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Representation of violence against women: analysis of language in the British press.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
CHAPTER 1 – LANGUAGE, POWER, AND NEWSPAPERS	5
1.1 THE POWER OF LANGUAGE	5
1.1.1 LANGUAGE, POWER, AND CONTROL	8
1.2 LANGUAGE AND NEWSPAPERS	11
CHAPTER TWO – WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE.....	15
2.1 THE DIVERSE NATURE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN	15
2.2 PREVIOUS STUDIES ON THE REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE BRITISH PRESS.....	21
CHAPTER THREE – LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE PORTRAYAL OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE BRITISH PRESS.....	25
3.1 METHOD	25
3.2 ANALYSIS OF THE PORTRAYAL OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE BRITISH PRESS	27
CONCLUSION	37
REFERENCES	39
SUMMARY IN ITALIAN	41

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation aims to uncover linguistic patterns used by the British press when reporting cases of violence against women. The choice of this topic has been driven by my deep and avid interest in feminism and language studies. I was struck by the overwhelmingly high number of cases of violence against women and the extent to which this phenomenon is still widespread. I have therefore decided to combine this concern of mine with my interest in language studies and analyse this phenomenon from a linguistic perspective through an analysis of British newspaper articles covering this topic. I have decided to focus specifically on newspaper articles because the press and mass media in general are at least partially responsible for shaping society's opinion and viewpoint on the topics they cover. Therefore, analysing violence against women from their perspective could be an interesting and useful insight into how society perceives it and consequently, the recognition and treatment this issue receives. Also, analysing it from a linguistic point of view is crucial as language is a powerful tool not only used for expressing oneself, communicating and interacting with the outside world, but also for ideology shaping, manipulation, and the establishment of power relations. A discussion on what language is and how it is used specifically in the press is thus needed to be able to understand the results that will emerge from the subsequent analysis.

Indeed, chapter one will focus on the different meanings and forms of the term language, followed by a discussion on how these different forms of language can be used for different purposes, to convey different messages, and to obtain different results. I will then continue by analysing its relation to ideology and society, by also considering the power it holds and therefore how it can also become a tool for manipulation, control, and consensus building. Language is indeed deeply intertwined with ideology and society, as much as when combined they appear to be some of the main factors in creating the reality we live in, constructing belief systems and language features that consequently become dominant. Furthermore, a discussion on how these features of language are employed also in the mass media discourse will be provided, as well as an explanation of how language is used in the press, which language choices are made by newspapers and why, and how they could influence the audience. I will also give some insights into how newspapers

choose which news are worthy to be reported and the perspective and tools adopted in the coverage of topics related to minoritarian groups.

I will then provide an explanation of what violence against women is in chapter two, by also mentioning the forms in which it could present itself and taking it further to a human rights issue discussion. A reference on policing and reforms introduced throughout the years will be provided, as well as data on the extent of this phenomenon, in order to better understand the context in which it finds itself nowadays. I will continue by explaining how violence against women is perceived by the police and criminal justice institutions, and how victims are treated. I will also dig into society's perception of it and the common beliefs it is surrounded by. Finally, I will present previous studies on the representation of violence against women and highlight features similar to the ones I will analyse in chapter three. All this information on the diverse nature of violence against women and the spread and treatment of it is essential for understanding the scope of the analysis, the features taken into consideration and the discussion of the results.

Finally, I will conduct a linguistic analysis of the representation of violence against women in the British press in chapter three. It will be a corpus-based analysis of articles retrieved from four British newspapers, namely The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Sun, and The Daily Mirror, and the main aim will be to uncover typical linguistic features in the reporting of cases related to this topic. I will specifically focus on the representation of victims and perpetrators, through an analysis of frequency lists, collocates and concordances.

CHAPTER 1

LANGUAGE, POWER, AND NEWSPAPERS

As the main objective of this thesis is an analysis of newspaper articles, where language and word choices will be evaluated from a linguistic perspective, providing a discussion and overview of language and its connections with power is indispensable.

Indeed, in the analysis that will be carried out later, language will not only be analysed from a linguistic point of view but the results that emerge will also be correlated to social conventions, to the social relations of power that ensue from the choice of these words, and to the effects that the choice of structuring the discourse in a certain way has brought about. For these reasons, I will carry a broadly based discussion on language.

The first part of chapter one is dedicated to a discussion of what language is, its power, and how certain types of language usage can influence society. An analysis of the importance of language will be carried out, alongside its relationship with ideology, power, and society, with many references to newspapers, namely how this relationship is also portrayed in the language used in news articles and newspapers.

The second part of the chapter includes a short outline of the process of selection of news by editors and newspaper owners, followed by a more in-depth analysis of how language is used in newspapers, with particular attention to the language used concerning minoritarian groups.

1.1 THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

Language is a major part of society and people's everyday lives. It is indeed a means of communication, of interaction with the outside world, of creating the reality we live in, of constructing beliefs-systems, of being influenced or inspired by other people's ideologies, by books, images, podcasts, etc., and of being up to date with the rest of the world. Even someone who has little interest in the study of linguistics can see how powerful language is: it can be noticed from a very young age when children are constantly being taught new words and expressions, verb tenses or idioms that are more elaborate than the basic ones they had been using until then, all with the aim of giving them the necessary tools to be able to express themselves clearly and correctly in a society

where language is crucial. It can also be noticed when going for a job interview, where a certain command of the language and an advanced and extensive vocabulary are undoubtedly beneficial. It therefore becomes obvious, that language is something that is extremely embedded in our social life and people's perception of us, as well as being the primary means by which a message can be conveyed, received, and interpreted. This last aspect of language is extremely crucial when conducting a linguistic analysis, as the focus will not only be on the linguistic choices taken, but also on which effects they have and what is the outcome of such choices. Let us therefore dig deep into the concept of language and discover its several nuances.

When searching for the word "language" in a dictionary, in this case the Collins online dictionary, the first definition that appears is "a system of communication which consists of a set of sounds and written symbols which are used by the people of a particular country or region for talking or writing" (*Collins Dictionary Online*, n.d.). Although this might be the first and most common explanation that people think of when asked what language is, with a more careful consultation of the dictionary, one would end up realising that many other definitions, exceptions, or examples are offered. Among all the different definitions the dictionary provides, it is worth spending a word on these two: "a system for the expression of thoughts, feelings, etc, by the use of spoken sounds or conventional symbols" (*ibidem*); "a particular manner or style of verbal expression i.e., *your language is disgusting*" (*ibidem*). The existence of various definitions that display the concept of language in different ways leads us to a discussion on how language can take diverse forms, the several connotations it can convey, how it is used in different ways for different purposes, and how it varies depending on the people using it, the type of interaction being held, and the scenario of its occurrence. Mooney and Evans (2018) give an example of how language can be structured in different ways, thus bringing different meanings to speech. They created hypothetical exchanges in which they used the word "fine" with different connotations, demonstrating how the same word used in different ways, by different people and in different contexts can totally change both its function and what one intends to convey by using it. Indeed, they showed how the same word can be used to engage in short dialogues which concern the weather, a person's health condition, a description of someone's appearance, an evaluation of someone's character, or simply to ask someone how they are doing. This brief paragraph on the definition of language leads

us to an analysis of how language can be a powerful tool serving different purposes and intentions.

Indeed, having established the multifaceted nature of language, I proceed to analyse the definitions mentioned above. In the second definition, language is described as “a system of spoken sounds or conventional symbols”. Although people usually assume that when talking about language, we are talking of something essentially verbal, language has many other different forms. These “conventional symbols” could still be interpreted as verbal symbols, but could also be intended as symbols that are part of the visual language, for example, gestures, facial expressions and corporal movements, written texts, advertisements, podcasts, videos, films, etc. In each of these spheres, in fact, a type of language is used that differs in the way it is produced and presented, but we are still talking about language, as it aims to communicate and convey a message. This type of language is called visual language, and it is just as important and effective as the spoken one. According to Fairclough (1989), a newspaper report's photograph often conveys the same information as its verbal counterpart, and the two frequently reinforce one another, making it challenging to separate them.

