Jihadist organization ISIS operating in the Middle East. In her speech, which video is attached to the original report, she defended the need to make public the heinous actions of the group, to get justice through the punishment of criminals, and to undertake not only local but a global intervention to the terrorist threats of the Islamic State.

The original publication brings in its content three more reports that are understood as essential to verify how Amal, in playing the social role of the category "woman", is represented in different media spaces. In the first report cited (2) the headline is "Wearing 4 1/2 in heels at 6 months pregnant ... is that wise, Amal?"⁶, the presence of the lawyer at the UN meeting is approached from her considered improper option by the use of high heels, clothing accessory usually imposed on women in formal events and compulsory symbol of femininity according to wrong social standards. However, according to the text in question, high heels are an inappropriate item for a pregnant woman, what in her condition becomes incompatible with exercising her femininity and professional practice. The pregnancy is understood as irreconcilable with the work in the public space: mothers and future mothers should be, as can be inferred from the report, confined themselves to the domestic context and use garments appropriate to their social status (maternity) and physical condition (as if the pregnancy represented a kind of illness that makes it impossible to work). Journalist Susie Coen, in this way, also reinforces stereotypes and contributes to the production of a distorted, superficial, and incoherent representation of women.

Besides, the reporter disqualifies the lawyer by implying that her choice for high heels is not intelligent and ratifies her opinion through the testimony of a male specialist doctor whose profession and workplace are mentioned, and who adds that the baby can suffer from the use of high heels by the mother. Here, Amal is conceived as an active subject, and in making choices, inadequate, of course, is represented in a rather assertive way, inciting an idea of a "bad mother", carefree and unzealous towards her baby. Amal, in making choices and actions, is described

as being unintelligent and careless with the future exercise of motherhood. To close the brief and incoherent text, Amal's profession is not mentioned at any time and the reporter refers to her only as the wife of the actor George Clooney, comparing her with other women (celebrities) who also chose to wear high heels during the pregnancy period.

The second quoted report (3) published in "The Mirror"⁷, calls attention to the display of Amal's "baby bump" during a trip to New York. The body of the lawyer and her outfits are, then, once again, the focus of the news. Unlike the first cited report, her profession is mentioned and the reason for the trip too, however, no visibility is given to her speech, there are only direct quotes from her husband, George Clooney (with a photo of the actor). The text implies the fact that her conjugal relation "provides visibility" to her work as a lawyer. Here rules the passivity, and, certain manner, Amal only has her professional exercise recognized (or even her existence) because she is married to George Clooney.

The third and last quoted report (4), published by "The Sun"⁸, presents Amal from her clothing as a future mother. Her costumes, her relationship with actor George Clooney (there is also a picture of the two), her age, and the value of her property (of the house where she lives with George) are detailed. According to the journalist Tess de la Mare, the possibility of Amal to continue dressing elegantly after the birth of the children is validated from the communal goods with the actor. Once again, Amal is represented passively not only in the pictures but also in the condition of possessing assets by merit of her husband, a famous and successful actor. On the other hand, her profession is also mentioned, although at no time the importance of the speech of the lawyer at the United Nations meeting was narrated.

Using the numerations previously specified, it is proposed to analyze the reports from the adapted table of the "Practical Guide to Communication with a Gender Perspective":

Table 1 – Analysis

CHECKLIST		
Language	YES	NO
It ensures the visibility of the ways of doing and the knowledge of the women in the communication actions.		1,2,3,4
The use of double meanings and puns is not sexist.	1	2,3,4
Women and men appear on equal terms as subjects of action and reference in the presented activities.		1,2,3,4
Women and Men are cited in the same category and not separately.	1	2,3,4
When describing women, they are mentioned with their status, profession, social status, etc. like men.		1,2,3,4
Men and women are associated with non-stereotyped behaviors or professions.	1	2
The contributions of women and their achievements are valued.	1	2,3,4
Data by sex/gender is disaggregated.	1	2,3,4

