Information management strategies on the Spanish monarchy in an English digital newspaper

Estrategias de gestión en la información sobre la monarquía española en un diario digital inglés

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Abstract:

This paper looks at one of the subtle ways of presenting biased information. It analyses the discursive strategies employed by

Resumen:

Este trabajo se ocupa de uno de los modos sutiles de presentar informaciones sesgadas. Se estudian las estrategias discursivas emplea-

The Guardian to inform about the Spanish monarchy at a critical moment, the period in which the abdication of King Juan Carlos I took place. Discourse analysis is used based on impoliteness theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987). The corpus includes all news items about the Spanish monarchy that have the words *Spain* or *Spanish* in their headlines during the years 2013 and 2014 and which appeared in the digital version of this English newspaper. Some of the coverage is analysed in greater detail due to its relevance. The results show how the British newspaper uses different discursive mechanisms, including insinuation, metaphor, symbology, or references to the Shakespearean literary world, which contribute to a distorted image of reality.

Keywords:

Monarchy; fake news; disinformation; media; language; United Kingdom; public opinion; The Guardian.

das por The Guardian para informar sobre la monarquía española en un momento crítico para esta, la etapa en la que tiene lugar la abdicación del rey Juan Carlos I. Se utiliza el análisis del discurso basado en la teoría de la (des)cortesía (Brown y Levinson, 1987). El corpus está constituido por todas las noticias sobre la monarquía española que tienen en su titular las palabras Spain o Spanish durante los años 2013 y 2014 y que aparecieron en la versión digital de este diario inglés. Algunas de las noticias se analizan con mayor detalle en función de su relevancia. Los resultados muestran cómo el diario británico usa distintos mecanismos discursivos, entre ellos la insinuación, la metáfora, la simbología o las referencias al mundo literario shakespeariano, que contribuyen a formar una imagen distorsionada de la realidad.

Palabras clave:

Monarquía; noticias falsas; desinformación; medios de comunicación; lenguaje, Reino Unido; opinión pública; The Guardian.

1. Introduction

Phenomena such as fake news and disinformation can have negative repercussions on an institution's reputation, and even have a hand in triggering certain events of historical relevance. This is hardly a new question. Several studies (Cabrera González & Ruiz San Román, 2007; Burgueño, 2019) indicate that fake news has been around for centuries "in times of war or to justify difficult decisions", on the part of the powerful (Burgueño, 2019). Moreover, through these phenomena it is possible to carry out a smear campaign in order to achieve a desired end. Rodríguez Cuadrado (2019) argues that this new tendency, occurring deliberately, calls for a reconsideration of the communicative theory of *agenda setting*. The first level of agenda setting theory refers to the media deciding what the audience are thinking about and the second level sees the media deciding what the audience are thinking (McCombs, 1994). We propose that there is a need to rethink the theory due to the emergence of transmedia journalism whereby the reader has greater protagonism, interacting and participating in content generation. All this taking place in an environment of information saturation, which supposes that the audience finds itself with the need occasionally to contrast and evaluate the veracity of said information.

The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union in February 2020 is intrinsically associated with the concept of rejection. This setting of disintegration provides a moment to reflect on the implications that newspaper texts have had in recent years to increase or mitigate this rejection. We do not yet know the full repercussions of Brexit, nevertheless,

it is possible to analyse which factors may have formed public opinion in wanting to decouple from the institution and from the countries that belong to it.

The coverage and treatment of news have consequences, to a lesser or greater degree, for a country's image. The United Kingdom's exit has been coming gradually for some time. Back in 2013, then Prime Minister David Cameron promised that should he win the election that was to be held two years later, he would call a referendum on remaining in the European Union within his term of office, (http://www.gov.uk/government/speeches /eu-speech-at-blomberg).

This paper focuses on years which have seen major problems arise concerning the image of the Spanish monarchy. This institution has not been studied sufficiently from an academic viewpoint as an organization which generates an image of Spain abroad, which may have an effect on social, economic and political aspects of the country. As Barredo Ibáñez stated, reporting on the monarchy in the Spanish media is no easy task (2013:3): "The Spanish monarchy is one of the most restrictive news environments for journalists in our current democracy". Furthermore, this author (2013:2) understands that the media: "are, above all, the builders of the symbolic meanings on which its reputation rests". The grounds for this type of idea have influenced the intentions of this paper to study a foreign media outlet from a country which has this institution in common with Spain.