Going further with the analysis of the second definition of language, another noteworthy aspect is the correlation created between language and people's thoughts, views, and feelings about something, namely their ideology. Simpson (1993) gives a critical linguistic definition of ideology, stating that it “normally describes the ways in which what we say and think interacts with society” (Simpson, 1993, p. 5). Simpson then continues by claiming that an ideology is thus a system of commonly held assumptions, beliefs and values shared by social groups. On the basis of Simpson's account, language, ideology, and society are inevitably and inextricably interlinked. Fairclough (1989) has even referred to language as a “part of society” and as a “socially conditioned process” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 22). Both Simpson and Fairclough point out how language is a form of reproduction of ideology and how society reflects, but also moulds and constructs ideology. Fairclough offers a concrete demonstration of these ideology and common-sense assumptions shaping processes by pointing out how during traditional type of consultations between doctors and patients, it is “rational” and “natural” - because firmly embedded in our belief systems and ideology - that the doctor is the one in the position

to decide what cure or which type of medicines would work best for the patient. So the doctor is the one who should lead and control the course of the consultation. It becomes clear then how language, ideology and society are intertwined. But these dominant language features, dominant common-sense assumptions, but mostly dominant ideologies are always, in part, a construct of power-holding people and the dominant social group in society. The adjective dominant placed before the term ideology, a concept in association with that of society, implies a social class division and a clear unequal distribution of power among the members of that society. Indeed, power and power holders partake in the construction of ideologies, which then influence the way society is organized and perceived, how language is used and how discourse is structured. Fairclough points out how unconsciously embraced institutional practices frequently reflect assumptions that somehow justify power relations. He continues his analysis of class and power in capitalistic society by proving how practices that may seem “commonsensical” and “universal” have their roots in the dominant class and have since been naturalized. In short, he is trying to explicate that many of the assumptions, practices, and perspectives that we as a society adopt, and the corresponding way of using language in situations in which these assumptions, deemed to be rational and logical, are present, are in fact a construct of the ruling and dominant class and a design of their ideas and views, which they have then projected onto the whole society, turning them as something natural.

I would also like to mention how ideological power – defined as “the power to project one’s practises as universal and common sense” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 33) – along with mastery of language and specific discourse-structuring choices are and have always been a significant consensus-building weapon used by the dominant class to exercise and maintain power.

In the following chapters, I will discuss how the abovementioned features of language usage, ideology and power are crucial for understanding how news is produced, the language choices that journalists make, and their effects on the audience.

1.1.1 LANGUAGE, POWER, AND CONTROL

The overview of language provided above has demonstrated how deeply ingrained language is in society and how it plays a major role in creating the reality we live in.

Language is not only the main means of communication, of exposing one's ideas, of interacting with the outside world but it is also one of the main tools for manipulation, domination, oppression, consensus-building, and discrimination. Going back to the example given earlier, concerning the importance of language in a job interview, when one fails to answer questions correctly or comprehensively, even though the reason may be having a different cultural and linguistic background, is unavoidably caused by their lack of command of language. In this case, power is being held by the interviewer, and language is a weapon they could use against the interviewee. Another example could be how people who speak standard British English and have a received pronunciation will be perceived as more educated and competent than those who do not (Mooney & Evans, 2018). This could open up more and better opportunities for those with received pronunciation, propelling them into positions of influence and power. This process of elevating a particular dialect into the chosen and correct form of speaking is called standardisation, which Fairclough puts into the concept of “power behind discourse” as he claims that “the whole social order of discourse is put together and held together as a hidden effect of power” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 55). Indeed, one of the most common ways to use language in an oppressive and controlling way is having people use the dominant language and “punishing” those who refuse to or are not capable of undergoing these impositions. It happened to the indigenous people in the United States and Australia, but also to the Kurds in Turkey, where Kurdish could not appear in official documents or be used for any political purpose, it could not be taught in schools or any other educational institution, and using it in newspapers, radio stations or broadcasting was prohibited. Indeed, many reforms aimed at the suppression and eradication of the Kurdish language and identity, such as those stipulating the protection and promotion of the Kurdish language, culture, and history as illegal, or those sanctioning that Kurdish village names had to be changed into Turkish ones (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2012). It also happened in Wales, with the Welsh Not, a token used by teachers to prevent students from speaking Welsh at school by punishing the ones that were caught speaking it, as trying to eradicate it was financially rewarding to the teachers (Thomas, 1996). It can be seen any time when mere discriminations are based on the use of a variety of language different from the standard one or the use of a slightly different vocabulary and a non-conventional discourse-structuring feature due to different cultural or linguistic backgrounds.

Another glaring example is that of the National Socialist language, designed and consciously structured to manipulate and control the German population. Press (2005) highlights how the deliberate language manipulation and its strategic use by the Nazi government were calculated steps toward bringing the German people closer to and fully compliant with fascist ideology. He also provides evidence of this language transformation, all taken from two extremely representative books of that period: Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (1925) and Rosenberg's *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts* (1930). Press recalls and analyses in particular the tendency of these two emblematic figures of National Socialism to affix specific prefixes to a large number of words, in order to make everything they are talking about impressive, majestic, and exaggerated. For instance, they were using words such as "Grossoffensive [great-offensives]" and "Grosskampftage [great days of struggle]", for ordinary political campaigns, or words such as "Vernichtungsschlachten [annihilation battles]" to portray military operations with minimal impact (Klemperer, 1946, as cited in Press, 2005). Furthermore, Press talks about how guilt and conspiracy theories, along with an image of greatness and power, are attributed to the Jews, who were actually a minority that had no intention of undermining the integrity of the German nation. Lastly, he mentions how they twisted words to their will, as with the word "fanaticism", which was used with a negative connotation with regard to other ideologies, but with a positive connotation when it was to be used alongside something related to national socialism.

We have seen how language can be used as a weapon of control, manipulation, creation of a certain vision and imposition to follow it by people and institutions of power. This aspect of language can also be adopted in mass media, especially newspapers and news websites. In mass media, producers exercise power over consumers, as they are the ones deciding what type of information is to be included, how it is to be presented, which perspective is going to be adopted, and what is going to be the message that the consumer will receive. With regard to this topic, Fairclough (1989) talks about the "hidden power" of language in relation to the mass-media discourse. He remarks how the media can slant news stories in favour of specific interests or groups by using a variety of strategies, such as biased reporting and suppression of information. This can result in reporting that is inaccurate, incomplete, or misleading. He also highlights how the sources of information chosen and the perspectives adopted are usually the ones of power-holding people and

highly remarkable institutions, while always bearing in mind the specific agenda of the news provider. Therefore, not all social groups are represented and considered in the same way when it comes to mass media. For instance, there will always be many more interviews with important and prominent people than with ordinary people, the murder or imprisonment of famous people will always cause a stir and will always be placed in a prominent position, or again, the news, as we have already seen it with language, is never neutral and will always be in favour of important institutions. Fairclough provides an example from his local newspaper: he selected an article that addresses the matter of some lorries shedding stones on their journey from the quarry to their destination. He remarks how there is no apparent reference or explanation of who is responsible for the shedding of the loads and who or what is causing it. It could likely come under the scope of quarry management, who, however, were never held accountable for what happened. Fairclough concludes by saying that the power exerted in this case is “the power to disguise power” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 52).

1.2 LANGUAGE AND NEWSPAPERS

The term newspaper suggests that the main content that is being covered is news. But is it actually true? And what is news? As we have already seen, what is being included in a newspaper and the perspective adopted when presenting the stories has a lot to do with the influence powerholders, owners, and agendas have on the newspaper. With that being said, it is clear that owners and journalists will decide what to include in the newspapers and how much importance to give to every section of the paper according to political, economic and social factors. A large portion of newspapers is therefore devoted to advertising, entertainment, celebrity scoops, and everything that might be appealing to the target audience of that specific newspaper. Moreover, owners and editors are also responsible for deciding which news will be selected to be put in the newspaper, as it would be impossible to include everything: as stated by Hodge “newspapers inevitably give only a partial version of the world. They select, reorder, transform, distort, and suppress, so that the final product is recognizably that paper and not other [...]” (Fowler et al., 1979, p. 157). But what is news? According to Reah (1998), news is “information about recent events that are of interest to a sufficiently large group, or that may affect the lives of a sufficiently large group” (Reah, 1998, p. 4). From the above definition, the process of selection becomes apparent and with it how choices made about what to

include on the news pages also influence how the reader is shown the outside world. Therefore, when choosing a newspaper to read, we must always keep in mind what audience it is intended for, what perspective is adopted and what editorial choices are made in relation to the information and news to be included.