Images and Iconography	YES	NO
The images used promote the breakdown of gender stereotypes.	1	2,3,4
The used images give visibility equally to women and men.	1	3,4
Communication campaigns recreate activities of women and men in diverse, non-stereotyped spaces.	1	3,4
If uses the alternation of images of women and men.	3,4	2
The size of the images used to represent women and men is the same and appears with the same frequency.		2,3,4
The images show the plurality of women and not always the stereotype of young and attractive women, etc.		1,2,3,4
Women do not always appear in the images with a passive attitude.	1	2,3,4
The contributions of women and their achievements are put into value in the used images.	1	2,3,4

Source: Adapted from the *Guía Práctica de Comunicación con Perspectiva de Género*

From this analysis, it can be said that the original report, even if it is supposed to be an example of good practices of gender representation, is not entirely in the positive column (yes). In comparison to the abovementioned reports, it stands out favorably, however, it can be said that it leaves something to be desired by not presenting all the women involved in the context (besides Amal, there are the victims she represents as a lawyer) and not to deep all the misunderstandings, prejudices and sexism present in the other articles and their contents.

The original report does not represent the plurality of women and maintains the stereotype of the young, thin woman, married to a Hollywood celebrity and beautiful, although pregnant, a condition that is known to imply gaining weight for many women. It could have been included images of other people present at the meeting, such as the victims who were defended by her, who were photographed in other reports, in addition to their names, although in the form of acronyms if necessary, because of secrecy. It is also interesting to note that the victims, although they were not the focus of the report, were present at the meeting, and at no time voice was given to their speeches. Also, although Amal's speech and its importance at the UN meeting are presented, there are still references to the lawyer as "George Clooney's wife", as if this condition represented a kind of professional title or category that legitimized more her work.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

After the synthetic panorama of the representation of the female gender from the "Amal case", it can be considered that, although the lawyer is in the desired stereotypical profile (white, female, cisgender, young and thin), other attributes were selected to disqualify her (such as pregnancy, choice of clothing, and relationship).

It is also noticeable that in all reports there is a hierarchy of voices, as proposed by Fairclough (1995). In the quoted reports, one of the voices clearly highlighted is the voice of the doctor, a man, a specialist, who is even quoted in quotation marks. In the original report, the emphasis is placed on Amal's speech,

however, the voices of the victims, who are represented by the lawyer, are marginalized, not even their names were cited. Thus, it can be concluded that women within the journalistic discourse tend to be invisible or underrepresented not only concerning their speech but also in their presence in general, as Marín and Ganzabal (2011) show when compared to men.

Moreover, it is important to note that in all reports, except for the original denouncement (although, in a way, it can be said that there is an implicit revictimization of the lawyer, although one tries to portray it, which is a rarity, as a successful case), the body of Amal is represented as an object and is reduced to its aesthetic aspects. The photographs also demonstrate that the press is dedicated to a representation that is much more focused on the image than on the subject's discourse. Her presentation, in turn, is not due to her individual condition (nor in the denouncement), but her family relationship.

Although these reports do not fully illustrate the importance of the media in the construction of gender representations, the succinct perspectives presented demonstrate its influence on the idealization of paradigms about women, even how motherhood should be and how a woman should act when pregnant. Considering the potential universality of access to the media, resulting from the advances in digital technologies on which virtual tabloids are based, it is important to consider some effects of the propagation of press communication narratives. Since they are mainly based on images, their dissemination, to the detriment of written information, is more intense. The deleterious subjective effects on mental health and their psychological impact on the body perception, self-esteem, and social beliefs of girls and women, for example, can be seen in numerous studies supported by the American Psychology Association, for instance (Cf. COLE; DANIEL, 2005). As Stuart Hall (1982) reminds us, the media has an "active job of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping; does not refer to merely conveying the existing meaning, but rather to the more active work of making things meaningful" (p. 64).

In this sense, recent researches show that the representation of women is carried out precisely from a prevailing male view. The material presented daily to the readers, from which they form and inform, is permeated by a patriarchal reading key that is rooted and reinforces ideologies often in a coded, implicit way. Therefore, it is very important the seriousness and responsibility that journalists and other communicators should have in the composition of representations that include the most varied forms of being a woman, with more multiplicity, abolishing stereotypes, prejudices and using a non-discriminatory language about gender, race, and ethnicity, presenting the feminine gender more consciously and prudently.

