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Clinton's hearing reaches headlines: The mediatization of the Benghazi hearing in two leading U.S. newspapers

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ABSTRACT

This article presents preliminary findings of a research project aimed at investigating textual outcomes in the press of Hillary Clinton's first congressional hearing on the Benghazi attacks on September 23rd, 2013. The analysis focuses on the way in which journalists of two main U.S. newspapers use congressional hearing material, and centres specifically on the strategies that are deployed to incorporate the hearing either to endorse/criticise Clinton's version of the events, or to present a more neutral stance, as may be expected of high-reputation newspapers. The analytical model that has been employed relies on the model Catenaccio (2008) developed drawing on van Dijk and Bell to analyse the presence of corporate press releases in the media and has been applied to the genre of congressional hearing. Findings confirmed that, in terms of input source usage, specific processes and strategies are similarly employed by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and are aimed at avoiding explicit endorsement of Clinton's point of view.

Keywords: congressional hearings, news articles, qualitative analysis, news production process.

1. Introduction

Congressional hearings have a long history in US political discourse. They have been broadcast over the past 50 years¹, and most Americans have

¹ The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 permitted, for the first time, radio and television broadcast of House committee and subcommittee hearings (GPO 2003:43).

watched at least one televised committee hearing. It seems quite evident that, alongside their formal role as records of committee activity, hearings serve other communicative purposes. Witnesses, who play a crucial role, may use their testimony to set out the motivations of their choices and justify their conduct. This is mostly the case with investigative hearings, which for their very nature have attracted the audience's attention and media coverage for a long time. To quote just one example, back in 1862² *The New York Tribune* reported President Lincoln giving testimony before the House Judiciary Committee about the premature publication of a portion of his last annual message in the *Herald*.

Originally addressed to a more restricted audience, nowadays hearings are widely reported on the front pages of the national press and increasingly accessed in their digital version. They provide both witnesses and committee members with high profile moments where they can use their argumentation skills to set out their ideology, thus giving them the opportunity to engage with an increasingly wide and varied audience.

Hearings occur in a very specific setting – almost all of the hearings are held at Capitol Hill – and they undergo a unique process of production and distribution. They can be broadly classified into four types, legislative, oversight, confirmation and investigative, although all hearings share common elements of preparation and conduct. Official hearings, which are published by the Government Printing Office and can be easily retrieved online, are made up of elements such as written and oral witness statements, transcripts of verbal question-and-answer sessions between committee members and witnesses, reports, exhibits and materials submitted for the record by witnesses, as well as correspondence and other materials submitted by interested parties. House and Senate Rules (Sachs 2004; Carr 2006) require a witness to file in advance a written copy of their testimony with the committee, who may want to summarise or outline the testimony, draft questions tailored to each witness's statement or photocopy the statement for distribution to the press. In following the traditional format, a witness summarises his or her written statement and addresses questions from committee members. As the analysis will reveal, the witness's opening statement is used extensively by the press and deserves specific attention in empirical work aimed at an improved understanding of the genre of congressional hearings.

² <https://www.senate.gov/committees/SittingPresidentsVicePresidentsWhoHave-Testified-BeforeCongressional-Committees.htm>

Previous steps of the research project on congressional hearings carried out by the author of this paper investigated the way in which witnesses discursively construct their public identity through their testimony (Gigliani 2017; 2019). However, the extent to which these textual and discursive constructions are adopted, wholly or partially, by the press (Bell 1991; van Dijk 1988) is also of crucial importance. This paper analyses and discusses textual outcomes in the media of Hillary Clinton's first congressional hearing on the 2012 Benghazi attacks. On January 23rd, 2013 Hillary Clinton testified in front of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the U.S. Senate and, later in the day, she appeared in front of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. This second hearing resulted in a longer document, although Clinton's opening statement is essentially a duplication of the opening statement she read out during the Senate hearing. It needs to be noted here that both in *The New York Times* and in *The Washington Post* the House hearing is not used as an input source except in one, not significant, case³. The analysis will focus on the way in which journalists use parts of the congressional hearing and will pivot specifically on the strategies which are deployed to incorporate the hearing, either privileging Clinton's version of the events or not.