As different newspapers adopt different perspectives, it is very likely that they will present the same information in different ways, but also the same newspaper itself depicts different subjects, belonging to different groups, in different ways. I would like to draw attention particularly to the representation of minorities in newspapers. Powerful people or people belonging to the socially dominant group will indeed be represented in a completely different way than people belonging to the so-called minority groups. Assuming that this division into groups is, in fact, a human construct that has no real basis and only exists in our perceptions and imaginations of the world and society, it is safe to conclude that their primary purpose was to be used as tools of discrimination and oppression. Indeed, minorities are usually treated differently, discriminated against, feared and disadvantaged, based on their sex, race, religious belief, or sexuality, by a society that has deliberately decided what is right and what is wrong. Also, as the beliefs ascribed to these groups derive from socially constructed values and perceptions, the attitude towards these minorities will be different when approaching different societies, with different cultures, concepts, and beliefs, resulting in a different representation of them also in books, articles, newspapers and mass media.

Language is therefore one of the means by which this attitude and behaviour towards minorities are perpetuated. The process of naming these groups, for instance, is a powerful tool that conveys the ideological point of view of the people choosing a specific naming for a specific social group. This also applies to newspapers and news articles: by selecting and analysing specific articles that had as their central figures women, Reah (1998) has shown how the process of naming has a huge impact in newspapers too. She points out how in these newspaper articles women are named in an “informal or casual way”, as they are referred to by nicknames, first names only, with reference to their husband, family, their physical appearance, portrayed as victims, namely not as active subjects, but as passive subjects affected by the actions of others, and when depicted as active subjects, their actions are often resembling childlike behaviour: “Camilla”,

“Diana”, “Angie”, “a stalker’s victim”, “Spencer’s sad wife”, “the proud mum”, “sexy Maxine”, “pretty girls”, “they had arrested the wife of...”, “Prince Charles has spent [...] for mistress Camilla Parker Bowles”, “Britain’s most sexist industry has been told to recruit women”, etc. (Reah, 1998, p. 63,69). Reah’s brief analysis of newspaper articles highlights how women are usually depicted as weaker than men, as victims, and as someone undergoing the actions of others. They are usually presented as the role they play in the family, as mothers or wives, or in relation to their physical appearance. These representations foster gender stereotypes and are a sign of how only a limited image is given of what women actually are.

Lastly, I would like to point out how the discussion on language carried out in this chapter will be of crucial importance later when a linguistic analysis of newspaper articles will be conducted. In the following chapter, I will address what violence against women is, along with a review of previous studies in the field.

CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

Chapter two focuses on the varied nature of violence against women and takes into examination the greatness and extent of the phenomenon. In particular, the first part of the chapter is dedicated to defining the field, with a broad-based discussion on what violence against women is and the forms in which it takes place. The police response and the public perception of these crimes are also taken into account, alongside a list of reforms, policies and measures adopted to counter gendered violence and abuse, and a set of data to provide an outline of the phenomenon. In the second part of the chapter, previous studies on the portrayal of violence against women in news articles are provided and examined, in order to set the scene for the subsequent linguistic analysis that is to be carried out in chapter three.

2.1 THE DIVERSE NATURE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

As this chapter focuses on the nature of violence against women, delving into the breadth of the term and exploring the various forms in which violence and abuse present themselves becomes crucial. The definition of violence against women that Silvestri and Crowther-Dowey provide in their book is the one presented in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, which defines violence against women as “[a]ny act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (Silvestri & Crowther-Dowey, 2008, p. 84). This definition highlights how violence can display itself not only as a detrimental act to an individual’s physical appearance, but also as a form of control, coercion, psychological and emotional abuse. This reveals how violence against women can take many different forms, including intimate partner violence, rape, forced prostitution, femicide, genital mutilation, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, psychological abuse and control, etc. (Davies et al., 2007; Silvestri & Crowther-Dowey, 2008). Even with such a brief list of acts of violence against women, it is clear that it could legitimately be regarded as a form of torture and a violation of human rights. Indeed, article 1 of the United Nations

Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment defines torture as:

any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions (United Nations, 1984).

This definition makes the connection between torture, human rights violations, and violence against women even more evident. For this reason, many campaigns, protests, and feminist movements emerged throughout the years with the aim of acknowledgement and recognition of the seriousness of the problem. These have then led to the introduction of policies and implementation of measures to fight and curb the phenomenon as much as possible and ensure support and protection for the victims. For instance, in the UK in 1891 the right to use corporal punishment on a wife was removed; in 1994 rape within marriage became a crime; in 2004 the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act was enacted with the purpose to prevent and address domestic violence by turning common assault and domestic abuse and murder into a crime that can be prosecuted; in 2015 coercive control became a criminal offence (The Fawcett Society, 2016). Significant changes have been made also on a global level. In 1993 violence against women was formally recognised as a human rights issue; in 1995 the Fourth World Conference on Women had a huge impact on the global agenda for gender equality, as its main objective was women's empowerment and achievement of gender equality in twelve areas, some of them being women and health, violence against women, human rights for women, and women and the media. The UN General Assembly in 1999 and the Security Council in 2000, whose resolutions were to marginalise violence against women and acknowledge the importance of women's rights and women's presence in all areas, including economic

welfare, conflicts, politics, and work placement, were also crucial events (Silvestri & Crowther-Dowey, 2008; United Nations, 1995).

Even though the aforementioned are only a small part of all the initiatives and policies that have been embraced in the last century, the problem of violence against women appears to persist or even worsen. Research has shown that in 2022 nearly 89,000 women and girls have been killed worldwide, the highest yearly number recorded in the past 20 years (UNODC & UN WOMEN, 2022). Moreover, most of these killings are gender-related, with more than half of female homicides committed by an intimate partner, a family member or a person otherwise known to the victim. Indeed, while of all the victims of homicide 80% are men and 20% are women, statistics change drastically when only taking into account homicides committed by intimate partners or family members, which make up 55% out of all women's murders, and only 12% of all men's murders (*ibidem*). It becomes clear how violence against women is a universal phenomenon, much more widespread and detrimental to women's welfare and well-being than is generally thought, so much so that in 2002, the Council of Europe "declared violence against women a public health emergency citing it as a major cause of death and disability for women 16 to 44 years of age" (Silvestri & Crowther-Dowey, 2008, p. 84). Focusing on the UK, the situation certainly does not improve. The Fawcett Society highlights how in Britain, two women are killed by violent partners every week, one in four women will experience sexual assault at some point in their lives, a quarter of all violent crimes are the result of domestic abuse alone, less than 20% of rapes and sexual assaults are reported to the police, and less than 6% of those cases end in a conviction (The Fawcett Society, 2004). These data underline the seriousness of the situation, and suggest immediate action by government bodies, police organs, and associations, but also call society itself for a radical change in the perception of women and the preservation of their dignity and rights as individuals.

Despite this, many authorities continue to fail to treat this phenomenon with due seriousness and proper consideration of the victims who have had to endure psychological and physical harm and damage. Silvestri and Crowther-Dowey (2008) have pointed out how police consider domestic violence as a private matter, as something that occurs within families, and as such, they believe that it should be the social services'

responsibility to find a solution to it and handle the “conflict”. Indeed, in many cases, police believe that policing domestic violence is not real police work, as they perceive it as a civil rather than criminal matter (*ibidem*). The Fawcett Society (2004) reports about it too when they mention how despite the high number of calls to the police concerning violence against women, one every minute of every day, the phenomenon is not treated with the seriousness, attention and commitment it deserves, and is rather dismissed with the pretext that it is something that only concerns the family and civil domain. This results in a hostile police environment towards women, one that is not genuinely concerned about the victims, that frequently does not even find the victims' accounts credible and is not dedicated to improving the already terrible situation.