Alonso Benito (2014) also reflected on the erosion of the monarchy's image in the eyes of the Spanish:

> The political class's poor image is truly striking, and along with it has come a highly negative view of the institution that was most protected by the culture of the transition, the monarchy, in which the physical deterioration of the monarch plus several scandals have led to the citizens giving the institution a fail (…) (Alonso Benito, 2014:10).

Moreover, this author says that:

> In early 2014, there are many voices that warn we are seeing a fin de siècle. Public opinion surveys seem to clearly point to this, the main actors in the development of Spanish democracy over these decades, political representatives and the monarchy, have plummeted in the polls (Alonso Benito, 2014:10).

The object of this paper is the analysis of the journalistic treatment of the Spanish Royal Household by *The Guardian* during the years 2013 and 2014. This period was chosen as it coincides with the high point of the socioeconomic and moral crisis which has swept over the western world. Unemployment peaked in 2013 (Source: Encuesta de Población Activa, 2013), and Spain was suffering the worst moments of the crisis. The decadence of the Spanish monarchy has marched in step with this crisis, which has affected every sector of the country. 2014 saw the beginning of economic recuperation. If the former year saw a moment of the decadence of the monarchy, the latter brought the King's abdication. Therefore, linguistic manifestations and the contextualized interpretation of their meaning have been studied from that period, focusing our attention on the linguistic mechanisms employed by the media.

The newspaper launched a new web, *The Guardian Australia,* in 2013, which brought it to a greater range of readers. In the years under study, *The Guardian* won numerous prestigious national and international awards: *Newspaper Awards,*

being named digital news service of the year (2013); *Press Awards* named daily of the year (2014); the *Pulitzer Prize*, jointly with *The Washington Post* (2014). It was also recognised over these years by the *Society for News Design.*

It is important to underline that the object of this study is to demonstrate how the press can reflect, under the appearance of attractive literary journalism, a deliberately inexact image of an institution by means of subtle discursive strategies in order to negatively affect its readers' opinions. However, concerning its repercussions, it is important to bear in mind that the lack of veracity in its coverage is only a part of a complex web, generally combined with accurate information. This study does not include considerations of the monarchy's behaviour, but of how a media outlet handles its treatment of information concerning the monarchy.

For this paper we have opted to follow the work on politeness (Lakoff, 1973, Leech, 1983, Brown & Levinson, 1987). The need to capture the audience's attention may mean that a journalist occasionally plays with strategies of linguistic politeness, or even deliberately breaches them.

The utilisation of this type of linguistic resources by the media reduces the chances that a news item supposes a "*face threatening act*" (Brown & Levinson, 1987) against a public image (Goffman, 1967). The authors state that a speaker (S) may emit sentences which affect the hearer's (H) image, but to mitigate this they make use of attenuators (Brown & Levinson,1987). Gil examines this theory and indicates (2006:78): "Acts of non-impolite speech are acts of threatening speech of image, while acts of impolite speech are image invaders. In this context, we cannot forget two factors of major importance, these being social distance and power relations (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The authors maintain that politeness is employed as a mitigating element before acts which threaten public image. In order to grade them, they created the following equation: Wx = D (S, H) + P (H, S) + Rx. (w= weightiness, D= distance, S= speaker, H= hearer, P= power, R= rank). Carrasco Santana (1999:10) explains that: "the degree of potential threat in an act (W) will depend on the social distance (D) between the emitter (S) and the recipient (U), on the power relation between them (P), and on the degree of imposition of the act (R) in question".

These concepts, taken from the field of linguistics, can be extrapolated to journalistic communication. Thus, the emitter is the journalist publishing in the newspaper and the recipients are the readers.

This paper will present an analysis of the article *King Juan Carlos of Spain: a fairytale told by politicians*, (*Theguardian. com*, 6/04/2013) under the supposition that its discourse may influence the creation of a thought framework for its readers. Shakespearian symbology has been utilized (this being very familiar to native English-speaking readers), in an attempt to relate that symbology to the situation of the Spanish monarchy.