2. Theoretical framework

Jacobs et al. (2008: 1) argue that, "as cultural brokers disseminating world knowledge, the stories journalists tell are ideologically significant. This observation is old news, but ever so timely, especially given today's mediascape of convergence, innovation, competition, and globalization". Journalists are social actors (Peterson 2003) and generally convey a point of view targeting an ideal audience that will/will not be comfortable with the construed ideological position (Fowler 1991: 232). At the same time, newspapers assert the "objectivity" of their discourse and maintain that their texts are "factual", "impartial", "balanced" and free of any of the author's own opinions and perspectives (White 2009), in other words journalists are presented as "disinterested transmitter[s] of the news" (Hanitzsch 2007: 372). Whilst a balanced engagement with alternative voices and positions was, in principle, a default procedure and a practice of professional ethics for quality newspapers (Richardson 2007: 44; Skovsgaard et al. 2013), nowadays journalist discourse often seems to be openly value-laden.

³ In *The Washington Post* article, only four lines were taken from the question-and-answer session.

As media practice involves journalists as social actors who make interpretative decisions (Couldry 2004), the textual outcomes of these decisions – news articles – deserve to be studied to better understand the actors' real intentions. According to van Hout and Jacobs (2008: 68), "journalists are interpretative agents who construct authoritative news accounts out of a multitude of news sources". Journalists "create public identities for both social groups and individuals through subtle discursive practices" (Fairclough 2003: 213). The model used for the present study, therefore, highlights the news providers' agency – the journalists' active role in the news production process.

Among these discursive practices, the way reporting and reported voices alternate deserves special attention, as the resulting multi-voice narrative (Harry 2014: 1042) is typical of news articles. *Verbatim* quotations in news discourse amplify, mimic or de-contextualise the speech of others, whilst indirect quotations can echo, paraphrase or "depict" this speech (Clark – Gerrig 1990). In the hearing under investigation, the reporting and reported voices conflate in ways that allow the former to be "disguised" as the latter (Bednarek 2006: 651). Direct quotations represent Clinton in her own voice, and by bringing the reader face to face with her actual words, journalists obtain a dramatic effect (Gray 2018: 202) that easily captures the reader's attention. At the same time, through indirect quotations consisting of a "paraphrasing and summary of an original quote by means of synonyms, re-phrasing and re-wording" (Harry 2014: 1050), Clinton's words are syntactically incorporated into the journalists' reporting voice, which is constructed to appear as a relatively accurate representation of what the source originally meant.

As argued by Thompson (1996: 514) and Wortham – Locher (1996), such an interweaving of reporting and reported voices produces a sort of linguistic ventriloquism, since quoted speech used by journalists is "the most explicit form of inclusion of other-discourse" (Calsamiglia – López Ferrero 2003: 147). Calsamiglia and López Ferrero's research focuses on direct and indirect quotation and highlights that when direct citations are used, there is a fracture between the syntax of other-discourse and the writer's discourse. This kind of fracture affects tense, space and time adverbs and person-reference words, as a result of the two different types of enunciation being juxtaposed and signalled by graphic markers such as colons and quotation marks. On the other hand, there is only one discourse with a single deictic centre when using indirect citations, with subordinate clauses introduced by conjunctions, and the correspondent agreement of tenses (Calsamiglia – López Ferrero 2003: 155).

The following paragraphs will discuss the way in which the congressional hearing's material is embedded in two news articles. This view somehow echoes the Goffmanian concept of "embedding", the incorporation of one speech event into another (Goffman 1981), – which is pivotal in the investigation carried out. As observed by Bell, in print media most of the reported news actually "consists of previously composed text reworked into text news" (Bell 1991: 41).