This disregard and negligence on the part of the police and criminal justice institutions also results in a very high attrition rate in cases of violence against women and in particular in cases of rape. In 2005, 179 of the 752 rape reports that the inspection team examined were marked as "no-crimes," even though 57 of them ought to have been filed as crimes (Silvestri & Crowther-Dowey, 2008). This is mainly caused by a lack of attentive and scrupulous handling of the crime by the police, who often do not continue to investigate even when there are possible lines of enquiry, or when they do not report the details mentioned by the victim as accurately as they should and prefer to drop the case due to sexist and discriminatory beliefs (HPCPSI, 2007, as cited in Silvestri & Crowther-Dowey, 2008).

This type of treatment of serious crimes such as domestic violence and rape leads victims to have feelings of fear and mistrust towards the authorities. Victims very often fear that the police, judicial institutions, and courts believe the myths surrounding incidents of violence against women, such as the myths surrounding rape. Indeed, although approximately 90% of rapes occur by acquaintances of the victim and frequently entail coercion, drug or alcohol use, the most common imagery in rape cases is that of the stranger perpetrator molesting the victim at night in an isolated place, or that in which the victim is often seen as the instigator of what happened to her and partly to blame, whether it be for the way she was dressed, the actions she performed, or the way she responded (The Fawcett Society, 2004). Tranchese (2023) explains how the stranger rape myth is so embedded in our culture that it is perceived as the only form of “real rape”, compared to

the “simple rape”, where the victimiser is a person known by the victim, considered as a less serious type of crime (Estrich, 1987, as cited in Tranchese, 2023). This makes victims reluctant to report incidents of harassment or violence of any kind. Indeed, crimes of rape and domestic violence have particularly low reporting rates and domestic violence victims are abused on average 35 times before deciding to make a report (The Fawcett Society, 2004).

Silvestri and Crowther-Dowey (2008) and Davies et al. (2007) provide glaring examples of this inappropriate and unprofessional behaviour towards victims by authorities who should instead guarantee a service that aims to protect and safeguard the integrity and rights of individuals. As an example of the assumption of domestic violence as a crime belonging to the private sphere, Silvestri and Crowther-Dowey mention the 2006 murder of Banaz Mahmood, a young Kurdish Muslim woman, by her father and uncle. They point out that despite the woman’s attempts to warn the police of her father and uncle’s intentions to kill her, the police ignored her concerns and did not take any action, perceiving her complaints as melodramatic and exaggerated. Meanwhile, Davies et al. (2007) address the expectations that society, but also courts and justice institutions, have of victims. They emphasise that victims must appear resigned, passive, inert, and unable to defend themselves, and be self-reliant to receive appropriate consideration and treatment. Indeed, whenever the victims failed to comply with these expectations, they suffered secondary victimisation and sentencing that did not reflect the crime they had suffered, often through victim blaming. For instance, Davies et al. (*ibidem*) bring up Mullin’s 1995 article for *The Guardian* entitled “When crime doesn’t pay”. The article explains how a female victim of robbery and rape was refused criminal injuries compensation on the basis of her work as a prostitute. The tariff for rape was reduced under the guise of provocative work and immoral behaviour, making it a discriminatory and victim-blaming process based on stereotypical views and personal opinions on her personal life and employment.

This victim-blaming behaviour, the expectations and stereotypes attached to victims, the myths that surround rape, domestic violence and violence against women in general, and the discriminatory treatment of victims are behaviours and beliefs embraced also by society. With patriarchal values still deeply embedded in the ideology of a large part of

the population, a superior view of men over women, and a persistent tendency to hold women accountable for acts of violence that they themselves experience, victims encounter a hostile environment towards them not only in justice-related institutions, but also in everyday life. In 2019, The Independent published an article which revealed that the research conducted by the polling company D-CYFOR and based on a sample of 1,104 adults found that 55% of men believed that women who wear revealing clothes are more likely to be victims of harassment and sexual assault, making the way women dress a reason and a justification as to why their perpetrator reacted the way he did and harassed or assaulted them (Oppenheim, 2019). Even in cases that did not occur in the UK, society's behaviour and opinion towards these cases is not dissimilar from the ones just described. For instance, in the Central Park jogger case, in which Trisha Meili was attacked, raped, and severely beaten while jogging in Central Park around nine o'clock pm, and consequently spent twelve days unconscious, people were questioning why the victim was alone in the park at night, instead of condemning the victimizer's actions (Humphries, 2009). Even in the case of O.J. Simpson, public opinion did not spare the victim, Nicole Brown, victim-blaming comments. The former American football player was charged with murdering his wife Nicole and the waiter who happened to be with her at the time of the crime. He was subsequently acquitted despite evidence and previous allegations of violence by his wife. Humphries reveals how in some interviews a significant number of people, including women, referred to the victim as anything but a virtuous person and anything but a good mother, implying that she was not the good woman the media was trying to portray her as, as if this partly legitimised what she had to endure. This happened also in the case of the Circeo Massacre, when a considerable part of public opinion sided with the young boys who violently raped and brutally murdered some young girls. Many defended the young boys, arguing that they were "good boys" who could never have committed such a crime, and even after the court decided to charge them based on the overwhelming evidence, people still blamed the victims saying that they had been reckless for agreeing to go out and attend a party with people they had just met.

2.2 PREVIOUS STUDIES ON THE REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE BRITISH PRESS

Having provided an overview of the main topics related to the analysis that will be carried out in the third chapter of this paper, I will continue by providing an outline of previous studies in this field, in order to get an understanding of the scope of this research. The main data that is going to be shown and discussed is related to cases of violence against women press coverage, although violence in general is also taken into consideration.

Tosh and Phillips (2009) have researched how The Sun newspaper portrays rape. They focused their analysis on three articles published between 1 January 2004 and 31 December 2004 concerning female rape victims. Through discourse analysis, they identified how news about rape is constructed, why it is constructed in this way and the outcome of such choices. The first feature they noticed was the huge number of unnecessary details that may lead to victim-blaming tendencies. For instance, when describing a stranger rape, the article pointed out how the victim was drunk when the crime occurred and that she was on her way home alone. Details such as being alone and being drunk are surely not needed in presenting the case, however, they can blame the victim and create a narrative that implies that the victim was partially guilty and deserved what happened to them because of their behaviour. In another article, this time describing a date rape, the victim was blamed for leaving a nightclub in a taxi to go to a party with two or three men, as this apparently “reckless” behaviour entitles the men to rape her. In the same article, the date was described as a “sexually exciting experience”, mentioning how the rapist considered it an awesome adventure. Once more, details that could certainly capture the reader’s attention and entice them to continue reading are provided, but they minimize the abuse the victim had to endure. Moreover, in all the articles rape is described as “sex with her” rather than something negative done to the victim, once again minimizing the violence and leading to an assumption that rape is not a horrific abuse, it is just sex. Tosh and Phillips then continue by pointing out how the representations of the victims, the perpetrators, and the crimes tend to promote rape myths and confirm social stereotypes. They talk about how encouraging victim-blaming puts the responsibility for what occurred on the victims and suggests that they deserved to be treated in that way. Moreover, they have highlighted how every article's final line casts doubt on the victim's credibility by painting her as a possible liar. For instance, one of the articles quoted how

the perpetrator's version of the events was utterly opposite to the one of the victim, as he stated that "the woman helped herself to the contents of the bottle [spiked with GHB] and later had sex willingly", implying that she did not describe what happened truthfully and therefore lied about the assault. This kind of representation of the victim relies on the "cry-rape girl" myth, where women are perceived as liars and as inclined to lie for jealousy, revenge, and wickedness (Bourke, 2007, as cited in Tranchese, 2023). Furthermore, in the stranger rape article, the victimizer is depicted negatively, as a menace, as a threat, whereas in the other articles, the perpetrators were described as men, with names. This highlights how some rapes are portrayed as more acceptable than others and how stranger rape is perceived as the only "real rape". Finally, Tosh and Phillips emphasize how in the articles the crimes are described in a passive voice, such as "she found herself on the ground", or the victim was "taking the date rape drug", with attacks and abuse happening to the victims rather than performed by the perpetrators, once again putting the victims in the spotlight and describing the victimizers in a passive way, therefore taking responsibility away from them.

