

IAMCR Conference "Media and Global Divides"

26TH ANNUAL RESEARCH CONFERENCE, JULY 20 - 25, 2008

STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY, STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

**"Information, Identity, Commitment: Questioning
Functions of News in European Minority Language
Media"**

Authors:

- **Iñaki Zabaleta**, Full Professor of Journalism, University of the Basque Country (Bilbao). Head of the Research Project "European Minority Language Media and Journalism: Reality, Issues and Development." <inaki.zabaleta@ehu.es>, +34-94-4734483.
- **Nicolás Xamardo**, Lecturer of Journalism, University of the Basque Country. Member of the Research Project "European Minority Language Media and Journalism: Reality, Issues and Development." <nicolas.xamardo@ehu.es>.
- **Arantza Gutierrez**, Lecturer of Audio-Visual Communication and Advertising, University of the Basque Country (Bilbao). Research Project "European Minority Language Media and Journalism: Reality, Issues and Development." <mirenarantza.gutierrez@ehu.es>.
- **Santi Urrutia**, Lecturer of Sociology, University of the Basque Country Bilbao). Research Project "European Minority Language Media and Journalism: Reality, Issues and Development." <cipurizs@lg.ehu.es>.
- **Itxaso Fernandez**, Lecturer of Journalism, University of the Basque Country (Bilbao). Research Project "European Minority Language Media and Journalism: Reality, Issues and Development." <itxaso.fernandez@ehu.es>.

* * *

Key words: news functions, European minority language media, journalism, political identity, social commitment

Abstract

This paper deals with the perception journalists of European minority language media have about the functions their journalistic work and medium – to the extent that both allude to news content –actually perform and pass on to their community, as well as what they should perform and pass on, in terms of information, national identity and/or social commitment. We want to know whether the role of news and information can for the most part be explained through the informative function or other latent and relevant functions have to be incorporated too; namely, those of political identity or social commitment.

Results have been obtained from a weighted and representative survey of 230 journalists of ten European minority languages (Basque/Euskal, Catalan, Galician, Corsican, Breton, Frisian, Irish/Gaeilge, Welsh/Cymraeg, Scottish-Gaelic/Gaidhlig, and Sámi).

1 Introduction

It is generally agreed upon that media and journalists are relevant contributors to the construction of the community and the nation, as well as to the consolidation of freedom and empowerment of society, among other functions.

In this paper the authors analyze what journalists of European minority language media think their information content/work and their news organization (in as much as it is taken as news provider) give to their linguistic community in terms of information, identity and commitment, and going beyond that, what they should be providing as well. Specifically, we asked journalists to report whether they perceive their news production is just strict information, with no added meaning; or information that also contributes to the construction of identity as a nation or people; and/or, thirdly, information that is tied to an active commitment with the community.

The central point, as a first level function – also called patent –, is firmly held by the professional meaning of information, as it is commonly understood in journalism. The functions of national identity and social commitment are considered as part of a latent or second level meaning that is not always directly comprehensible nor assessable and has to be inferred or perceived. We could also explain the two latter functions as contributors to the empowerment of the community in the political and social spheres respectively.

As it is known, functions of journalists and media are a matter of diverse conceptual fields and intense debates. A classical, and not outdated, approach, talks about patent and latent functions or meanings, with two levels of analysis in which different categories and classifications have been established.

Herbert Hans (1979) said in his quoted study that journalists act as "constructors of nation and society" and as "managers of the symbolic arena". By extension, we could also apply those functions to the information and content produced by journalists and media organizations.

The majority of studies on functions of journalism analyze mainstream media, that is, media of the majority languages. However, here we take a different path and examine the important though scarcely researched area of minority languages, where national identity construction (a political issue), and community commitment (a social matter) are frequently regarded as significant values.

In this paper we survey 230 journalists from ten European minority language communities: Basque, Catalan, Galician, Corsican, Breton, Frisian, Irish, Welsh, Scottish-Gaelic, and Sámi. These linguistic communities have a minimum degree of media development and sum a speaker population of more than ten million out of approximately thirty million inhabitants.

The sample is adequately representative of an estimated population of 5,301 reporters. The authors travelled to the ten communities, visited the main minority media and conducted the survey via interviews and mail. The study is part of a larger and multi-annual research project on "European Minority Languages Media: Reality, Development and Journalism".