The analysis, which is qualitative in nature, focuses on news articles, the traditional object for media discourse analysis. At the same time, the study broadens the investigation to include the actual process (Cotter 2010), the manufacture of news products. News production is here considered as a form of reproductive writing (Jakobs 2003) involving the transformation of sources, thus highlighting the intertextuality of news text and the way in which news texts are linked to sources (van Hout – Jacobs 2008: 67). It is against this background that the textual practices underlying the transformation of the Clinton hearing from a congressional document to news reports are investigated in this study.

3. Data

The texts considered for the pilot study consist of the congressional hearing Clinton gave in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee⁴ and two news articles, which were published the following day in two of the most important US newspapers in terms of circulation, reputation and tradition: *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. The first one has a worldwide influence and readership⁵, it has won more Pulitzer Prizes than any other newspaper⁶ and is ranked 3rd in the US in circulation⁷. *The Washington Post* is regarded as one of the leading daily American newspapers⁸ and is well known to the general public for its accuracy in delivering news in a timely and efficient manner.

The two articles have been selected also in consideration of the fact that they are of a similar length (1180 and 1167 words respectively) and do

⁴ Clinton's hearing was retrieved from the US Government Publishing Office (GPO)'s website.

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-New-York-Times>.

⁶ <https://www.nytc.com/company/prizes-awards>, accessed June 2019.

⁷ <https://www.cision.com/us/2019/01/top-ten-us-daily-newspapers/>, accessed June 2019.

⁸ <https://www.politico.com/media/story/2015/08/is-the-washington-post-closing-in-on-the-times-004045>, accessed June 2019.

not belong to the category of editorials, where explicit value-laden opinions are openly presented to readers. In fact, editorials' typical argumentative structure caters to a declared purpose of setting forth opinions rather than reporting facts and will "induce the reader to construct a preferred model of the event being discussed" (Degano – Garzone 2008: 25). The rationale underlying the choice of news articles in this study is that bias is expected to be less openly expressed in this type of article, and therefore the way the congressional material is used by the press may somehow reveal journalists' opinions.

In addition, an expert informant who was consulted during the research – an analyst on Congress and the legislative process – suggested the choice of the two leading US newspapers and underlined that:

Most hearings in the US Congress are at least partially advocacy events. In other words, the committee is having the hearing in whole or in part because they want to demonstrate a particular viewpoint to colleagues, the media, and the public. As such, the Chair is often careful to select witnesses whose testimony will illustrate whatever viewpoint the committee wishes to convey. The ranking minority party Member, who has a limited right to select witnesses at hearings, does the same thing. Because of that, it is in the interest of the Chair and his or her staff to publicize the hearing and to distribute the testimony to media representatives covering the event. When planning a hearing, among the many factors congressional staff often consider is, "what will be the headline in *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post* the morning after we hold this hearing?" (Christopher M. Davis – Analyst of Congress – Personal communication, 4th Aug. 2019)

4. Research questions and methodology

Input sources (van Dijk 1988:126; Bell 1991: 57) play a major role in the actual production of news and, not surprisingly, congressional hearings seem to be no exception. This crucial role becomes even more so when deadlines are tight (Wodak 2009: 19) and news needs to be produced quickly. White House congressional correspondents, who typically sit through hour-long hearings and try to attract and maintain the attention of their readers, make an extensive use of the congressional document as an input source, as this analysis will show.

The study takes into consideration van Dijk's (1988: 133) suggestion that selection, deletion, and, to a lesser extent, summarisation are the main strategies used in news production, to which generalisation/particularisation and restyling/translation may be added (Bell 1991: 65). The news articles reporting on Clinton's congressional hearing are investigated following Catenaccio's model (2008) that draws on van Dijk and Bell to analyse the presence of corporate press releases in the media. This model considers the following strategies and processes, on the basis of textual evidence:

1. Selection Implies selecting parts of the congressional hearing and using them in news articles.
2. Reproduction Refers to incorporating parts of the hearing into the news articles with no changes.
3. Summarisation Implies information provided in the hearing can be summarised in the news articles.
4. Restyling Implies rearranging the information that was provided in the hearing.
5. Commentary Refers to extraneous evaluation expressed in the news articles towards the information that is provided in the hearing.