Another study on the representation of violence against women, specifically domestic violence, is the one carried out by Braber (2014). She analyses the language used in reports of domestic violence in two British newspapers, *The Guardian* and *The Sun*, in the years 2009-2011. She focuses on how these crimes are described, which cases of domestic violence are perceived as newsworthy and therefore selected to be included in the newspapers, the linguistic devices used to report them and if there are common and recurring themes within the two newspapers. She noticed that a wide range of topics were covered, from domestic violence cases to honour killings, foreign affairs, female-to-male violence, etc. In all these reports and in both newspapers the most common term was "domestic violence", followed by "domestic abuse, domestic battery, wife abuse", etc. She pointed out how in both newspapers the focus was on reporting sensational and "unusual" stories, therefore a substantial amount of reports were about celebrities, cases of female-to-male abuse, and foreign cases, even though these represent a minority of overall domestic violence statistics. She emphasised how there was a tendency to prefer these types of cases, the sensational ones, the extraordinary ones, to capture the reader's attention but also to distance them from the case of abuse, as if to imply that cases of violence are not so common and do not concern ordinary people. It is subsequently

emphasised that the focus is always on the woman, and if attention is paid to the perpetrators, it is not to describe them as abusers, but as men, as ordinary people, to emphasise characteristics irrelevant to the case, or to mention their employment, their relevance in the sector in which they work, etc. For example, in the case of abuse by footballers against their partners, the qualities of the athletes are emphasised, such as being a striker, being very talented and skilful, all of which is unnecessary information for the crime report. Furthermore, the emphasis on the victims frequently seeks to describe their sexual behaviour, as if to imply that their abuse is partially justified by it, rather than to express sympathy and compassion for them. Braber points out how in some articles it is underlined that the women killed by their husbands had affairs with other men, and had sex chats on social media, portraying this behaviour as the cause for their murder. A glaring example is an article in *The Sun* that discusses the murder of a woman by her partner. In relation to it, Braber talks about the inappropriate sexualisation of the woman. Indeed, the article refers to the woman as “playboy girl”, “playboy model”, “brunette”, and “the stripper”, whereas the man is named as “labourer Klym, 34”, “her fella” and “lover” (Braber, 2014, p. 99). Finally, she talks about the use of the passive voice when describing the actions of the perpetrators, making the victims the active agents and hiding or reducing the blame and responsibility of the attackers.

Similar results have been found also in other studies. Stuart et. al (1998) have discussed how an overwhelming number of sources used by news organisations are provided by men, and how women are perceived as not reliable and credible enough, taking us back to the “cry-rape girl” myth. They also talk about the stranger rape myth, claiming that “the single most frequently featured offender is the male stranger, who represents forty-three per cent of all male suspects in reports of sexual violence, followed at some distance by ‘husband’ at eleven per cent and ‘male acquaintance’ at ten per cent” (Stuart et al., 1998, p. 230). Furthermore, an analysis of violence coverage in four British newspapers over six months has revealed how women’s violence and men’s violence were portrayed in different ways, with women’s violence being reported as irrational and emotional, and men’s violence as normal and rational (Bronwyn, 2001).

Focuses on the diverse nature of violence against women, the perception of this phenomenon by society and the dealing of it by authorities, alongside an overview of

previous studies on the portrayal of violence against women in the British press from a linguistic point of view will be of crucial importance in the following chapter. Indeed, the linguistic analysis that will be carried out in chapter three will focus on features similar to the ones that emerged in this chapter, as I will conduct similar investigations into the chosen corpus, and I will focus on the way violence against women is depicted in British news articles.

CHAPTER THREE

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE PORTRAYAL OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE BRITISH PRESS

Chapter three will be dedicated to a linguistic analysis of British news articles concerning violence against women. The main purpose of this analysis is to uncover how the British press depicts violence against women. I will, therefore, select articles that cover this topic from British newspapers, and I will focus my analysis on the language used to report this type of cases.

An explanation of the methods used to conduct this analysis will be provided in the first part of the chapter. I will mention and then describe the tools and techniques adopted to uncover linguistic patterns, such as the corpus used, and the features taken into examination. This part will be followed by the actual analysis, alongside the results that have emerged from it and the discussion of the findings.

3.1 METHOD

This study is based on the corpus entitled *Violence against Women in British Newspapers* created by me through the software *Sketch Engine* (Kilgarriff et al., n.d.). The process of building the corpus consisted of using the software to search the web for British newspaper articles about violence against women and then compiling it. I chose to focus my analysis on articles retrieved from four British newspapers, namely The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Sun, and The Daily Mirror. The choice of these four specific newspapers was based on the willingness to include newspapers of different types, such as broadsheets, compacts, and tabloids, and newspapers of different views, namely both right-wing and left-wing newspapers. Indeed, The Daily Telegraph is a broadsheet and a right-wing quality newspaper; The Guardian is a compact and a left-wing quality newspaper; The Sun is a right-wing tabloid newspaper; The Daily Mirror is a left-wing tabloid newspaper.

As I chose to focus on these four British newspapers, I entered their names, alongside terms such as *violence against women*, *rape*, *domestic violence*, *abuse*, *femicide*, *attack* and *assault*, as reference points for the software when searching for articles to include in

the corpus. After obtaining the software's results, I examined all the articles it had selected, chose the ones that were most inherent to the analysis I was going to conduct, and compiled my corpus. This stage of the corpus-building process was crucial, as the software had also selected articles from non-British newspapers, such as The Guardian Nigeria and The Daily Telegraph Australia, or it had chosen articles on violence against women from non-publishing sources, such as the UN Women website, Wikipedia, and Twitter.

The finished and compiled corpus contains 176 articles, 179,736 words and 209,300 tokens. The articles are from different years, but the vast majority have a publication date that ranges between 2017 and 2024, and all of them are retrieved from the online web pages of the newspapers selected. However, the number of articles included is not the same for every newspaper.

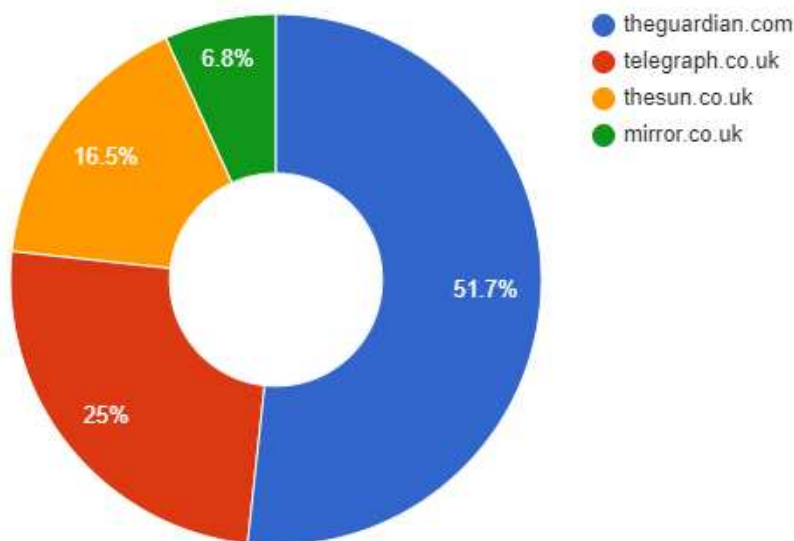


Figure 1: Percentage of articles by newspaper. Source: Sketch Engine.

As Figure 1 shows, the highest number of articles comes from The Guardian, with a percentage of 51.7%, followed by The Daily Telegraph with 25%, The Sun with 16.5%, and The Daily Mirror with 6.8%. This highlights how the results that will emerge from the analysis will come from the examination of data retrieved more from articles from some newspapers, such as The Guardian, than from articles from other newspapers, such as the Daily Mirror.

Having provided a general description of the corpus that will be employed, I will now mention the main purposes of this paper and explain the research techniques I will adopt. Focusing on the purposes of this paper, it aims to address several questions: how does the British press cover violence against women? How are the victims and the perpetrators portrayed? How are the cases reported? What kind of language is used?