2 Literature review

Due to the fact that the paper studies functions of European minority language media, this section will frame several areas: a) standard scholarly literature on media functions and factors shaping the content; b) specific scholarly literature on European minority language media and journalism; c) information on European minority languages; d) a reference to the Third Person Effect and related theories.

Shaping and functions of media content

Factors shaping media content. Media content is shaped by at least three major factors that interact with each other: "The environmental setting, the management and structure of the organization, and those who work for it" (Davison, Boylan, and Yu 1982, 81).

The environmental setting may be broken up in several elements that go from a *sociopolitical climate* – where political, cultural, linguistic, economic, and even geographical elements have their share–; to *media and personnel infrastructure* – other media outlets, wire services, prepackaged material production, technicians, journalism and media students, among others –; and to *audiences* that get the media content.

The management and structure of the organization, the second factor in the shaping of the media content, can be affected in their decisions by internal and external pressures (ownership, market competition, social and political groups and institutions, audience needs and wants, among others), as well as by values and personality of the media executives and managers.

Professionals, constituted by journalists and editors in the case of news content, are the third major factor that intervenes in the media output. These gatekeepers make their decisions influenced by another set of elements that, for the purpose of clarity but not exhaustivity, we can picture as the normative frame of journalism professional standards and practices, the personal frame of the reporter that can include his/her ideology, personality, interests, agenda (Peiser 2000), and the two previous major factors, namely environment and organization.

The second and third factors, organization and professionals, probably share a common, partially tacit and constantly adjusting consensus on news values and policy

that is attuned to the objectives of the company with regard to social, cultural, political and economic matters. In fact, consensus of the news media with 'their' environment is probably a general and basic assumption too.

Functions of news and media. Going a step further in the theoretical framing of the paper, we should also keep in mind the functions media professionals and scholars attribute to news content and media organizations. The perspectives are varied (McQuail 2000/1983) and go from a *Marxist theory of ideology* that deals with class inequality and critical interpretation of signification, ideology, media and reality; *positive-functionalist view* of patent and latent functions; *structural-semiological analysis* of the cultural meaning of 'texts', with at least two levels of meaning as well (frequently labelled as denotative or primary and connotative or secondary) ; to an *informational theory* that renders to quantitative terms the content and features of media (informativeness, degree of sensationalism, readability, information flow, etc.).

In any case, all theories may assume there is a two-level signification process in which the media produce images of the world that give events particular meanings, since they do not simply reflect the world but 'represent' it, define it, create it, and these representations and creations are related to power and ideology, i.e. e., to a system of beliefs and values (Hall 1982). Shortly said, all theories, each one from its own standpoint, frame signification in two or more interrelated levels of meaning.

With respect to the functionalist theory, we certainly are aware about the critiques Robert Merton's approach has received over the years (Carey 1988, 52-54) and the limitations it may have: Allegedly, the defence of stability and existing order and justification that any "part" or actor exists because it serves a function to support the ongoing operation of a system, which may not be the case at all.

However, we still believe it is helpful in so far as the concept of function is well stated and its deterministic significance and 'role' within any system ruled out; the plausible existence of manifest and latent functions is recognized, as well as the frequent difficulty to differentiate them; and the point of view of the 'definer' is clearly established (journalist, executive, audience), for their can diverge in their goals and assignment of functions to actual communicative acts and media content.

That said, from the point of view of the scholars and media practitioners (Laswell 1948; Siebert, Petersen, and Schramm 1956; Wright 1959), classical functions of media (and inherent disfunctions) are *surveillance*, in which news and information are the basic components; *correlation*, that allegedly helps connecting members of society; *transmission* of values, norms and culture between generations; and *entertainment*. This classification of basic and patent functions can be labelled in other ways and from other perspectives, but their core meaning has not changed nor been challenged over the years.

Functions or roles of journalists. Standard research on the professional functions of journalists (Johnstone et al. 1976, Weaver and Wilhoit 1986, 1996), have produced a set of seven roles: 1) Report news quickly; 2) Provide analysis; 3) Be a government watchdog; 4) Provide access for participation of public; 5) Provide entertainment; 6) Report accurately/objectively; and 7) Be a member of a journalist's organization. Those seven functions have been reduced to three categories of functions: Interpretive/investigative, disseminator and adversarial journalist (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986).