In line with Catenaccio's approach (2008), the model used in this paper does not include the strategy that Bell refers to as generalisation/particularisation because a cursory reading suggested that it was not deployed in the articles analysed. Moreover, what Catenaccio defines as "stance" is here indicated as "commentary", since it seemed a more appropriate term as the point of the present research is to see how far the strategies together reveal the ideological positioning and stance of the two newspapers.

The two articles from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have been downloaded as text files and tagged manually in order to identify strategies involved in the news production process.

The analysis followed the research questions which are summarised below:

- RQ 1. In reporting about Clinton's hearing, to what extent do the newspapers under consideration make use of the hearing's textual data?
- RQ 2. When the hearing is incorporated into the news pieces, what kind of operations are carried out on its text?
- RQ 3. Are there any significant differences between the articles selected, in the use of congressional material?

5. Analysis

5.1 The New York Times

There are specific parts of Clinton's hearing which appear to have been incorporated into the final news piece in print on January 24th, 2013 (the day after the hearing), Section A, Page 11 of the *New York Times* edition with the headline: *Facing Congress, Clinton Defends Her Actions Before and After Libya Attack*⁹.

5.1.1 Selection

In terms of the 5-point investigation template, the process of selection seems to be necessary when it comes to congressional hearings. In fact, Clinton's hearing, like most hearings, lasted many hours which then resulted in a very long document (about 70 pages). Therefore, its embedding in a news article necessarily implies a major process of selection, which results in only a few lines of the document being actually used in the final news piece. Nevertheless, what seems to be significant is the fact that a relatively large number of lines of the article – corresponding to roughly 10% of the text – come from a really small part of the congressional document, the witness's opening statement. Furthermore, these lines from the opening statement are given a prominent position (in the second, fourth and most notably last paragraph of the news article), which seems to confirm the crucial role the statement plays in the event. This idea is also reinforced by the information provided by the expert informant, who explained that the opening statement is distributed by congressional committees to media representatives covering the event the very day it takes place, thus providing journalists with ready-to-use material.

The other part of the hearing that is selected and partially reproduced in the news article is the verbal question-and-answer session between committee members and the witness. In Clinton's hearing, this is the longest part of the document and counts for slightly more than 50% of the text (pages 11 to 48). The remaining parts, which are not embedded in the news article at all, are the short opening statements by two committee members (pages 1 to 6) and the written responses of the Secretary of State to questions

⁹ All the examples provided in this paper have been retrieved from the online version at <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/24/us/testifying-on-benghazi-clinton-cites-new-security-steps.html>, accessed May 2019.

submitted by six senators. This is a rather long part (pages 49 to 70), which corresponds to 30% of the text and is submitted after the conclusion of the actual hearing, as it is quite common in the U.S. Congress for committees to obtain information from a witness both before and after the hearing in which the witness appears in person.

5.1.2 Reproduction

As far as the process of reproduction is concerned, data suggest that the information provided in the news article relies heavily on the input source. In fact, 60% of the news article is made up of actual words from the hearing, both in the form of direct and indirect speech. Reported speech prevails slightly over reporting speech (18 vs. 14 lines) and it is also the journalist's choice for the second paragraph, the first where Clinton's words are reproduced *verbatim*:

- (1) "As I have said many times, I take responsibility, and nobody is more committed to getting this right," she said, reading a statement during a day of testimony before Senate and House committees. "I am determined to leave the State Department and our country safer, stronger and more secure."

5.1.3 Summarisation

Due to the different size of the two texts – the congressional hearing and the news article – the strategy of summarisation was expected, with different parts of the hearing being conflated into one single sentence in the resulting text. Summarization is a distinctive strategy in about 30% of the paragraphs, including the very first one. The reader can find a couple of examples of this strategy below.