As we know, disinformation is not only generated by fake news, but also by ambiguous information or even by means of insinuation, silence, content selection, order, etc. When "information distortion" is subtle, it intends to confuse the public and becomes an invisible, and powerful, tool. Badillo (2019:6) reflects on the control exercised by the media: "That debate between the power of the media to impose meanings and the power of individuals to decode them has marked the discussion on this matter in the social sciences over recent decades".

García Inda (2019) reflects on fake news and points to:

> Its capacity to corrupt information and true knowledge (…) where facts and opinions are mixed, and critical argument and a debate between ideas are supplanted by swaggering, speculation and insult. In other words, the presumed democratisation of truth —and I say presumed as to speak of "democratic truth" is surely an oxymoron intended to hide or disguise the absence or deformation of the truth.

This author's approach to outdated information is noteworthy, seeing it as another manipulation strategy, and, as such, of disinformation. García Inda (2019) warns of its different manifestations: "Certainly, manipulation of information involves not only having falsehood passing for truth, but also the past for the present, or the commonplace for the unusual and novel". (García Inda, A. (2019). "Fakes". El Heraldo. Available at bit.ly/2mO2ExP)

Vilarroya (2019) sees *fake news* as no more than tales which feed off situations of fear and anger and whose end is to manipulate and cheat. In consonance with the above, this paper seeks to look deeper into one significant example, news as a tale told through the literary world. In this case, we are faced with an approach to a problem (the crisis of the monarchy) using literary parallels as a mechanism to diffuse historical inexactitudes.

However, as Cabrera González and Ruiz San Román (2007) say, loss of credibility is not the gravest part (2007:117): "the most terrifying part would come from the spiral of damage that a falsehood could unchain". They say that to halt an escalade of falsehoods one must bear in mind Sullivan's reflection (2003) that a lie is a vice broadly spread by a deformed story, mythology, or anecdote.

Apart from the framework of research on fake news, this paper, as stated above, draws on studies of the theorical basis of linguistic politeness, considered as a sociopragmatic phenomenon, which determines the success or failure of the communicative process between an emitter and a recipient. The study of the concept of linguistic politeness was initially approached by Lakoff (1973), based in turn on Grice's conversational maxims (1975) dealing with the efficacy of a communicative act. Brown & Levinson (1987) later developed the politeness model based on the concept of public image (Goffman, 1967) which is offered to the recipient of the message. This study considers that it is possible to apply this theory to an organism, an institution, or a country as well. These authors propose a series of strategies to provide interlocutors with instruments or resources which would serve to palliate the need for individuals to preserve their image when threatened by a *face threatening act*. On the contrary, some acts of speech are used to deliberately pose a threat. It would then be possible to speak of a theory of impoliteness (Watts, 2008; Fuentes Rodríguez, 2009; Alcaide Lara, 2010).

Among the antecedents we find Austin's linguistic vision (1962) which relates words with actions, that is, the characterization of words in itself conditions the efficacy of the communicative act. In this way, in the exposition of this theory we see a convergence between meaning, "the illocutive force" (understood as a communicative intention) and "the perlocutionary effects". The linguistic complexity of Austinian theory lies in the fact that in the act of speaking there is no linguistic action without a communicative intention.

However, the contribution of greatest influence has been that of Brown & Levinson (1987). These authors developed a series of strategies that relate the implicature with this theory, fundamentally based on Grice's Maxim of Relevance (1975). The strategies spring from the idea that the deliberate violation of relevance constitutes a way in which the recipient catches the emitter's attention. Regarding these "undercover" strategies, Brown & Levinson (1987) maintain that they are the commonest strategies in social interactions. Therefore, some of those which we consider could be applicable to an analysis of impoliteness in journalistic discourse are set forth as follows: providing associations, employing contradictions, being ironic, using metaphors, using tautologies, asking rhetorical questions, being ambiguous, being imprecise, generalizing and not providing all information (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Study of the phenomena of euphemism and dysphemism (Casas Gómez, 1986, Díaz Pérez, 2012) is related with the study of semantics and enjoyed a long tradition prior to the theory of linguistic politeness. The utilization of euphemisms in the media is driven by a desire to avoid communicative conflict, as well as to promote and fix certain ideas about society (Sadovnikova et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the term "coarseness" has even been used in association with impoliteness, understood as "a deviation from that which is understood as politeness in a social context, it is inherently confrontational and prejudicial to social equilibrium" (Yus, 2010:284).

