

## Gender violence news in British and American press

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### Abstract

This study aims to prove which qualities, from the British and United States actual press, are more adequate for gender violence issues, comparing news on the same stories. It is evident the influence of mass media on public opinion and, therefore, the responsibility that written press has on gender violence messages, avoiding sensationalism. Psycholinguistic studies have established the relation language-thought, so language used in journalism is crucial.

Following the belief that newspapers considered more liberal and independent will lead to a better treatment than traditional ones considered to be more reluctant to change, journals have been selected. Furthermore, different cultures can be as objective and respectful but maybe less committed with the issue, as it may arise from the samples. There have been emerging ethic codes giving guidelines to journalists, including discrimination, and more specific on gender sensitive reporting.

Therefore, the objective to improve public opinion information, stepping away from stereotypes and oversimplifications, is substantial, and will undoubtedly result in a better understanding of equality.

### Keywords

Gender violence, equality, English language, press.

## Introduction

The term gender was first used at the UN Beijing Platform for Action, September 1995, where violence against women was mentioned as one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position by men. It was declared that it was a consequence of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, exacerbated by the absence of educational and other means to address the causes and consequences of violence. On the resolution, institutions, Governments and organizations are encouraged to instigate media to examine the impact of gender role stereotypes.

This study will contrast the way language is used in messages, from two different newspapers, about the same news. Both are considered serious, liberal and free of censorship, from two of the most important countries in the world the UK and the US. The aim is to find out which news processing would serve better for the topic.

There are ethic codes for journalists both in the UK and the US where gender violence is considered. The National Union of Journalists edited the code for GB; inclusive language is used in the text and explicitly refers to gender discrimination declaring it must be avoided. In the Code of Ethics from the Society of Professional Journalists, from America, inclusive language is not used but all sentences are imperative as a neutral choice. It specifically advises to avoid stereotyping by gender or sexual orientation and to be cautious about identifying victims of sex crimes.

One of the main problems related to women issues has been invisibility (Alberdi, 2006). There have been different stages concerning the dissemination of written news on periodicals. Not so long ago, domestic violence messages were published only in gutter press, specialized in scandals. Gender news has been related to sensationalism and stereotypes; these devices were used in order to call for attention and improve selling numbers, which was, even if unintentional, a perverse behaviour.

Nowadays most advanced societies are concerned about equality and the structural nature of gender violence. There are many institutions and organizations focused on gender equality aiming to end this scourge. In spite of these efforts, the invisibility of women remains.

General press discourse is already divided in a number of different perspectives where it is not easy to find a right spot for gender. Education should be revised, Van Dijk (2011) gives evidence that only in the US can be found some Faculties offering ethic diversity studies at University level for Journalists, and gender issues should be equally included. Studies suggest that rather than looking for a section in gender, every piece of news should be considered under a gender perspective (Gallego, 2002). Gender education should be taught at all levels, including professionals dealing with language (Taillefer, 2011).

## **1. Discrimination, gender and press**

In this study we will analyze gender violence news trying to discern which processing emerges as more adequate after comparing two English language newspapers, both considered liberal and independent, The Guardian from the UK and The New York Times from the US that we assume as more formal and diplomatic.

Studies have found the relevant influence of mass media on public opinion (Matas, 2006), and therefore the responsibility they bear on the references most people use in their minds. From a linguistic approach, the power of language influencing thoughts has been one of the most relevant findings, since it is now established that the language we use determines the way we think. By changing the words used in the news to refer to violent acts and people involved in them, society may realize how the situation actually is.

Mental models (Fernández, 2003) are representations anybody can infer about another person or an event. Group beliefs and knowledge are the references that need to be changed so models would be more adequate.

Literature review includes publications concerning different aspects of this topic. The most important focuses are general education (Bengoechea, 2011) and specific journalists education (Dijk, 2011) because they are the first steps to unmask the role language plays on building gender references. Other focuses are the representation of women on media, the number of women working on news production (Gallego, 2002) and the language used (Calero, 1999).