- (2) WASHINGTON — In one of her final appearances as secretary of state, Hillary Rodham Clinton on Wednesday vigorously defended her handling of last September's attack on the United States diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya, which killed four Americans and prompted a scathing review of State Department procedures.
- (3) But Mrs. Clinton, whose appearance before Congress had been postponed since December because of illness, quickly departed from the script. She jostled with Republican lawmakers over who deserved blame for the security problems at the compound, and choked up as

she described being at Joint Base Andrews outside Washington when the bodies of the American killed in the assault arrived from Libya.

Example (3) summarises the opening lines of the congressional document – the Chair opens the hearing expressing his relief in seeing Secretary Clinton healthy and ready to testify before she leaves office – and also the question-and-answer session¹⁰ and some lines from the witness's opening statement, where Clinton underlines that for her "this is not just a matter of policy. It is personal. I stood next to President Obama as the Marines carried those flag-draped caskets off the plane at Andrews. I put my arms around the mothers and fathers, the sisters and brothers, the sons and daughters, and the wives left alone to raise their children" (Senate Congressional Hearing No. 113-184, 23 Jan. 2013: 9).

5.1.4 Restyling

The fourth process at work is restyling, and it consists in reporting the information provided during the hearing in a different order. The clearest example of this process can be found in the penultimate paragraph of the news article, where Clinton's words from her opening statement, which occupies the initial pages of the congressional document, close the article, the very last line being a single-line quotation from the question-and-answer session.

- (4) "Benghazi didn't happen in a vacuum," she said. "The Arab revolutions have scrambled power dynamics and shattered security forces across the region. And instability in Mali has created an expanding safe haven for terrorists who look to extend their influence and plot further attacks of the kind we saw just last week in Algeria".
 "We are in for a struggle, but it is a necessary struggle," she said. "We cannot permit northern Mali to become a safe haven".

This is in sharp contrast with the congressional document where the opening statement occupies the initial pages. The resulting dramatic effect of using the politician's own words in such a prominent position is evident, and its force is intentionally exploited, as is also the case in *The Washington Post*. It is worth quoting Mazzoleni (2015: 379) who, among the five distinctive traits of the mediatisation process, includes the spectacularisation of the event, that

¹⁰ "[Clinton] jostled with Republican lawmakers [...]".

is the effort made by journalists to portray characters' voice, appearance, and personality in order to give audiences the impression that they can directly observe the characters' feelings through the lens of the omniscient journalist. The few lines of indirect speech that come immediately before (4) introduce what is going to follow, but have a milder impact: "Mrs. Clinton sought to put the events in Benghazi in a regional context, noting the presence of a group of northern Mali affiliated with Al Qaeda".

As previous research has shown (Gigliani 2017), Clinton's opening statement is extremely sophisticated from a communicative and rhetorical point of view, and it is conceived to attract the audience's attention and convey Clinton's standpoint. This is a common trait in witnesses' opening statements (Gigliani 2019), also in consideration of the fact that they are written texts that are carefully crafted and were previously submitted to the committee. Therefore, the reversed order of the hearing's parts in the news piece seems to have yet another purpose: it shifts the attention back to the main character, the witness, whose voice had been mixed with committee members' voices in the preceding paragraphs.

5.1.5 Commentary

The New York Times's massive use of reproduction processes can be considered to be significant in evaluating the newspaper's stance towards the information that is provided in the congressional hearing. In epistemic terms, Clinton's and the committee members' words openly represent their points of view and, accordingly, they are attributed either when quoting *verbatim* or through indirect speech. Commentary can therefore be located only in the remaining (small) part of the text, as in the example provided below:

- (5) The continuing controversy over the attack, which resulted in the deaths of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans, has cast a cloud over Mrs. Clinton's final months at the State Department. It also has enormous political implications for Mrs. Clinton, the former New York senator who is already regarded as the front-runner for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination if she chooses to run. It was the first time she had faced extensive questioning about her role in the episode.