But other studies have revealed (De Buin, 2000, Gans, 1979, Fowler, 1991, Humanes and Ortega, 2000) journalists play further functions as well. Some of them are the construction of the nation, society, identity, and the creation of symbolic representations that make sense out of the reality shared by subjects. As public opinion builders, journalists exert the cultural direction of society, establish reference points to help make sense of reality, and offer norms that facilitate consensus (Tamarit 2006).

Besides what has been said, it could be argued journalists of minority language media may have an additional responsibility as disseminators of language standardization and creators and transmitters of community-bound cultural values. Gruffid (1998) also claimed minority language journalists have an added value of voluntary work as well as loyalty to community interests, aspects that emphasize their commitment to the development of their own language and culture. Nevertheless, there is no sufficient empirical research yet to measure and evaluate those conclusions.

Minority language media and journalism

Minority language media research is rather limited in academic literature. At times it is placed in the category of community communication, others would position it in political communication, or just journalism research. In any case, most of the times it gets shadowed in the context of scholarly work framed within nation-state realities. Possibly, due to the specificity of the topic, there should be a subfield dedicated to minority language media and journalism.

In Europe, over the last twenty years, mostly thanks to the pressure and work of communities and language advocates, a few international organizations have been established to support minority tongues (Mercator Media, EBLUL). In terms of regulation, The European Council passed in 1992 The European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. It entered into force in 1998 and has already been ratified by 23 nation-states.

On the academic side, scholarly work has been carried out from the decade of the 1980s. Although many studies are bound to one or two specific communities, there still are some that include several linguistic communities and take a more European perspective (Cormack 1998; Cormack and Hourigan 2007; Zabaleta et al. 2004; Mercator Media 2007; Zabaleta et al. 2007, 2008; Cormack 1999, 2000; Browne 1996; Hogan-Brun and Wolff 2003; Kirk and Baoill 2003).

European minority languages

The European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages (EBLUL 1999) classified minority languages in five categories: 1) National languages of small nation-states which are lesser-used or threatened, as it is the case of Irish; 2) Languages of communities residing in a single nation-state, with examples as Breton, Galician and Welsh; 3) Languages of communities residing in two or more nation-states, as it happens with Basque and Catalan; 4) Languages of communities, which constitute a minority in the nation-state in which they live, but are majority languages in other countries, as with German minority in Belgium, Turkish in Germany, Croatian and Slovenian speaking communities of Italy and Austria, among others; and 5) Non-

territorial languages, which are traditionally spoken in one or several nation-states, but can not be identified with a particular area, as the language of the Roma minority.

The ten languages of this study belong to categories one, two and three. They sum a speaker population of more than ten million out of approximately thirty million inhabitants and have a basic degree of media development. They are a significant yet lesser known part of the current European Union of 27 Members States and 23 official languages.

3 Research questions

We established the following research questions:

1) What perception do European minority language media journalists report about the actual functions their information and news organizations have before their community, as far as news content is concerned, in terms of information, political identity and social commitment? Putting it another way, what contribution do they think their journalistic work and medium give to the community: Strictly information, information plus identity as people/nation, and/or information plus commitment with the community?

2) What do European minority language media journalists believe the potential functions of their journalistic work and medium output, in as much as news is concerned, should be in regard to the same issues of information, identity and commitment? To what degree mean them strictly information, information plus identity as people/nation, and/or information plus commitment with the community?

3) What effects, if any, do journalists' socio-demographic variables have on those perceived functions of journalism and news medium?

4 Methods

The study is based in a weighted survey of 230 journalists working in print press, radio and TV. A careful multistage method and sampling procedure was established in order to deal with the diversity of media systems and levels of development. The steps were: a) A complete database of all minority language media in the ten communities

was created; b) A complete relation of full-time journalists was generated, along several variables (distribution by media type, ownership and gender); c) An adequate sample was extracted and the questionnaire was written; d) After a pilot study, the questionnaire was sent, responses received and coded, and results obtained.