From the media approach, there are questions on how presence and absence of women in the press affects their visibility (Gallego, 2002), with the advice ‘not to hide women.’ Bach Arús (2000) stands for social changes followed by language.

The fact that press discourse is never neutral is also pointed by a number of authors (Gutierrez, 2009; Dijk, 2008; Dardis, 2006a) directly linked to the power of manipulating information, so it is imperative to point at the right direction. It is commonly admitted the pressure of androcentric power elites to impose their point of view and therefore their interests (Dijk van, 2011; Fernández, 2003).

Discourse works as Teun van Dijk’s on racism or Dardi’s on media marginalization devices, deal with press manipulative strategies. Both authors agree on how the discourse of ‘us’ vs. ‘the others’ or the denial of the problem is widely used. These words show how the topic really is (Dijk, 2011:5):

*...it categorizes the out group (the Others, Them) not only as different, but also as inferior to the in-group (Us), so that discrimination can be morally legitimated, or simply taken for granted as ‘normal’ conduct towards Them. Thus, the symbolic elites of white societies developed racist ideologies that control all perceptions, understanding, beliefs, attitudes, and hence all actions and interactions, geared towards the reproduction of ethnic domination.*

This shows how difficult is trying to get over discrimination. The ‘us vs. the others’ strategy has been often applied to gender issues where women would be ‘the others.’ The same strategies of discredit apply for all acts of prejudice or bigotry. The invisibility of violence against women is immersed in a more general power control device.

Psycholinguistic studies established the relation between mind and language. So that, not only our thoughts are shaped into speech but also our mind is influenced by language. In this way society can be influenced and collective thoughts can be modified by language, proved its capacity to transform our perception of reality and became part of our thoughts following Taillefer de Haya (2011), who also refers to the fact that language should be an ally to build up a more fair society.

It would be good to establish a right frame as where to locate gender news in the newspapers, how to approach the different violent acts, avoiding stereotypes and additional unnecessary information, and how language should be used. So the influence of press should be used to set a more realistic portrayal of the stories.

## **2. Analysis**

The newspapers reviewed were selected considering their circulation numbers and their national coverage. Both journals have in common belonging to developed countries, where press is considered independent and free, as stated by Dardis (2006b.) The Guardian has been defined as a quality and technical newspaper with a low affective involvement (Gonzalez, 2007), and The New York Times as a reliable entity for international events reporting specific, real and sure knowledge (Dijk, 2008), and as a reference periodical in the US (Fondevila, 2012.)

This is a qualitative study of the language used for the same piece of news on the same date in two different newspapers. As the newspapers are from two different countries and cultures, the cross-national research must reveal interesting findings based on the socio cultural backgrounds of each country (Dardis, 2006b.) Using the same event will allow to compare whether a device used by both periodicals may be considered as generic, or cultural differences may arise.

Several items will be depicted from the most recent research studies. The notion of subject as the main topic or theme within the nominalization group technique, and the rest of the sentence

as rheme or focus as a secondary form referred to the first one. This may be again divided into main focus and additional focus (Gutierrez, 2009). The linguistic topics on Fernández (2003) will be arranged to analyze the events where pertinent; and also some of the processing devices used by Menendez (2010).

We expect more liberal papers to have a more adequate treatment towards gender. Both newspapers are considered liberal, serious and independent in their own countries and have an international reputation. The selected examples for this work are soft news, not comments, so no evaluation or opinion is expected, just the facts. The way each editorial reaffirms the “truth” of the story for the intended reader on their discourse (Gonzalez, 2007) will show their differences.

### **3. Findings**

The fact is that there are differences in the way information is dealt in relation to gender.