The commentary parts generally maintain a neutral tone and are sometimes compounded with direct and indirect speech, as (6) exemplifies:

- (6) One of the sharpest exchanges of the day came when Mrs. Clinton responded to questions from Senator Ron Johnson, a Wisconsin Republican, by saying there was too much focus on how the Benghazi attack had been characterized in its early hours and not enough on how to prevent a recurrence. Republicans have repeatedly charged that Obama administration officials deliberately played down the attack, focusing much of their criticism on Susan E. Rice, the ambassador to the United Nations and once Mr. Obama's choice to succeed Mrs. Clinton.

The neutral tone of this commentary is followed by an extremely vivid citation from the hearing, which is frequently quoted, as a cursory reading of other newspapers published the same day revealed:

- (7) "Was it because of a protest, or was it because of guys out for a walk one night who decided they'd go kill some Americans? What difference, at this point, does it make?" Mrs. Clinton said, her voice rising. "It is our job to figure out what happened and do everything we can to prevent it from ever happening again, Senator."

The New York Times depicts a combative Hillary, who "vigorously defended" her handling of the attacks, "jousting" with Republican lawmakers over who deserved blame for the security problems in Benghazi and "face[s]" extensive questioning about her role in the episode. Her voice is mixed with the voices of her opponents, expressed both in direct and indirect speech, thereby presenting the reader with a multi-perspective picture of the situation:

- (8) Mr. McCain asserted that the Obama administration's aversion to nation-building had precluded it from providing the kind of training and assistance that would have helped the fledgling Libyan government in Tripoli confront growing security threats from militants. "We did not give them the kind of assistance that would have been necessary to help dismantle these militias that still, to this day, remain a challenge to democracy in Libya," he said.

On the basis of the analysis conducted, the strategy that most reveals an evaluative treatment of the material from the hearing seems to be restyling. Through restyling, a small part of the congressional document which presents the witness's point of view is given prominence in the news article. However, *The New York Times* – notwithstanding its publicly declared

support for the Democrat party during the presidential elections both in 2008 and 2012 – seems careful in presenting the event in the most neutral way: the commentary parts are impartial, and the reproduced parts relay both Clinton's and her opponents' words. The Grey Lady, as *The New York Times* is nicknamed, has gained a national and international reputation, and its neutral stance was expected also in the case of a highly controversial topic like Clinton's handling of the Benghazi crisis.

5.2 The Washington Post

The article, *Clinton delivers forceful defence on Benghazi in congressional testimony*, was retrieved from *The Washington Post* website¹¹. The *Washington Post* endorsements historically tend Democratic, as observed by one of its journalists (Pexton) in 2012. However, over the years the newspaper has also endorsed Republicans for federal, state or local elections, although it has never endorsed a Republican for presidential elections, whereas it supported Obama both in 2008 and 2012.

5.2.1 Selection

In terms of input source usage, the strategies employed by *The Washington Post* show both similarities and differences with those employed in *The New York Times*. As far as selection is concerned, *The Washington Post* often resorts to this strategy since it is necessary when a long congressional document migrates to a news article, as previously mentioned. Similarly to what was detected in the analysis of *The New York Times*, the witness's opening statement is a privileged part of the hearing when it comes to its exploitation by journalists. Notwithstanding its brevity (4 pages), it is the input source for 22% of the resulting text, while the question-and-answer session is reproduced in roughly 50% of the news article, although it represents about 50% of the input source (37 pages). Like *The New York Times* article, *The Washington Post* article presents no traces of other parts of the hearing, such as the committee members' opening statements, whereas the witness's opening statement, with its extraordinary communicative force, is foregrounded. Indeed, it occupies prominent positions and closes the news

¹¹ All quotations come from that document that can be found at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/clinton-to-appear-before-congress-over-benghazi-attack/2013/01/22/3f03f8ee-64ce-11e2-85f5-a8a9228e55e7_story.html.

piece with a dramatic effect, as will be discussed further in this paragraph, when focusing on the restyling process:

- (9) “For me, this is not just a matter of policy. It’s personal,” she said, choking up. “I stood next to President Obama as the Marines carried those flag-draped caskets off the plane at Andrews. I put my arms around the mothers and fathers, the sisters and brothers, the sons and daughters, and the wives left alone to raise their children.”

