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'Between journalists and reporters'. A corpus-assisted analysis of occupational representations within journalism

Journalism must be examined as a corpus… (Carey 1997: 148)

This paper outlines findings from a larger project which analyses the ways journalists represent themselves and their trade in their own news-work. The paper focuses on the conceptualizations of journalism emerging from the discourses surrounding different kinds of newsworkers, in particular analysing the differences between 'journalists' and 'reporters'. Dictionaries present the two words as near synonyms, but corpus evidence shows that the terms are not exactly interchangeable, and are loaded with rather distinctive meanings. Additionally, a methodological question concerning the bottom-up generation of research questions in corpus-assisted (or based) discourse studies (Baker 2006, McEnery and Gabrielatos 2006) and the serendipitous opportunities offered by CADS (Partington 2009) is addressed.

The main assumption underpinning the research is that journalists create interpretative communities (Zelizer 2004) through the discourses they circulate about their profession, and that the meaning and role of journalism are constituted through daily performance (Matheson 2005) and can be studied by means of the self-reflexive traces newsworkers leave in their texts. That is, they can be detected and studied in a newspaper corpus.

The corpus under investigation contains the complete output of the Guardian in 2005 (amounting to approximately 40 million words), a year that was particularly relevant from a journalistic point of view in the newspaper's recent biography (*). The Guardian was selected in preference to other news outlets because of its interest in media matters, a focus both self-proclaimed by the newspaper itself and also empirically attested by a preliminary Keywords comparison of the Guardian with other British broadsheets (Marchi and Taylor 2009).

The analysis combines two different tools, Wordsmith and Xaira. The concordancers are used in a complementary way in order to optimise the employment of the corpus XML mark-up, which, as it will be reported, proved to be useful in achieving a finer-grained assessment of the data.

Journalism is a segmented and undetermined occupation and journalist is 'a label that people engaged in a diverse range of activities apply to themselves' (Tunstall 1971: 69). The analysis starts by defining candidate items for the investigation and by tracing a lexical profile of the terms JOURNALIST and REPORTER. By means of a detailed collocation analysis it is shown how the two words are used in different ways and how the patterns associated with them point at some core matters of occupational identity: class, skills, professional ethics, and so on. According to Hampton (2005) there is a difference of status between 'real journalists' and 'mere shorthand reporters'; the focus on the discursive behaviour of the two labels allows us to open a window onto the varied meanings of journalism and the multiple discourses practitioners enact about their profession, in particular with reference to a "good" vs "bad" journalism dialectic.

(*) In 2005 the Guardian underwent a transformation, changing to the smaller Berliner format. The transformation received extensively coverage and resulted in a broader debate about newspapers and journalism.

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