In order to carry out our research, we are going to analyze a news item on Sunanda Pushkar death. The New York Times placed a 58 lines article on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 2014, in the ASIA PACIFIC Section, Page A10, with the Headline ‘After Love Unravels in Media, Indian Politician’s Wife Is Found Dead.’ The Guardian placed a 20 lines report on the 20<sup>th</sup> January 2014, in the INTERNATIONAL Section, Page 13, with the Headline: ‘Indian Minister Testifies Over Wife’s Sudden Death.’ We consider the difference of date a consequence of the time difference between the two countries.

The social context is very similar for both periodicals; they are equally serious and address the same class readers with a high socio-cultural level. The words, groups of words and sentences used to refer the story will show the lexical relevance in a technical familiar dualism. Findings of affective involvement vs. formal relation of the communicative event and rhetorical mode will indicate the Tenor (Gonzalez, 2007.)

In the New York Times piece we find the words: love, unravels, wedding, smooth-talking, reputation, beautiful, middle age, relationship, glare, affair, unnatural, dangerous,

overexposure, pursuing, poisoning, scandal, resigning, influence, wrongdoing, priceless, ridicule, affection, despondent, dazed, divorce, pursued, stupid, intimate, episode, happily, ill, hospitalized, unauthorized, suite, luxury, formerly, infuriated, demise, accused, pursuing, awful and tragic. As for The Guardian, we find the words: Testifies, accused, adultery, affair, unnatural, injury, death, former, diplomat, investigation, rumors, personal, minister, horrified, reckless, speculation, rampant, pledge, unstinting, indignity, subjected, testimony, magistrate, inquest, comment, scandal, erupted, resurgent, political, rivals, patronage, engulfed, corruption, scandals and account.

The references: love, beautiful, smooth-talking, middle age, glare, priceless, ridicule, affection, despondent, dazed, divorce, stupid, intimate, suite, luxury are found only in the New York times article. These words show a closer relation with the reader with some affective involvement, and are not so relevant to refer the information.

We find some of these words in the phrases: ‘After Love Unravels in Media’ on the Headline; ‘He was a smooth-talking politician’ and ‘She was a beautiful Kashmiri from the north’ on the first paragraph. They are strategically located, and set an atmosphere of novel rather than news reporting. Other phrases such as: ‘a minister in the Indian government’, ‘a high profile member of the governing Indian National Congress party’ and ‘his resigning as junior minister for foreign affairs’ point at the importance Mr. Tharoor has. The sentence ‘Ms. Pushkar, became Mr. Tharoor’s third wife’ doesn’t add any relevant information. In the sentence ‘He called her “priceless,” leading to some ridicule for his public display of affection’; the adjective ‘ridicule’ shows the journalist’s opinion.

The words used in The Guardian to refer the event are more impersonal and technical. There are some phrases in which the importance of the victim’s husband is revealed: ‘An Indian government minister’, ‘Tharoor, a former UN diplomat’, ‘In a letter to India’s home minister’ and ‘Tharoor’s Congress party, led by Rahul Gandhi.’

Some additional stories are found in The New York Times as the way Mr. Tharoor and Ms. Pushkar met, the scandal about him misusing his official influence to help her that he denies,

discussing their relationship in social media, and the declarations of Ms. Tarar, the journalist accused of pursuing Mr. Tharoor. In The Guardian the additional information is on Mr. Tharoor hoping to end rumours about their personal lives, declaring his horror on speculations on his private life, and on the political relevance of the scandal.

We find in The New York Times article that Sunanda Pushkar is the subject on thirteen sentences plus the object on a passive voice one, and Mr. Tharoor is a subject on fourteen sentences, eleven with the pronoun ‘he’, one with Mr. Tharoor, one with ‘Her husband, Shashi Tharoor,’ and one omitted; this is: ‘Married twice before’ which refers to Mr. Tharoor.

In The Guardian there are eight sentences with Mr. Tharoor as subject, three with ‘he’, three with ‘Tharoor’, one with ‘Shashi Tharoor’ and one with ‘her husband’. Ms. Pushkar is the subject of one sentence referred with her full name ‘Sunanda Pushkar.’