5.2.2 Reproduction

The news article also relies on the process of reproduction, with 16 lines of direct speech and 30 lines of indirect speech, thus reversing the proportion found in *The New York Times*. However, it confirms a trend: reproduction occupies a major part (72%) of the news article, and especially through indirect speech. Among the *verba dicendi* that introduce Clinton’s indirect speech in this article, *say* is the most frequently employed (occurring 7 times) but, unlike *The New York Times*, there is also space for more connotated, performative verbs (*reiterate, demand, reject, pledge, praise*), whereas they occur only once (*acknowledge*) in *The New York Times*.

- (10) She reiterated that she takes responsibility for what an independent investigation called security lapses and systemic failures within the State Department. But she rejected all suggestions by Republicans that there had been a cover-up in the aftermath of the assault on the temporary post and a nearby annex used by the CIA. She also said she never saw requests by Stevens and others for more security.

As explained before, other participants take the floor in the hearing during the question-and-answer session, and they seem to migrate into the news article: the committee members’ words are reproduced, either through direct or indirect speech, in almost one fourth of the article, as in the example below. (11) also displays the phenomenon of “integrated citations” (Calsamiglia – López Ferrero 2003: 155), that is a form of indirect citation but with segments also cited literally, mainly with quotation marks, thus mixing syntactic traits of direct and indirect style, a strategy frequently used by journalists to enliven their pieces.

- (11) Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) greeted Clinton politely, but switched his tone quickly, telling her, “Your answers are not satisfactory to me.”

He said that “numerous warnings” about militant activity in Libya were not addressed and that the State Department’s desire for a “soft footprint” in the country “was to some degree responsible for what took place.” Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) said he would have fired Clinton if he had been president, eliciting a gasp from a Clinton aide. And Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.) trying to pin Clinton down later in the day, observed, “Everybody has their own CYA to do here.” On a lighter note, Rep. Steve Chabot (R-Ohio) drew chuckles when he wished Clinton “the best in your future endeavors — mostly.”

5.2.3 Summarisation

Summarisation was also expected and, as with *The New York Times’s* attitude, it does not seem to be framed in evaluative terms. It occupies roughly 13% of the news article – thus revealing a difference with *The New York Times* (30%) – and it is also found in the three-paragraph opening part of the article, where it is interwoven with commentary:

- (12) In what probably was her final major public appearance as secretary of state, Hillary Rodham Clinton spent Wednesday delivering a forceful defense of the Obama administration’s response to the killings of four Americans in Libya last year and praising the commitment of the United States’ diplomats.

Clinton, who returned to work this month after suffering a concussion and blood clot in early December, spent six hours testifying and answering questions. She started at 9 a.m. before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and ended after 5 p.m. with the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Her long-awaited testimony provided little in the way of new information about the attack in Benghazi. But confronting her critics and delivering a spirited defense of the administration’s response was essential to the effort to put the tragedy behind her as she leaves a job for which she has received wide praise and contemplates a possible presidential run in 2016.

The tone sounds neutral, even when the journalist writes that “[Clinton’s] long-awaited testimony provided little in the way of new information”, somehow echoing *The New York Times’s* lines: “The testimony did little to clarify the role of the White House”. The newspaper’s commentary is generally neutral throughout the article, and this neutrality is further reinforced by the presence of various committee members’ voices.

5.2.4 Restyling

The last process to be discussed is restyling, and it is particularly clear in (but not limited to) two cases. The first one is the witness opening statement, which is at the beginning of the congressional document, but actually appears at the very end of the news article. The second case regards the frequently quoted citation taken from the central question-and-answer session in the hearing which has been already referred to above. In the article it occupies an initial position (the third paragraph), employing both indirect and direct speech:

- (13) At times, the usually composed Clinton was emotional, choking up as she described meeting the caskets of U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and the three other Americans who were killed in the assault on a diplomatic outpost on Sept. 11. Occasionally her patience wore thin. After one Republican pressed her on the administration's shifting explanations for the attack — which it initially described as the result of a protest — she pounded the table. "What difference, at this point, does it make?" Clinton demanded. "It is our job to figure out what happened and do everything we can to prevent it from ever happening again."