Finally, there are studies on the treatment of politeness in the world of advertising (Saz Rubio, 2000; Alcoba & Poch, 2011), however, there are far fewer papers focused on treatment of impoliteness in digital journalistic discourse. There are studies which state that the main function of impoliteness in advertising is reparatory, that is, it goes through the following phases: destruction- virtual repair and action (Alcoba & Poch, 2011:33).

2. Methodology

Before setting out the methodology of this paper, it is necessary to point out that, in order to explain the inclusion of the subject of the Spanish monarchy in the English paper's agenda, we should look at the prestige which monarchical organization has in British idiosyncrasy. Another reason that could justify this interest is the, in the words of this British newspaper, "scandals" that have occurred in the Spanish royal family within this timeframe.

As regards the selection of this newspaper, that is due to *The Guardian* having earnt a name for itself beyond its borders. Moreover, it is one of the dailies with most digital traffic in the world. Available data shows the broad coverage of its digital version (Source: comScore). It became the most popular newspaper website in the United Kingdom in May 2013, reaching 8.2 million unique users per month. In September 2014, this daily, according to the same source, became the second most popular digital daily in the English-speaking world with 42.6 million unique users, compared to the 41.6 million of the New York Times.

The textual corpus selected is made up of news items published concerning Spain in the digital edition of the newspaper. This corpus is composed of 122,143 words distributed between 216 news items (including all subjects and sections

except sports). Those pieces that included the words *Spain* and *Spanish* in their headline have been selected. After this initial selection, we extracted those with the sole subject of the Spanish monarchy (15 items).

This study is structured in two parts. The first constitutes an automatic analysis offering the quantitative data relative to lexical frequency. These have been extracted using the *Sketch Engine* textual tool, which has also provided us with further information, such as at grammatical and lexical semantic levels. The tool has allowed us to perform a computerised treatment of the data. One of its functions allows searches for the number of appearances of words in the corpus, a second function provides an analysis of the grammatical and lexical collocations of a word. From the lexical semantic function, we have been able to obtain data on the frequency, concordance, word constellations etc. of the terms analysed. In this manner, this study has been able to focus on the words which may ascribe positive or negative aspects to the monarchy and on the later analysis of the discourse.

Following the automatic analysis and to reinforce the validity of this study, a second qualitative phase was carried out manually. Detailed reading of all the news items published within our timeframe concerning the monarchy was performed. After that, positive or negative connotations and denotations were searched for.

Finally, as a result of our detailed reading, a significant article was discovered which serves to illustrate the power of the media through language. Therefore, this example serves as a case study considered relevant due to its use of persuasive elements which are mitigated by the presence of different language techniques. The article has been subject to lexical and interpretive analysis to discover the meaning it possesses for the image of the Spanish monarchy.

3. Results

As regards the quantitative analysis carried out in the first phase of the study, 15 news items were found for the years 2013 and 2014 with headlines referring to Spain and the Spanish monarchy. They are as follows:

1. Spain's Princess Christina named as suspect in corruption case (3/04/2013).

2. King Juan Carlos of Spain: a fairytale told by politicians (6/04/2013).

3. Spanish taxes pay for King Juan Carlos to go from have-yacht to have-not (18/11/2013).

4. Spain's Princess Cristina in court over tax fraud claims (7/1/2014).

5. Spain's King Juan Carlos to abdicate (2/04/2014).

6. King Juan Carlos's reign in Spain ends amid falling popularity and bungling (2/06/2014).

7. Juan Carlos abdication sparks calls for referendum on Spain's monarchy (2/06/2014).

8. Crown Prince Felipe: the man who will be king of Spain (2/06/2014).

9. Spanish activists launch street referendum over future of monarchy (13/06/2014).

10. Spanish king and queen to retain titles and immunity after abdication (18/06/2014).

11. Spain's Felipe VI promises a 'renewed monarchy' as he is sworn in as King (19/06/2014).

12. Princess Cristina corruption case in Spain is given go-ahead (25/06/2014).

13. Princess Cristina fraud case leads to calls to strip her name from Spain's Streets (3/08/2014).

14. Spanish king's sister faces trial after court approves tax fraud charges (7/11/2014).

15. Spanish king's sister to stand trial on tax fraud charges (22/12/2014).

It can be seen that only three news items were found for 2013 and consequently 12 items were found for the following year. This quantitative increase is associated with King Juan Carlos I's abdication, announced on June 2, 2014 and which became effective on June 19 of the same year.