Moreover, as this analysis is based on a corpus, it can be referred to as a corpus-based discourse analysis that examines articles both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. Indeed, frequency information about occurrences of specific words, phrases, or particular linguistic features will be provided, as well as an examination of collocates, namely words that regularly appear near one another, and a qualitative evaluation of the language used to cover violence against women. For the qualitative evaluation, I will examine the concordances in which the terms I will be analysing appear. Concordances are lists of examples of the use of words, parts of speech, or phrases in context, namely in the documents included in the corpus. This type of analysis allows the uncovering of patterns of language that could not be identified with a mere analysis of collates or frequency lists. For instance, the labelling patterns for women and men will be taken into consideration, namely whether they are referred to by their occupation, age, gender, or social status, whether any terms denoting positive or negative appraisal are present, and whether the authors have included a subjective evaluation of the participants.

3.2 ANALYSIS OF THE PORTRAYAL OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE BRITISH PRESS

As stated above, this is a linguistic analysis of the coverage of violence against women by the British press. Therefore, the first thing I would like to focus on are the most recurrent nouns in the corpus, in order to get some insights into what is more frequently mentioned in the articles. To analyse this feature, I used the frequency lists function on Sketch Engine, I selected *noun* as part of speech and decided to consider the first ten most frequently used nouns.

NOUN	ABSOLUTE FREQUENCY (number of times the item was found in the corpus)
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Woman	1673
Violence	919
Police	778
Abuse	696
Year	651
Victim	598
Man	557
Rape	412
Case	404
Time	353

Table 1: Frequency lists of nouns.

As Table 1 shows, the most frequently used term is *woman* with 1673 occurrences. This may suggest that more attention is paid to the victims, namely women, than to the perpetrators. Indeed, further analysis of the results reveals that both *woman* and *victim* occur more frequently than the term *man* or other nouns that may be associated with it. Also, terms such as *violence*, *police*, and *abuse*, which might indicate the newspapers' focus on the reporting and description of the cases rather than the participants involved in them, have a higher absolute frequency than the term *man*. To further analyse this aspect, I decided to examine also the frequency list of pronouns and determine whether the recurrence of pronouns typically associated with women is higher than that of pronouns typically associated with men.

PRONOUN	ABSOLUTE FREQUENCY (number of times the item was found in the corpus)
It	1508
Her	1327
I	1307
She	1250
He	1096
We	956
They	814
Their	656

His	560
You	554

Table 2: Frequency lists of pronouns.

As Table 2 shows, female pronouns, such as *she* and *her*, occur more frequently than male pronouns, such as *he* and *his*. Indeed, *she* and *her* occur respectively 1250 and 1327 times, and *he* and *his* occur respectively 1096 and 560 times. Therefore, even in the analysis of the frequency lists of pronouns, there is evidence of the possible predominance of mentioning and focusing on women rather than men.

However, the high frequency of terms associated with women does not provide clear information about how they are portrayed. For instance, the high recurrence of the pronoun *her* might not necessarily imply that the focus is on the woman, as it may be used in the form of something happening to the woman or something done to her. Again, when acknowledging that words such as *woman* or *victim* have high frequencies, detecting how these terms are used and whether the woman or the victim is depicted positively or negatively is not possible. Therefore, I will continue by analysing the collocates of *woman* and *man*. I have decided to focus on the modifiers of the selected terms, the verbs with the selected terms as object and the verbs with the selected terms as subject.

Modifiers of <i>woman</i>	Verbs with <i>woman</i> as object	Verbs with <i>woman</i> as subject
Young	Kill	Be
Black	Be	Have
Other	Murder	Experience
Old	Rape	Suffer
Many	Protect	Do
More	Assault	Die
Palestinian	Find	Face
Migrant	Abuse	Say

Table 3: Collocates of the term *woman*.

Modifiers of <i>man</i>	Verbs with <i>man</i> as object	Verbs with <i>man</i> as subject
Young	Be	Be
Violent	Arrest	Kill
Abusive	Say	Have
Other	Accuse	Commit
Asian	Assault	Do
Many	Kill	Abuse
Black	Identify	Rape
Old	Enable	Say

Table 4: Collocates of the term *man*.

The first remarkable feature that emerges when examining Table 3, is the tendency to classify women in terms of their age, their skin colour and their nationality or provenance. Indeed, Table 3 shows how terms such as *young*, *black*, *old*, *Palestinian*, and *migrant* are some of the most frequent modifiers of the word *woman*. The mentioning of the women's age and skin colour is utterly irrelevant in reporting the case, as knowing that the woman who was assaulted was young or old does not make any difference in the brutality of the case and the fact that they should not have had to experience the violence. Indeed, mentioning these characteristics seems to suggest that there are victims who are more worthy of sympathy and victims with whom the reader should not empathise that much.

When examining the same feature for the collocates of *man*, Table 4 shows how men are classified by their age, skin colour and nationality too, with modifiers such as *young*, *Asian*, *black* and *old*. Again, pointing out that the perpetrator is Asian, young, or black, does not minimise or aggravate the crime that person committed. Consequently, it could be seen as irrelevant information or information that tends to create stereotypes and false myths.

Therefore, it seems like women and men are portrayed quite similarly in terms of the most common modifiers of these words. However, there is a difference that is worth mentioning, which is the fact that women are only portrayed in relation to how they appear, namely personal features and characteristics, whereas men are also classified in terms of the crime they have committed and the actions they have performed. Indeed,

modifiers such as *violent* and *abusive* refer to what the perpetrators have done rather than mention any biological or physical features of these men. Thus, the negative appraisal that these terms carry in their meaning is geared towards these men because of the actions they have performed, and not due to characteristics they possess.

Going further with this type of analysis, I would like to find out whether women are described as vulnerable and defenceless and men as monsters, to determine whether the cases of violence against women are presented as sensational and exceptional cases, where the offenders are portrayed as beasts and the victims as helpless against such brutality, or they are accurately and realistically reported, conveying their seriousness without elevating them above the ordinary, as they are very common crimes. Therefore, I have searched for words such as *monster*, *animal*, *vulnerable*, *helpless*, and *troubled*. I chose these words because I either noticed them in the word lists of the corpus or in the concordances when analysing other words. The term *monster* appears almost always in the reporting of the statements of the victims, such as “My monster ex beat me so hard”, “He's a monster”, and “Sebastian was a monster and I am so glad he was caged at all”. The same results have been found for the term *animal*. As for *helpless*, the term was found only in one article, and it was used by the victim herself to describe how she felt. *Troubled* was found in two articles: in one it was used to describe a type of relationship, in the other one it was used to report the words of the victim's neighbour, who described her as a “troubled woman”. The term *vulnerable* appeared quite a few times, but only once as an evaluation made by the newspaper itself, when it stated that the victim “seemed warm, friendly and very vulnerable”. Having researched how these terms are used in the corpus, I would suggest that there is not a tendency to report the crimes as something sensational, or at least the participants are not described in a controversial way.

Another aspect that I would like to delve into is whether there is a tendency to report details that could lead to victim blaming. For this reason, I have searched for words such as *drink*, *wear*, *alone*, *provoked*, *mad*, and *culpable*, which I noticed again either in the wordlists or in the concordances when searching for other words. The first three terms were selected as the main reasons for victim blaming are usually the fact that the victim was drunk or alone, possibly at night or in places she “shouldn't have been”, or for what they were wearing, frequently seen as inappropriate or provocative. The last three terms

were chosen as oftentimes the victims are blamed for being culpable, having provoked the offender, or having driven them mad. Both *drink* and *wear* appear much more frequently than the rest of the terms, respectively 31 times and 30 times. Nevertheless, no negative or personal comments from the newspapers were detected. Indeed, in the sentences in which these words appear they are used to report something the victim has said or remembers about the offence, such as “He developed a habit of disappearing for hours at a time, staggering home drunk in the early hours of the morning”, “Sebastian had been wearing heavy boots as he stamped on my spine”, “He was well-dressed and generous, insisting on paying for drinks”, or “he controlled what clothes I wore”. Sometimes these terms were used to describe how the victim previously blamed herself for the offence, in phrases such as “She was drunk at the time, so, confused by victim-blaming culture, it took her a while to stop blaming herself for *putting myself in that position*”, or to describe details witnesses had seen, such as “The 50-year-old said: The boy wore a black blazer, the girl wore green”. Overall, these two terms were mainly used to describe the men’s behaviour or appearance, whether it was in the form of details the victims had remembered, or in the account of the events by witnesses or the newspaper itself. The term *alone* was also found 30 times in the corpus, but it was never used to point out the fact that the victim was alone, or that the victim should not have been alone, or similar statements. *Provoked* and *culpable* appear only once, but not in relation to victims. Indeed, *provoked* was used to refer to protest outbursts after the gang rape and murder of a student, and *culpable* was used to refer to the mistake made in freeing a serial sex offender. Finally, *mad* appeared to report the concerns of the victims to anger their partners or perpetrators, in phrases such as “you’re in this constant state of trying to manage, to not make him mad”, or “She remembers thinking: He’s going to get mad. He’s going to look for me”.