Universe and population

Media universe. All minority language newspapers, magazines, and radio and television channels were identified and analyzed during 2004, 2005 and 2006. Thus, for the year 2007, the universe of media with $\geq 70\%$ of content in minority language was estimated in 1,024 outlets, with 33.8% in press, 29.1% in radio and 16.2% in television.ⁱ

Looking by communities, the estimated distribution of the database is the following: 810 Catalan media outlets (79%); 109 Basque (10%); 45 Galician (4%); between 10-20 in the Welsh, Irish, Breton and Frisian communities (1-2%); and less than 10 in the Sámi, Corsican and Scottish-Gaelic communities ($<1\%$).

Population of journalists. An operational definition of the unit of analysis, the journalist, was establishedⁱⁱ, similar to that of Weaver and Wilhoit (1996). The estimated population for the year 2007 was of 5,301 journalists (30% in print, 38% in radio and 32% in TV). Their distribution by communities is the following: 3,677 Catalan language journalists (69.3%); 650 Basque (12.3%); 460 Galician (8.7%); 121 Irish (2.3%); 103 Sámi (1.9%); 95 Welsh (1.8%); 81 Frisian (1.5%); 51 Breton (0.9%); 35 Scottish-Gaelic (0.7%); and 28 Corsican (0.5%).

Sampling

To create a multi-step and weighted sample that could solve the skewness of the population of journalists (Catalan community yielding 69% and seven other communities barely summing up 10%), we introduced three methodological decisions:

1) To take the square root of each community's estimate of journalists in order to transform the data with a high degree of skewness into a normal distribution, a standard statistical procedure. This way we determined the basic sample figure for each community.

2) To increase to a minimum of ten questionnaires the sample of communities where the value of the square root had been lower.

3) To apply a similar percentage increment to samples of the rest of communities.

General sampling distribution. The final sample consisted of 230 responses distributed the following way: 69 questionnaires (30.0%) from print press journalists, 90 (39.0%) from radio and 71 (30,9%) from TV. Differences with values in the population of journalists are lower than one percent.

In regard to media ownership, 30.9% of journalists of the sample work in private media, 60.1% in public outlets and 8.3% in social news organizations. Again, differences with values in the total population are lower than four percent.

The level of diffusion has also a proportional representation. 71.6% of journalists belong to general diffusion media (linguistic or political community audience) and 28.4% to local outlets. Their difference with figures in the total population is less than four percent.

Finally, in regard to gender, female journalists took 41.0% of the sample, a figure that in the total population reaches 48.1%, an acceptable difference of eight points.

Intra-community sampling distribution. Having statistically determined the sample size needed in each community and knowing the actual distribution of journalists according to the four mentioned criteria (media type, ownership, level of diffusion and gender), we were able to establish the approximate number of journalists/questionnaires that would be needed in each criterion to obtain an adequate quota sample. Hence, the responses of 230 journalists were coded and results extracted.ⁱⁱⁱ

Questionnaire

This paper was part of a larger research project and the questionnaire covered other topics as well. Words derived from Latin were used as much as possible to potentially elicit meaning and interpretation differences. Versions in four languages – Spanish, English, French and Basque – were prepared. The specific question of this paper was designed with a three-category scale of assumed ordinal value (strictly information, information plus identity as people or nation, and information plus commitment with the community) and the fourth option (“other”) was the open category to journalists' free contribution. The respondents were invited to mark the category they

considered more correct and important, though they were free to tick more than one, as some of them did.

Reach. More than 60% of the total population of journalists were contacted and received the questionnaire. Likewise, nearly all who worked in newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations of general diffusion had access to it.^{iv}

5 Results

Results of the survey are shown at two levels. One is devoted to the analysis and comparison of communities and the other is aimed at establishing a European level framework by totalling the results of all journalists surveyed.

Results

Results of the survey are shown at two levels. One is devoted to the analysis and comparison of communities and the other is aimed at establishing a European level framework either by totalling the results of all journalists surveyed or averaging the community percentages.