Though the number of news items is not high, there are periods of notable coverage. For example, the 7 items published between June 2, 2014 and June 25, 2014 are enough for the proposed analysis due to their relevance.

The subjects covered are chiefly related to the corruption imputed to certain members of the royal family and to the King's abdication. We present the data relative to frequency (in decreasing order) which offers us information on the coverage dedicated to the different members of the royal family.

The name of Princess Cristina appears most frequently with 65 appearances; followed by that of Felipe, with 59 mentions; then comes the name of King Juan Carlos on 54 occasions; and finally, we see the name of Princess Cristina's husband, Iñaki Urdangarin, which appears 31 times.

Having mentioned the proper names, we present three key terms for this subject: the word *monarchy* appears on 49 occasions and the words *abdicate* and *abdication* on 33 occasions.

It is worth pointing out that in concordance with *Spain* the monarchy is found associated with terms such as scandal, corruption, money laundering and tax evasion. Almost all of these are related to the case of Princess Cristina and her husband, Iñaki Urdangarin. The other examples refer to the crisis in the monarchy that culminates in the abdication of King Juan Carlos.

The following are examples of how information pertaining to the Spanish Royal Household was treated. The following extract is a manifest example of the fall in popularity of the monarch emeritus: "King Juan Carlos's reign in Spain ends amid falling popularity and bungling". However, later news items are more optimistic when referring to the abdication of King Juan Carlos and the speech given by the new King, Felipe VI, as can be seen in these fragments from the body of different news items:

1. "the best moment for change".

2. "my faith in the unity of Spain".

3. "In a unified and diverse Spain, based on the equality of and solidarity between its people".

4. "the new king of Spain, he vowed to move the monarchy away from its scandal-plagued past".

5. "he gave those up and helped steer Spain into a remarkable and relatively peaceful period of transition that allowed the country to join the democratic world".

Nevertheless, in example 4 we can observe that the aforementioned optimism is attenuated by the metaphor contained in "scandal-plagued past".

An explicit intention has been found in some articles to inform positively about Felipe VI's past. This can be seen in the following sentences taken from the piece *Crown Prince Felipe: the man who will be king of Spain* (*Theguardian.com*, 2/06/ 2014):

– Nearly two-thirds of Spaniards said last year that they believed it was time for the king to abdicate, suggesting that many see Felipe as the monarchy's best hope of moving forward

– Fluent in English, French, and Catalan along with Spanish, Felipe studied for a year in Canada before undertaking three years of military training in Spain's armed forces academy. A law degree in Madrid soon followed, as well as a master's in international relations from Georgetown University in Washington, DC.

– His low-key image was bolstered by his marriage to a commoner in 2004

– He has promoted more openness and transparency for the monarchy, while carefully avoiding being seen in public with his sister Cristina, who along with her husband Iñaki Urdangarin is embroiled in a long-running corruption scandal. Instead, Felipe and his wife have focused their attention on taking over an increasing number of public functions from his father, including Spain's most recent National Day celebrations.

As described on previous pages, the article "King Juan Carlos of Spain: a fairytale told by politicians", (*Theguardian. com*, 6/04/2013) has been analysed. This item defends the thesis that the Spanish monarchy legitimates itself by using symbols, metaphors and analogies, which paradoxically discredits it.

The first linguistic strategy that can be observed is the euphemism in the headline containing the word "fairytale". As defined on *MerriamWebster.com*, this word, in its adjectival form, means: "characteristic of or suitable to a fairy tale; especially: marked by seemingly unreal beauty, perfection, luck, or happiness".

The discourse continues through an analogy constructed by the journalist through references to the great dramas of the Shakespearian universe (Rodríguez Cuadrado, 2017), which can in no way be called a fairy tale. As stated by Hernández Corchete and Gómez Baceiredo (2010:66): "The fable is a fictional narrative frequently employed as a rhetorical strategy in all the genres traditionally considered to be «opinion» (…)". These authors consider that the objective is to emit a moral judgement on the acts of professional politicians. The example analysed presents an "assessment" of the royal family's behaviour.