Having established that in the selected articles no major victim-blaming tendencies were identified, I would like to switch to an analysis of the relational identification of the participants. Namely, I would like to determine the frequencies with which women and men are labelled in terms of their relationship to others. I have therefore searched for terms such as *mother*, *mum*, *daughter*, *sister*, *wife*, and *girlfriend* for women, and *father*, *dad*, *son*, *brother*, *husband*, and *boyfriend* for men.

LEMMA	ABSOLUTE FREQUENCY
Mother	128
Daughter	97
Wife	60
Sister	40
Mum	31
Girlfriend	27

Table 5: Frequencies of words related to relational identification for women.

LEMMA	ABSOLUTE FREQUENCY
Husband	77
Son	69
Father	43
Boyfriend	26
Brother	21
Dad	10

Table 6: Frequencies of words related to relational identification for men.

As Tables 5 and 6 show, women are much more referred to with words denoting their relationship with others than men. This could also be due to the fact that women are more frequently mentioned than men in the corpus. What is also worth mentioning is the fact that women are mostly labelled as mothers, probably meant to underline the fact that they are not the only victims of the violence, but also their children might be affected by it. The problem is that this might suggest that there are victims more deserving of empathy than others. Moreover, this type of labelling may also be meant to give a hint about the status of these women in society. Men instead, are mostly labelled as husbands, highlighting how the majority of cases of violence against women involve victims and perpetrators that have a very intimate and close relationship, and it has nothing to do with the stranger-rape or stranger-abuse myths.

Finally, I would like to analyse the verbs most frequently used with *woman* and *man* and therefore go back to the collocates of these terms. As Tables 3 and 4 show, the first eight most common verbs with *woman* as subject are *be*, *have*, *experience*, *suffer*, *do*, *die*, *face*, and *say*, whereas for the term *man* we have *be*, *kill*, *have*, *commit*, *do*, *abuse*, *rape*, and

say. In the list of verbs where the term *woman* is the subject, verbs that indicate that the victims had to endure and go through something are present, such as *experience*, *suffer*, *face*, and *die*, whereas in the list of verbs with *man* as subject we find verbs such as *kill*, *commit*, *abuse*, and *rape*, which display the perpetrators' actions towards the victims. There are also verbs such as *be*, *have* and *say*, that appear in both lists, but are used in different ways. For instance, the passive voice of the verb *be* is used more frequently in the sentences with *woman* as the subject than those with *man* as the subject. Indeed, of all the times the verb *to be* is used in the corpus with as subject the term *woman*, 25% of the times it is used in the active voice and 75% in the passive voice, while with regard to the sentences with *man* as subject and *to be* as verb the statistics change, with *be* being used 47% of the times in the active voice and 53% in the passive voice. This could indicate that the verb *to be*, for instance, is frequently used with the term *woman* to denote something done to them, whereas when it is used with the term *man* it highlights a way of being of these men.

Going further with the analysis of verbs, I would also like to mention the verbs with *woman* as object because they appear to be quite similar to those that have *man* as subject. The eight most frequent ones are *kill*, *be*, *murder*, *rape*, *protect*, *assault*, *find*, and *abuse*. Indeed, verbs such as *kill*, *rape*, and *abuse* appear both in the collocates of *man*, with men as subjects, and in the collocates of *woman*, with women as objects. When they appear in sentences where women are the objects of the phrases, they are very frequently preceded and followed by the performer(s) of these actions, in phrases such as “A footballer accused of raping two women”, “women killed by their ex-boyfriends”, “woman killed by husband”, “he claimed he had killed another woman”. This means that the agent is usually mentioned and therefore male agency is not removed from the reporting of cases of male violence.

Moreover, when searching for similar verbs in the concordance, such as *assaulted*, and *attacked*, I observed how these verbs were used in a way that brought attention to the actions of the perpetrators rather than just to claim that a woman had been assaulted. For instance, the active voice of these verbs was used respectively 33% of all occurrences for *assaulted* and 41% for *attacked*, in phrases such as “He then sexually assaulted her”, “he had assaulted or raped them”, “he attacked her”, and “Caden Crossley attacked teenage

girl”, and even though they were used mainly in the passive voice, 67% for *assaulted* and 59% for *attacked*, the agent was still frequently mentioned, as in phrases such as “Nigella Lawson was apparently assaulted by her husband”, and “a 43-year-old woman was sexually assaulted by Savile”. When the perpetrator was not mentioned one of the main reasons was that the article was reporting statistics, such as “One in three UK female students sexually assaulted or abused on campus”, or “At least 50 women and girls have been raped and sexually assaulted”.

Overall, I would say that from the linguistic analysis conducted on these articles, no judgmental nor biased tendencies have been detected, neither towards the victims nor towards the perpetrators. Indeed, I would suggest that in these articles the cases of violence against women have been reported without any kind of exaltation of unnecessary details or additional comments from newspapers. However, it is important to bear in mind that the selected articles are predominantly from recent years, and that an analysis of articles with an older publication date might reveal different results, as might a different selection of British newspapers.

CONCLUSION

After having provided a review on language and violence against women, having discussed their connection with society, power and ideology, and having outlined the way in which they are used and portrayed in the British press in the first and second chapter of this paper, the aim of chapter three was to conduct a linguistic analysis of British newspaper articles reporting violence against women to uncover how this issue is represented in the British press.

The analysis was conducted through the software *Sketch Engine*, and it was based on a corpus created by me and containing 176 articles on violence against women retrieved from four British newspapers, The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Sun, and The Daily Mirror. What has emerged from the analysis is that women and other terms that may be associated with them, such as the pronouns *she* and *her*, are more frequently mentioned than men. Moreover, a tendency to classify these women in terms of their age, gender, nationality and provenance has been detected. These features seem to be frequently mentioned for men too, as well as modifiers that carry negative appraisal, mainly due to the actions they have performed. Further analysis has shown that there is not a preference for reporting the cases in a controversial way, by using terms that could depict the perpetrators as beasts and the victims as vulnerable and defenceless, making the report extraordinary and sensational. Moreover, no straightforward and obvious victim-blaming tendencies from the newspapers were detected. What has been identified though, is the high number of occurrences of words such as *mother* and *daughter* that label women in terms of their relationship to others. In this category, men were mostly referred to as husbands. Finally, an examination of the verbs most frequently used with the terms *woman* and *man* has revealed how victims are often followed by verbs that indicate that they had to endure something, whereas perpetrators are typically followed by verbs that highlight their actions. Furthermore, verbs such as *kill*, *rape*, *assault*, and *attack*, are used both in their passive and active voices, and although usually the percentage of the times they were used in the passive voice is higher than the one reporting their usage in the active voice, very frequently the agents are mentioned.

Overall, I would say that neither women nor men were portrayed in a biased or judgmental way in the newspaper's articles analysed. Moreover, no unnecessary, personal, or

prejudiced comments towards the cases were detected. I would suggest further analysis in this field by examining articles from different newspapers or with a diverse publication date than the ones chosen by me, or even articles from two different years, to identify how the portrayal of violence against women has changed over the years. Furthermore, a comparison between the representation of this issue by right-wing newspapers and left-wing newspapers might also be interesting.

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SUMMARY IN ITALIAN

L'obiettivo di questa tesi è quello di fornire un'analisi linguistica del modo in cui la stampa inglese tratta la tematica della violenza contro le donne. La scelta di questo argomento è stata dettata dal mio interesse nei confronti di femminismo e studi linguistici, tanto da decidere di condurre un'analisi che veda combinate queste due sfere.