#### 4. Final remarks

The headlines share the information about the fact that the victim’s husband is a politician, and therefore it may be inferred he is an important person belonging to the power elites, and the fact that his wife is dead. In both sentences the topic/theme is Mr. Tharoor, and the comment/rheme is his wife.

The fact that Sunanda Pushkar accused her husband of adultery previous to her death is revealed in both periodicals as an important aspect of her demise. The way information is placed in The New York Times ‘*Now after public allegations that he was having an affair, the woman is dead*’, suggests her death was a consequence of that incident.

Although both pieces of news refer to the fact that Ms. Sunanda believed her husband had had an affair, neither of them refers to the psychological mistreatment implicit on adultery, which has been indicated as relevant in her death.

The message about the autopsy ‘*Pushkar’s death was sudden and unnatural, and her body bore injury marks, although doctors said this did not mean the injuries had caused her death.*’

is referred in both newspapers in a very similar way. Suicide is a reference left on reader's minds although not explicitly declared.

References to the importance of Mr. Tharoor are found in both journals as if this fact is what makes his wife's death appear on the news.

There are two remarks on The Guardian about Mr. Tharoor seeking a quick investigation in order to 'put an end to rumours about their personal lives' and another on his complaints about the 'reckless speculation' on media reports, which suits a serious tone.

In spite of the fact that the subject/theme shows to be more balanced on The New York Times the processing of the information is more concise on The Guardian. The different tone used by The New York Times is coherent with the less objective, unnecessary, additional information.

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## 6. Appendix

NEWS 1. Death of Sunanda Pushkar.

New York Times, January 19, 2014

Page A10, ASIA PACIFIC.

After Love Unravels in Media, Indian Politician's Wife Is Found Dead

By BETWA SHARMA

(Photograph) Sunanda Pushkar, left, and Shashi Tharoor at their wedding reception in 2010. She was found dead in New Delhi on Friday. Credit Associated Press

NEW DELHI — He was a smooth-talking politician from South India with an international reputation from his time at the United Nations. She was a beautiful Kashmiri from the north when they met in 2009 in middle age and began a relationship partly played out in the media, and social media, glare.

Now after public allegations that he was having an affair, the woman is dead, in what a doctor called an “unnatural, sudden death.” Her husband, Shashi Tharoor, briefly checked himself into a hospital with chest pains. And Twitter is alive with virtual handwringing over whether the medium allowed a dangerous level of overexposure.

The unraveling of the couple’s personal lives began last week, when the wife, Sunanda Pushkar, was quoted as saying she sent out a series of messages on Twitter that she said proved that a Pakistani journalist was pursuing her husband. Days later, on Friday, he reported finding his wife dead in a hotel bed.

On Saturday, Sudhir Gupta, one of the doctors who performed an autopsy, told reporters that “there were certain injury marks on the body, but we can’t divulge details at this point.” He ruled out poisoning and said it would take several days to determine the cause of death.

(Photograph) Shashi Tharoor, right, a minister in the Indian government, sat in an ambulance with the body of his wife, Sunanda Pushkar, in New Delhi, India. Credit Money Sharma/European Pressphoto Agency

The death of Ms. Pushkar, 52, stunned many in New Delhi’s journalistic and political circles, many of whom had followed the twists in her life since she met Mr. Tharoor, a high-profile member of the governing Indian National Congress party. Married twice before, Ms. Pushkar, became Mr. Tharoor’s third wife in 2010 in the wake of a scandal that led to his resigning as junior minister for foreign affairs. The scandal centered on accusations that he had used his official influence to help her get an ownership stake in a franchise in India’s cricket league. He denied any financial wrongdoing.

After their marriage, when he was again needled for the scandal, the two of them — both prolific users of social media — turned to Twitter and the media to discuss their relationship. He called her “priceless,” leading to some ridicule for his public display of affection. She then told a TV interviewer, “Shashi and I show our love with P.D.A.”