– The Spanish monarchy's legitimacy was based on symbols, metaphors and, first and foremost, on storytelling.

Therefore, the fact that our monarchy is democratic, as it was supported as the form of State in the 1978 referendum, is ignored. Moreover, this concept is reinforced later by "The Spanish monarchy was born outside and above the law". The implication is that the Spanish monarchy is illegitimate, and therefore this is "undercover false information".

The insinuation of putting in doubt the legitimacy of the Crown supposes a speech act that threatens its public image. The primary observation on the approach adopted is that a clear threatening act against the image of the Spanish monarchy is taking place; however, at the same time the members of the Spanish royalty are being raised to the level of the great kings of Shakespeare's works. We are faced with a compensation phenomenon (In Rodríguez Cuadrado, 2017).

The following are examples of a metaphor and several analogies from the Shakespearian world:

– King Juan Carlos of Spain must be one of the most Shakespearian kings, ever. His grandfather was ousted from the throne like Richard II, and like Richard III, his brother was killed (though in Carlos' case it was a tragic accident)

In the first phase we find a metaphor in which the Spanish King is identified as one of the most Shakespearian of kings. Immediately afterwards we find two analogies, the first with Richard II and the second with Richard III. The insinuations and implicatures that we can perceive behind this figure of speech are extremely serious, the latter dealing as it does with a sinister character. The only explicit analogy we can find in reality between King Juan Carlos and Richard III is the accidental death of a brother. Nonetheless, it is impossible to avoid all the associations that this analogy raises. The figure of Richard II, between the literary and the historical, is known as a bloody tyrant. He was portrayed by Shakespeare as a cripple, malformed from birth. Moreover, he went down in history as the murderer of his brother's sons and, following his brother's death, ascended to the throne bearing that stigma. Furthermore, the text contains another imprecision as Richard III's brother (Edward IV) was not murdered, but in reality, died of illness.

– Like Hamlet he had a difficult relationship with his father, and like Macbeth, he arrived at the crown by way of an evil creature (General Franco)

Despite the author creating an analogy with the Prince of Denmark, it is difficult to see, as Hamlet intended to take revenge on his uncle for his father's death. Hamlet was commended to accomplish the mission of revenge by his father's ghost. This hardly implies a difficult relationship between father and son. The article creates confusion. If the analogy had been established with his uncle and stepfather, it would have been closer to reality.

Regarding the second analogy in the paragraph, Macbeth is a character who symbolises ambition. The other main themes of the drama, guilt and destiny, deal with that ambition and its consequences. Shakespeare uses images and symbolism to illustrate them. Macbeth's ambition leads him to his tragic destiny. Unhindered by morality, Macbeth feels protected in some way, even invincible. Moreover, the Shakespearian Lady Macbeth is a perverse woman who entices her ambitious husband to sow death and misfortune in his wake in his quest for social advancement. Macbeth is a character who strives to escape guilt for his illegitimate rise to the throne. We find the metaphor "evil creature" in this paragraph. This sentence constitutes an act of direct threat, with no kind of attenuation or ambiguity, towards the figure of Franco.

– It sounds inevitable that, like King Lear, in his old age he would be cursed with troublesome daughters. Now, one of them, Princess Cristina, has been summoned by a judge.

However, this similarity, which could have been developed as certain parallelisms do indeed exist, rests solely on the alleged improper appropriation of millions of Euros by the princess and her husband.

Other observations of the text:

The journalist writes an enunciation that requires a justification which does not figure in the text.

– "We were told that the King had brought democracy to Spain. (…) We were told that republicans loved him too. (…) As in all fairy tales, there's some truth in this fiction. The King contributed to the transition to democracy and confronted the 1981 coup d'état",

However, the journalist claims that the King felt obliged to do it, as it was the only option if he wanted to reign.

– "As with theatre, the monarchy had started as a religious play and ended up as a circus. That's all. In stable systems like the United Kingdom, this transition from the art of governance to the performing arts can be done more or less effectively, but in Spain the trick goes too far."