Actual functions of news, by communities

Results on the main current functions the news content, and even the news organization (as far as journalistic content is referred), play before the community, as it is understood by journalists, need a basic interpretative framework:

- *The function of 'strictly information'* represents the most generally accepted role of news, where professional journalism values, standards and practices are the guiding reference. In the most recent survey on American journalism, Weaver et al. (2006, 141) reported "American journalism's majority culture continued to frame its basic purpose in terms resonant with the old recommendations of the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press in 1947," centred in analysis, investigation and interpretation. This approach is mostly characterized by the *interpretive function*, considered extremely important by 62.6% of American journalists.^v

- *The function of information plus identity as nation/people* keeps the professional values and standards of sound and ‘objective journalism’ but recognizes that the news content and the medium have or should also have a complementary political role as contributor to the building of the national identity.
- *The function of information plus commitment with the community* maintains the ethical principles of good professional journalism too, but acknowledges that the journalistic work/content is or should be enhanced by a social rather than political endeavour, described as commitment to the community’s cultural and social needs, problems and other issues of that nature. This function seems to have notable similarities with the *populist mobilizer* function (10.4%) present in Weaver et al.’s survey of American journalism, at least in four of the five factors (let people express views, develop cultural interests, motivate people to get involved, point to possible solutions). Even the fifth component, setting the political agenda, could fit in, for it might refer to usual political practice, rather to symbolic representations as in the case of national identity.

That said, at the European level, results in Table 1 show that 60.2% of European minority language journalists believe the function of their current journalistic work, as well as of their medium, is ‘information plus identity as people/nation’; 27.0%, ‘information plus commitment with the community’; and only 6.6%, ‘strictly information’.

Table 1: Actual functions of news content and organization by communities

	Strictly information	Information + identity as nation, people	Information + commitment with the community
Corsican	10.0%	70.0%	20.0%
Scottish-Gaelic	8.3%	66.7%	25.0%
Welsh	17.6%	64.7%	17.6%
Breton	0.0%	63.6%	27.3%
Irish	5.3%	63.2%	26.3%
Catalan	4.4%	62.2%	27.8%
Galician	4.0%	60.0%	28.0%
Sámi	5.6%	55.6%	33.3%
Basque	9.4%	53.1%	25.0%
Frisian	10.0%	50.0%	40.0%
<i>Total</i>	<i>6.6%</i>	<i>60.7%</i>	<i>27.0%</i>
<i>Average</i>	<i>7.5%</i>	<i>60.9%</i>	<i>27.0%</i>

N = 244 answers given by 230 journalists (more than one category could be ticked). $\chi^2 = 7.822$; $df = 18$; $p = 0.9812$; null hypothesis not rejected at .05 probability level.

Looking by linguistic communities, data of Table 1 indicate there are no statistically significant differences. In fact, in regard to the ‘*information plus identity as people/nation*’ category, seven communities (Corsican, Scottish-Gaelic, Welsh, Breton, Irish, Catalan and Galician) are in the 60-70% bracket. Only three communities (Sámi, Basque and Frisian) present figures below the total and average values of 60.7% and 60.9% respectively. In any case, at least half of the journalists of these three communities consider their news content and medium is not only information but also national identity builder.

The category of ‘*strictly information*’ is evaluated quite high by Welsh journalists (17.6%), ten point above the average. In the rest of the communities the percentages are in the 0-10% range. It calls our attention that none of the Breton journalists marked this option.

Finally, in the category of ‘*information plus commitment with the community*’ Frisian (40.0%), and Welsh journalists (17.6%) stand out, but for opposite reasons: The former are thirteen points above the average and the latter ten point below. The rest of communities are between 20-33%. Nevertheless, the differences are not significant.

Potential result by communities

The potential functions the news content, and even the news organization (to the extent that it refers to journalism content), should play before the community is the second part of the research question. As we can see in Table 2, the differences between what journalists believe their journalistic work and medium should give to the community (potential result) and what they actually give (actual result) are small, not statistically significant.

However, we perceive a slight reduction of the potential result named “Information plus identity as people/nation” (-7.3%), with proportional increments in the other two categories: ‘Strictly information’ (+4.2%) and ‘information plus commitment with the community’ (3.2%).