Representação de gênero e o discurso jornalístico: o caso Amal

RESUMO

Uma reflexão sobre a representação das mulheres no discurso da imprensa é uma prática imperativa em qualquer contexto favorável a questionamentos sobre ideologia de gênero. Tal discussão já constava na pauta das reivindicações do movimento feminista desde os anos 60 – quando já era possível identificar a influência dos meios de comunicação como promotores de representações que estabeleciam e designavam atributos a determinado gênero ou definiam sua “performatividade”. O presente artigo propõe analisar uma suposta boa prática jornalística por meio do “Caso Amal”, composto por um artigo principal e três outras publicações. Para tanto, a análise será orientada por uma lista de indicadores estabelecidos e adaptados do *Guía Práctica de Comunicación con Perspectiva de Género*, publicado pelo Instituto da Mulher do Governo da Espanha e será fundamentada teórico-metodologicamente na análise do discurso proposta por Norman Fairclough e seu modelo crítico tridimensional.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Gênero. Representação. Performance. Jornalismo. Análise do Discurso.

Representación de género y discurso periodístico: el caso Amal

RESUMEN

La reflexión sobre la representación de la mujer en el discurso de la prensa es una práctica imperativa en cualquier contexto favorable a las preguntas sobre la ideología de género. Tal discusión ha estado en la agenda de las demandas del movimiento feminista desde la década de 1960, cuando ya era posible identificar la influencia de los medios como promotores de representaciones que establecían y asignaban atributos a un determinado género, o definían su “performatividad”. El presente artículo propone analizar una supuesta buena práctica periodística por medio del “Caso Amal”, compuesto por un artículo principal y otras tres publicaciones. Para eso, el análisis se guiará por una lista de indicadores establecidos y adaptados de la *Guía Práctica de Comunicación con Perspectiva de Género*, publicada por el Instituto de la Mujer del Gobierno de España y se basará teórica y metodológicamente en el análisis del discurso propuesto por Norman Fairclough y su modelo crítico tridimensional.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Género. Representación. Performance. Periodismo. Análisis del discurso.

NOTAS

¹ Original quote: [...]os atributos de gênero são performativos, produzindo inclusive a ilusão de uma identidade pré-existente. A postulação de um “verdadeiro sexo” ou de uma “verdade sobre o gênero”, revela-se antes uma ficção reguladora”. (BUTLER, 2003)

² Original quote: A mídia é um lugar privilegiado de criação, reforço e circulação de sentidos, que operam na formação de identidades individuais e sociais, bem como na produção social de inclusões, exclusões e diferenças. (FISCHER, 2001, p. 590)

³ Original quote: “O conceito de representação social designa uma forma de conhecimento específico, o saber do senso comum, cujos conteúdos manifestam a operação de processos generativos e funcionais socialmente marcados. Mais abrangentemente, ela designa uma forma de pensamento social. As representações sociais são modalidades de pensamento prático orientado para a comunicação, a compreensão e o domínio do ambiente social, material e ideal. Enquanto tal, elas apresentam características específicas no plano da organização dos conteúdos, das operações mentais e da lógica. A marca social dos conteúdos ou dos processos da representação remete às condições e ao contexto das quais emergem as representações, às comunicações pelas quais elas circulam, às funções que elas têm na interação com o mundo e com os outros.” (JODELET, 1984, pp. 361-362)

⁴ <https://www.indy100.com/people/amal-clooney-un-genocide-iraq-iran-isis-terrorism-sexism-sun-mail-7622046>

⁵

https://elpais.com/internacional/2016/03/26/actualidad/1459007251_268593.html

⁶ <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/daily-mail/20170310/281543700723400>

⁷ <https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/pregnant-amal-clooney-shows-baby-10000244>

⁸ The link to access the report has been disabled, but its reference can still be found in the original article.

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