The most significant stylistic resources from the point of view of journalistic discourse are metaphor and hyperbole, which bring us to the presentation of a distorted vision which on occasions borders on so-called *fake news*.

Turning to the level of threat to the monarchy's image, this is indicated by Brown & Levinson's (1987) previously mentioned equation, bearing in mind the social gap between the monarchy and the newspaper. The correspondence would be: *Speaker* = the author of the piece, *Hearer* = the monarchy, and R (or the act's degree of imposition) = the news item's degree of diffusion.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Coverage of the Spanish monarchy in the newspaper *The Guardian* and the manner of reporting manifest underlying intentions. The deterioration of the monarchy's image during the last stage of the reign of Juan Carlos I is an important subject in Spain. However, the information offered by this media organisation, with subtly biased news, may seek to lead its readers to hold certain opinions. The question is to ask if the news has been given its true importance for the British people.

We can state that in the article which plays with Shakespearian references, the stereotypes are related to the cultural base of the readers' ways of thinking and their mental models (Rodríguez Cuadrado, 2017). Impoliteness theory is also to be seen in the style adopted in the article, through metaphors and the literary style, as well as in speech acts which represent direct threats. By means of universal literary references, mitigation of face threatening acts towards the Spanish monarchy has been achieved, something which direct language would not have managed to do. Therefore, this detailed analysis has demonstrated that a large part of the analogies created by the journalist contain imprecisions

or false or erroneous allusions. We are faced with affirmations which base themselves on imprecisions to establish an analogy of doubtful validity. The discourse and techniques employed by *The Guardian* journalist, Miguel-Anxo Murado, serve to avoid a direct confrontation between the newspaper and the Spanish royal household.

The imprecisions, historical errors and journalistic insinuations in *The Guardian* which we demonstrate in this text contribute to the forging of a negative image of the Spanish monarchy, which, at that time, was particularly vulnerable. The generalization of parallel treatment in the European press in which the norms of politeness relative to the monarchy's public image were not observed (Brown & Levinson, 1987), could have contributed to generating a setting abroad favourable to the abdication of King Juan Carlos in 2014 and to the discrediting of the monarchy.

However, it can be seen that, once the abdication of the king in 2014 had become a reality, this newspaper reported on the figure of Felipe VI, offering information which presented the new king as someone educated and prepared for the position he was to hold.

The reiteration of certain linguistic strategies (such as analogy, metaphor, or euphemism) demonstrates the use of politeness theory by the media. The journalist's wit and creativity are noteworthy in that they give greater force to his discourse, and better catch the reader's attention. It is clear that the use of metaphors and literary references, apart from enriching the text, perform the function of attenuating the discourse. Furthermore, a novel strategy can be observed which misinforms the readers through the utilisation of literary discourse as a strategy to confuse the audience about fact and fiction. Additionally, the use of these expressive mechanisms makes the newspaper's intention implicit. However, although politeness is a conversational strategy, it does not always manage to or wish to avoid conflict.

The use or abuse of politeness theory, frequently employed in the sensationalist press, constitutes an increasingly common tool in our times in other media. In other words, it can be said that if this type of strategy is utilised in advertising to sell a product, it is used by the media to sell information. We are therefore faced with the use or abuse of so-called strategic impoliteness by the media. Though it is true that here we are not dealing with the sensationalist press, we do find content and linguistic resources designed to cause a certain degree of sensation and impact on the reader, and consequently, on the image of the monarchy's popularity. The recipient's sensitivity plays a fundamental role in the interpretation of the information. An explanation of *The Guardian*'s use of threatening acts against Spain's image can be found in the fact that a reader's general tendency is to seek confirmation of his/her own ideas in the media, that is, judging the objective of the sources in line with his/her own convictions.

This analysis has confirmed the utilisation of stylistic resources to incorporate subtle twists to information contrary to the image of the monarchy.

At the same time, this study has demonstrated the options that the media have to mitigate excessively explicit expressions which may suppose a threatening act towards Spain's public image, as well as those speech acts in which this threat is deliberately made.

We cannot forget the dangers of offering imprecise or distorted information, however subtle and decorated with effective literary resources it may be, it may have social and communicative consequences for one of the fundamental organisms of a country's image.

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