Table 2: Difference between potential and current functions of news content by communities

	Strictly information	Information + identity as people/nation	Information + commitment with the community	Other	No info	Total
Catalan	9.2%	-17.0%	8.0%	-0,2%	-0,1%	0,0%
Basque	0.0%	3.1%	3.1%	3,1%	-9,4%	0,0%
Galician	0.0%	-12.0%	12.0%	-4,0%	4,0%	0,0%
Welsh	1.1%	-2.2%	-11.4%	0,0%	12,5%	0,0%
Sámi	5.0%	-2.9%	-1.8%	0,0%	-0,3%	0,0%
Frisian	-0.9%	-4.5%	5.5%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
Corsican	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
Breton	9.1%	0.0%	-9.1%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
Scottish-Gaelic	-0.6%	17.9%	-17.3%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
Irish	0.0%	-5.3%	5.3%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
<i>Total</i>	4.2%	-7.3%	3.2%	-0,1%	-0,1%	0,0%

N = 251 responses to potential function question and 244 to actual function.

Inter-community comparisons about potential-actual functions

In five communities (Basque, Sámi, Frisian, Corsican and Irish) there are no differences between potential and actual news functions, which means that journalists think the contribution to the community is what should be.

However, there are four communities where differences among potential and actual functions are noticeable. Catalan journalists believe the ‘information plus identity as people/nation’ function should have lesser importance (-17.0%), something similar to what Galician journalists think, though in a smaller percentage (-12.0%). In the Catalan case, the seventeen points are transferred almost evenly to “strictly information’ (9.2%) and ‘Information plus commitment with the community’ (8.0%), while Galician people only increment their commitment with the community (12.0%).

The case of Scottish-Gaelic newsmakers is the opposite, for they want to increment the ‘information plus identity as people/nation’ function (+17.9%) and reduce in the same proportion the ‘information plus commitment with the community’ category (-17.3%).

Breton journalists want to increment the ‘strictly information’ function (+9.1%) and reduce the role of commitment to the community (-9.1%).

Finally, the 11.4% reduction of the ‘information plus commitment with the community’ function among Welsh journalists has no clear meaning, since that reduction went to the ‘no info’ category.

Actual functions of news content, by media type, ownership and diffusion

Functions by media type

There are no statistical differences among press, radio and television journalists in regard to the three functions under study, as we can see in Table 3. The only difference that can be mentioned is in the category of ‘information plus identity as people/nation’, where print press people (67.6%) surpass in ten points broadcast journalists (57.0% in radio and 57.5% in TV). In the other two categories, the values of each media type differ less than five percent from the total European values (as seen in Table 1).

Functions by media ownership

Again, as it can be observed in Table 4, the variable of media ownership does not produce statistical differences among the three categories taken together. However, when talking about social media journalists, some interesting results pop up: The ‘information plus identity as people/nation’ option is preferred only by 45.0%, fifteen

points below the average; and the ‘commitment with the community’ category by 35.0%, seven points above.

On the other hand, private media journalists (68.5%) rate the ‘information plus identity as people/nation’ category ten points higher than public media newspeople (58.3%) and over twenty percent with respect to social media. It is perhaps an indication that the political identity function is more consciously attached to the informative role in the case of private news organizations. This suggestion is corroborated in the ‘strictly information’ choice, where public media reporters score higher (8.6%) than those working in private organizations (2.7%). Again, differences are not significant but may be taken as traces for a different understanding of underlying news and journalism functions.

Table 3: Actual functions of news content by ownership

	Strictly information	Information + identity as people/nation	Information + commitment with the community
Private	2,7%	68,5%	26,0%
Public	8,6%	58,3%	26,5%
Social	5,0%	45,0%	35,0%
Total	6,6%	60,2%	27,0%

N = 244 answers given by 230 journalists. $\chi^2 = 51.2$; $df = 4$; $p = 0.3249$; null hypothesis not rejected at .05 probability level.

Actual functions of news content by diffusion

The third media variable, level of diffusion, does produce statistically significant differences. Just 50.0% of the journalists working in local diffusion media say that their journalistic work/content and their medium give ‘information plus identity as people/nation’ to the community, while this percentage raises almost fourteen points, to 63.7%, in the case of newswriters of general diffusion organizations. Comparing with the total figure at the European level (60.2%), local journalists are quite below.

Again, as it happened in the case of social media, the complementary category for local journalists is ‘information plus commitment with the community’ (38.7%), almost twelve points above the average.