Il primo capitolo è dedicato ad un'analisi del termine linguaggio, che porta ad una riflessione sui vari significati che questa parola può assumere e ai modi in cui il linguaggio utilizzato in modi, contesti e da persone differenti può trasmettere messaggi diversi e adempiere a scopi differenti. In particolare, menziono il fatto che il linguaggio può essere anche visivo, come nei casi di pubblicità, film, immagini e anche nel caso dei giornali, principalmente attraverso fotografie. Viene inoltre discussa la definizione che descrive il linguaggio come qualcosa di correlato alle credenze, punti di vista e pensieri della gente, sottolineando quindi come linguaggio e ideologia siano strettamente legati tra di loro. Viene poi esplorato il nesso tra linguaggio, ideologia, e società, arrivando alla conclusione che questi tre concetti sono strettamente legati tra di loro, tanto da influenzarsi a vicenda e da avere un impatto gli uni sugli altri. L'uso di un determinato linguaggio indica infatti un certo tipo di ideologia e inevitabilmente influenza la società, ma allo stesso tempo anche la società e le diverse ideologie determinano il linguaggio che viene utilizzato in determinati contesti. Viene menzionato anche come il potere abbia un grande impatto su questi tre aspetti. Sono infatti solitamente le persone e classi sociali più potenti e quelle che godono di più privilegi a dettare le regole su quali debbano essere le ideologie e il linguaggio dominanti. È facile dedurre quindi come anche il linguaggio utilizzato dalla stampa sia spesso influenzato da fattori esterni e tenda spesso ad adottare punti di vista o essere favorevole alla classe dominante.

Successivamente, parlo della natura più infida del linguaggio, cioè il suo utilizzo per controllare, manipolare, opprimere e discriminare altre persone. Abbiamo già menzionato come la padronanza del linguaggio e la possibilità nel fare determinate scelte in campo linguistico e "imporle" alla società sia un segnale del potere che il linguaggio detiene. Questo potere può essere utilizzato in certi casi per scopi negativi, come appunto controllare, manipolare o discriminare. Alcuni esempi di questo fenomeno riportati nel capitolo sono il Welsh Not, cioè la proibizione di parlare gallese a scuola e la conseguente

punizione che subivano i bambini che lo parlavano, la lingua kurda in Turchia, parzialmente sradicata attraverso leggi che ne proibivano l'uso in molteplici contesti, oppure l'uso del linguaggio da parte dei Nazionalsocialisti, volto a manipolare e controllare la popolazione. Questo tipo di utilizzo del linguaggio può essere adottato anche nei mass media e in particolare nella stampa. I produttori, infatti, hanno il potere di decidere ciò che il consumatore leggerà o vedrà, in quanto sono loro a scegliere i contenuti da includere, il modo in cui vengono presentati e la prospettiva adottata. Nella seconda parte del capitolo ho analizzato proprio questo aspetto, cioè il potere della stampa nel decidere quali informazioni includere nei giornali e quale versione dei fatti presentare.

Nel secondo capitolo viene analizzato il significato di violenza contro le donne e le forme in cui questo fenomeno può presentarsi. Viene sottolineato come possa essere non solo abuso fisico, ma anche psicologico e come debba essere considerato una violazione dei diritti umani. Vengono inoltre menzionate alcune delle leggi e campagne volte a tutelare le vittime e minimizzare questo fenomeno, come il fatto di considerare abusi e omicidi domestici come crimini, oppure l'organizzazione di conferenze mondiali per la promozione della parità di genere. Nonostante le numerose leggi e provvedimenti stipulati, le percentuali di atti di violenza contro le donne sono comunque alquanto alte: nel 2022 quasi 89.000 donne e ragazze sono state uccise in tutto il mondo, il numero annuale più alto registrato negli ultimi vent'anni; gli omicidi commessi da partner o membri della famiglia costituiscono il 55% di tutti gli omicidi di donne; in Gran Bretagna, ogni settimana, due donne vengono uccise da, proprio partner, una donna su quattro subisce violenza sessuale almeno una volta nella vita, e un quarto di tutti i crimini violenti sono il risultato di abusi domestici.

Nonostante ciò, le vittime continuano a non essere trattate con la dovuta serietà e il dovuto rispetto da parte delle forze dell'ordine e di istituzioni giuridiche che invece dovrebbero tutelarle. Le vittime spesso non vengono credute, non vengono presi provvedimenti quando casi di violenza vengono denunciati, non vengono portate avanti indagini anche se sono presenti prove perché casi come quelli di violenza domestica non vengono percepiti dalla polizia come lavoro che deve essere svolto da loro, in quanto li definiscono una questione civile più che un crimine. Questo porta alla diffidenza da parte delle vittime nei confronti di forze dell'ordine e autorità giudiziarie, diventando di conseguenza sempre

più restie nel denunciare gli abusi. Altre credenze che tendono a sminuire gli abusi subiti dalle donne sono il mito del stupro da parte di persone estranee come unico tipo di “vero stupro”, oppure il mito chiamato “cry-rape girl”, che sostiene il fatto che spesso le vittime mentano su ciò che è realmente successo per vendetta o gelosia. Non mancano commenti e narrative che colpevolizzano le vittime per l'accaduto, affermando che un determinato comportamento o un determinato abbigliamento fossero inopportuni, e che di conseguenza hanno scatenato le azioni violente degli uomini. Infine, apporto degli esempi di questo modo di rappresentare la violenza contro le donne, attraverso pregiudizi e credenze controverse, citando e analizzando studi nell'ambito della rappresentazione di questi casi da parte della stampa britannica.

Nel terzo capitolo viene svolta l'analisi linguistica della rappresentazione della violenza contro le donne da parte della stampa britannica. L'analisi si basa su un corpus creato da me e intitolato *Violence against Women in British Newspapers*. Il corpus è formato da 176 articoli che parlano di violenza contro le donne e pubblicati da quattro giornali britannici, The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Sun, e The Daily Mail. Cercare questi articoli, creare il corpus e condurre l'analisi è stato possibile grazie al software *Sketch Engine*. Inoltre, l'analisi mira a rispondere a varie domande, tra le quali il modo in cui la stampa tratta la violenza contro le donne, il modo in cui vittime e colpevoli vengono rappresentati, come vengono riportati i casi e il tipo di linguaggio utilizzato.

Dall'analisi è emerso come il termine *donna*, e altre parole che posso essere associate con questo termine, come *lei* o *vittima*, vengono utilizzati più spesso del termine *uomo*. Inoltre, sia donne sia uomini vengono spesso affiancati da aggettivi che indicano la loro età, il colore della loro pelle o la loro nazionalità, tutti dettagli poco rilevanti per la descrizione del caso. Per quanto riguarda gli uomini, vengono utilizzati anche aggettivi che si basano sulle azioni che hanno svolto, come *violento* o *abusivo*, che derivano dal loro comportamento e non da un loro modo di essere. Inoltre, non vengono utilizzate parole che tendano a rendere i casi di violenza qualcosa di straordinario e sensazionale, come il riferirsi ai colpevoli con termini come *mostro* e *animale*, e alle vittime con termini come *vulnerabile* e *problematica*. Non sono stati rilevati termini che suggeriscano la tendenza a colpevolizzare le vittime per l'accaduto. Ciò che è stato notato è l'elevato numero di volte in cui le vittime e gli autori di reato vengono indicati con termini che

sottolineano la loro relazione con altri soggetti. Le vittime sono infatti spesso definite come madri, mentre i colpevoli come mariti. Infine, un'analisi sui verbi più frequentemente utilizzati ha indicato che si presta molta attenzione alle azioni svolte dagli uomini e anche nei casi in cui i verbi vengono utilizzati alla forma passiva, l'agente viene spesso menzionato.

Infine, ho suggerito un'analisi più approfondita sull'argomento selezionando articoli con date di pubblicazione diverse per mettere a confronto com'è cambiato il modo di rappresentare la violenza contro le donne negli anni. La scelta di analizzare articoli di giornali diversi, o fare un confronto tra il modo in cui alcuni giornali scrivono di questo fenomeno e il modo in cui altri giornali lo fanno, per esempio scegliendo di fare un confronto tra giornali di destra e giornali di sinistra, potrebbe essere interessante, apportando quindi diverse prospettive e punti di vista a questo tipo di analisi.