On Wednesday, Ms. Pushkar, who seemed to have gained access to her husband’s Twitter account, began posting messages she said he had received from the Pakistani journalist. One said the sender was “in love with you, irrevocably, irreversibly.”

The drama between Ms. Pushkar and Mr. Tharoor was covered heavily on India’s 24-hour news channels. In interviews, Ms. Pushkar sounded despondent and sometimes dazed.

She told The Indian Express, a popular newspaper, that her husband had been in a “rip roaring affair” since April, and that she would seek a divorce. “That woman pursued and pursued him,” she was quoted as saying. “Men are stupid anyways.” She then added: “For all you know she is a Pakistani agent.”

The journalist, Mehr Tarar, denied having an intimate relationship with Mr. Tharoor, and responded on her own Twitter account, “I am not an ISI agent,” referring to Pakistan’s main spy agency. “Or CIA. Or Mossad. Or even the dead KGB. May I go now?”

Ms. Pushkar and Mr. Tharoor then issued a joint statement playing down the episode. “We are happily married and intend to remain that way. Sunanda has been ill and hospitalized this week and is seeking to rest,” they said. The statement also vaguely suggested that the messages in question from their accounts had been “unauthorized.”

On Friday, he returned from a major gathering of the Congress Party to a suite at a luxury hotel in New Delhi, where he found his wife dead, fully clothed and lying on the bed, said Abinav Kumar, his personal secretary. He said there were no signs of foul play.

Mr. Tharoor, formerly a top United Nations official, was one of the first politicians in India to use Twitter intensively, and infuriated many Hindus in 2009 when he sent out a message describing traveling in coach on a flight as “cattle class out of solidarity with all our holy cows.” Hindus revere the cow, and the post almost cost him his political career.

On Friday night, Sunanda Pushkar was being discussed in the media and trending on Twitter as people posted messages conveying shock and sadness over her death, with many commenting on the role the social media played in her last days.

Suhel Seth, a public relations specialist and a friend of the couple, said on TV that Twitter had caused the “decline of many” and that now it had led to the “demise of a very, very fine human being.”

Ms. Tarar, the woman accused of pursuing Mr. Tharoor, wrote about the announcement of Ms. Pushkar’s death on Twitter: “I just woke up and read this. I’m absolutely shocked. This is too awful for words. So tragic I don’t know what to say. Rest in peace, Sunanda.”

The Guardian, Jan 20, 2014

Page 13, INTERNATIONAL.

Indian minister testifies over wife’s sudden death

Reuters New Delhi

An Indian government minister, Shashi Tharoor, appeared yesterday before a magistrate investigating his wife's death days after she accused him of adultery.

Photograph: Prakash Singh/AFP/Getty Shashi Tharoor and his late wife, Sunanda Pushkar, at the Indian parliament in 2012

Sunanda Pushkar was found dead in a hotel room in Delhi on Friday after sending tweets that suggested her husband was having an affair with a Pakistan-based journalist, Mehr Tarar.

An autopsy found that the 52-year-old Pushkar's death was sudden and unnatural, and her body bore injury marks, although doctors said this did not mean the injuries had caused her death.

Tharoor, a former UN diplomat, called for a quick investigation into his wife's death, saying he hoped this would put an end to rumours about their personal lives.

In a letter to India's home minister, Sushilkumar Shinde, Tharoor wrote: "I have finally had a chance to catch up with media reports and am horrified to read the reckless speculation rampant there.

"I pledge my full and unstinting cooperation. Nothing short of truth will end the indignity to which my wife and I are being subjected."

Later yesterday, Tharoor, 57, gave his testimony to a magistrate, Alok Sharma, who is conducting the inquest. There was no word on what he had told the magistrate and he made no comment.

The scandal has erupted as Tharoor's Congress party, led by Rahul Gandhi, is preparing to fight a tough election against a resurgent main opposition party as well as a new political group that promises clean and open politics.

Rivals have painted Congress as a party of power and patronage, engulfed in corruption scandals and unable to hold its leaders to account for their actions.