Table 4: Actual functions of news content by diffusion level

	Strictly information	Information + identity as people/nation	Information + commitment with the community	Other	No info	Total
General	7,7%	63,7%	23,1%	3,3%	2,2%	100,0%
Local	3,2%	50,0%	38,7%	1,6%	6,5%	100,0%
Total	6,6%	60,2%	27,0%	2,9%	3,3%	100,0%

N = 244 answers given by 230 journalists. $\chi^2 = 7.098$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.2876$; null hypothesis is rejected at .05 probability level.

Actual functions of news content by demographic variables

The demographic variables of the journalists surveyed do not produce statistical differences with respect to the three categories.

Gender. Female and male journalists almost coincide in two categories (information plus identity as people/nation, information plus commitment with the community) since the difference between them and with regard to the total is lower than two percent. In the case of 'strictly information', 9.2% of male and 2.9% of female journalists rate it as the main function of their news content, a small difference of six points.

Age. Along the five age-brackets we established in our study (20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-65) no statistical differences were found and the majority of their percentage values in the three categories fell within a $\pm 6\%$ range with respect to the total/average values. The only mentionable result is that the 'information plus commitment with the community' category dropped to 17.9% in the 50-65 age-group, almost ten points below the total (60.5%). As a complement, the 'information plus identity as people/nation' category increased its value to 67.9%, over seven points above the total figure.

Journalism studies. Again, no statistical differences were found among newspeople with or without journalism studies. They virtually match percentage values in the three categories, since their difference range is lower than 1%.

6 Discussion

Current news functions. About two thirds (60.2%) of the European minority language journalists believe the function of their current journalistic work, as well as of their medium (to the extent it relates to news content), is ‘information plus identity as people/nation’, and only 6.6% agree with the category of ‘strictly information’. The category of ‘information plus commitment to the community’ obtains 27.0%.

Evidently, these percentages indicate the actual function of the information content, as well as of the minority language news organization, is not fully explained by standard and mainstream definition of journalism, where the interpretive function may be dominant, as in the case of American journalism (extremely important for 62.6%). Rather, as for minority language journalism, it seems relevant to incorporate a complementary function as ‘national identity contributor.’ This latent function, perhaps, may also be present among mainstream media journalists but often it can go unnoticed.

The compound category of *information plus national identity* is dominant (60-70%) in seven communities out of ten and even in the remaining three (Sámi, Basque and Frisian) its value is over fifty percent. On the other hand, the category of *strict information* is quite undervalued, since only 7.5% of journalists consider it to be the main function. In fact, it receives a similar low percentage in nine communities (between 4-10%). The only exception are Welsh journalists (17.6%) who rate it fairly high. The role of information plus social commitment is considered important only by Frisian (40.0%) and even Sámi newspeople (33.3%).

Potential news functions. It is interesting to observe that, in opinion of journalists, at the European level, these percentages of actual functions do not differ significantly from the potential ones they should play. We only can mention a minor reduction of the information plus national identity category and proportional increment of the other two.

Looking by communities, two findings call our attention: There is a significant reduction (-17.0%) of the ‘information plus identity as people/nation’ category among Catalan journalists, reduction that goes from 62.2% (current function) to 45.2% (potential function). A possible interpretation might be that, having the Catalan

language media system reached a remarkable degree of development, their journalists do not perceive the need to attach a national identity meaning to their information and, conceivably, they seek a further mainstream standardization of their work and output.

The case of Scottish-Gaelic newsmakers is the opposite, for they want to increment the ‘information plus identity as people/nation’ function (+17.9%) and reduce in the same proportion the ‘information plus commitment with the community’ category (-17.3%), something that can indicate they want their information and medium to be not only professional and of high quality information but also to contribute to the national identity. We should remember that practically all Scottish-Gaelic journalists work at the BBC.

Finally, Breton newswriters suggest they want to increase the ‘strictly information’ function (+9.1%) and reduce the role of commitment to the community (-9.1%), a slight indication of the desire for a more standard and professional content and media.

Functions by media type, ownership and diffusion level. We have not found statistically significant differences among print press, radio and television journalists in the percentage values of the three functions at the European level. The only mentionable finding is that, in the category of ‘information plus identity as people/nation’, print press people (67.6%) surpass in ten points broadcast journalists of radio and television.