The process of restyling places under the spotlight some parts of the hearing which originally occupied a more neutral position in the congressional document, especially as only a few lines have been selected from an event that lasted many hours and resulted in a 70-page document. In the article, these lines seem to share a common function, that is to portray the witness's character and personality, a picture that is much more vivid when placed in a prominent position and stems from the character's actual words.

7. Conclusions

Although Clinton's hearing was among the most keenly anticipated and mediated appearances in Washington history, we should consider that "all contemporary politics are mediated to some extent" (Moffitt 2016: 94). We seem to be far away from the "end of mediatization due to the direct relationship now practicable between politicians and citizens, i.e. disintermediation" (Mazzoleni 2015). However, we could talk about a new form of extended mediatization that includes old media and the

Internet. In this new, mixed scenario, the press still has a “watchdog” role from which it derives its professional legitimacy and democratic function (Skovsgaard et al. 2013: 23-29). The apparent general lack of ideological colouring found in the two leading US newspapers can therefore be better understood in this perspective.

In fact, on the basis of the discussion carried out in the paper, it seems possible to conclude that the journalists of the two newspapers under investigation are particularly wary of endorsing Clinton's point of view by reproducing her discursive practices in their articles. Even while (considerably) relying on the information provided in her opening statement, they balance this information either by mixing it with alternative voices, such as those of the committee members, or by relying on restyling, a strategy which enables the newspaper to present its reading of the events while ostensibly maintaining an objective appearance.

In terms of input source usage, the processes and strategies employed by *The New York Times* show substantial similarities with those used in *The Washington Post*. It may be worth stressing here that both newspapers are published on a daily basis, and therefore they are generally less focused on commentary than weekly publications that refer to facts that have been disclosed several days before the publication, and have therefore already been extensively reported by a variety of media (Catenaccio 2008: 120). This may partially explain why commentary is relatively limited with an average presence of about 15% and the input source is extensively used in both news articles, as the processes of reproduction and restyling highlight, thus demonstrating a manifest intertextuality (Fairclough 1992: 117-119). As underlined throughout the discussion, the process referred to as reproduction is widely based on quotations, whose reproduction is not combined with evaluative comments to support different lines of arguments – a phenomenon that has been frequently pointed out in the literature (especially Bakhtin 1981: 340). At the same time, both articles show evidence of substantial selection and some degree of summarisation that can be better understood if we consider that information is transferred from a long congressional hearing to (much shorter) news pieces.

Although the hearing is extensively relied on (roughly 90% of the text in *The New York Times*, 85% in *The Washington Post*), and never combined with data from other sources¹², and even if the reproduction process features

¹² There is one exception confined to a single line in *The New York Times* where reference to Clinton's “interview with television reporters” on October 15th, 2012 is made.

comparatively often in the articles, with a relative prominence of the witness opening statement, the two newspapers can hardly be said to reproduce Clinton's versions of the events. However, the fact that the witness opening statement is overrepresented both quantitatively and qualitatively in both news pieces may suggest a different attitude. In fact, for its very nature, the witness opening statement contains a favourable self-representation of the witness (cf. Giglioni 2019). Nevertheless, in the two cases under investigation, this part of the congressional document has been manipulated by journalists to present more neutral meanings, as it is expected for high reputation newspapers. Also, the lack of explicit commentary seems to be primarily linked to the identity being construed by these prestigious papers, whose objectivity and impartiality are crucial for their reputation as trustworthy imparters of information.

This pilot study proved to be an adequate testing ground for the proposed research questions. However, further research calls for a larger-size corpus, to corroborate/contradict the findings presented here, and investigate if and to what extent the 5-point template used in this study can help to understand how and why congressional material is used by the press.

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