Something similar happened with the media ownership variable, whose categories do not show significant differences in general. However, if we look with more detail, we can see some interesting signals. Private media journalists (68.5%) give the highest percentage to the ‘information plus identity as people/nation’ option, ten points above public journalists (58.3%) and twenty-three over social newspeople (45.0%), differences that can not be overlooked.

These percentages suggest, though not conclude, that more journalists from print press and private ownership media (between ten and twenty percent more, approx.) than from broadcast and public and social ownership outlets choose the ‘information plus identity as people/nation’ category as the most appropriate one to describe what their journalistic work and medium give to the community. Setting a graph, private

journalists would be positioned at the top, public in the middle, and social newspeople at the bottom.

The place of social media newswriters seems congruent with the main thrust of this type of media, apparently dedicated to inform of and participate in community's everyday life rather than, perhaps, enriching information with a national identity ingredient. Likewise, the midpoint of public reporters seems to relate easily with the alleged institutional approach of their organizations to the concept and functions of journalism.

The variable that does produce statistically significant results is the diffusion level of the media. Only 50.0% of local diffusion media journalists report the main function of their news content and organization, inasmuch as journalism production is concerned, is the 'information plus identity as people/nation' category, almost fourteen points below the percentage attributed by journalists working in general reach media (63.7%).

As a consequence, our interpretation goes in the direction that for about two thirds of minority language journalists of general diffusion, print press and private media, the main function of the news content and organizations, as journalism is concerned, is not strictly informative but rather a combination of informative and national identity builder. On the other hand, only for about half of newswriters of local reach and social ownership is that same function the most important one.

The socio-demographic variables of gender, age and journalism studies have not produced any significant differences among journalists. Practically, all segments cluster around the total value. The only mention could go to older journalists, 50-65 of age, who value the 'information plus identity as people/nation' function relatively higher and the 'information plus commitment with the community' role lower than the total European value, but the variation is not major.

Final remarks

For two thirds of minority language journalists the current main function of the news content they produce – and even of the news organizations, as far as journalism is concerned – is not only to provide information, but information with a national identity component. This striking finding is more evident among newswriters of press, private

and general diffusion media and suggests that standard and mainstream definition of journalism is not sufficient to interpret the reality of minority language media news production and signification. In fact, for those same journalists, the actual function does not differ significantly with the potential function news should play. A similar analysis of mainstream journalists would be necessary to evaluate and compare results.

* * *

7 Bibliography

- Browne, D. 1996. *Electronic Media and Indigenous Peoples: A Voice of Our Own?* . Ames (Iowa): University of Iowa Press.
- Carey, James. 1988. *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*. London: Routledge.
- Cormack, M. 1998. Minority language media in Western Europe: Preliminary Considerations. *European Journal of Communication* 13 (1):33-52.
- . 1999. Minority Languages and Television Programming Policy. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 5:293-313.
- . 2000. Minority Language Media in a Global Age. *Mercator Media Forum* no. 4:3-15.
- Cormack, Mike, and Niamh Hourigan, eds. 2007. *Minority Language Media*. Clevedon (UK): Multilingual Matters.
- Davison, W. Phillips, James Boylan, and Frederick T. C. Yu. 1982. *Mass media systems and effects*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- EBLUL. 1999. *Unity in Diversity*. Brussels: European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages.
- Hall, S. 1982. The rediscovery of ideology: Return of the repressed in media studies. In *Culture, Society and the Media*, edited by M. Gurevith et al. London: Methuen.
- Hogan-Brun, Gabrielle, and Stefan Wolff. 2003. Minority languages in Europe: An introduction to the current debate. In *Minority languages in Europe: Frameworks, Status, Prospects*, edited by G. Hogan-Brun and S. Wolff. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Kirk, John, and Dónall P.Ó Baoill, eds. 2003. *Towards our Goals in Broadcasting, the Press, te Performing Arts and the Economy: Minority Languages in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Scotland, Belfast Studies in Language, Culture and Politics 10*. Belfast: Queens's University Belfast.

- Laswell, H. D. 1948. The Structure and function of communication in society. In *The Communication of Ideas*, edited by L. Bryson. New York: Institute for Religious and Social Studies (Reprinted in *Mass Communications*, W. Schramm ed. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960; reprinted also in *Sociología de la comunicación de masas II. Estructura, funciones y efectos*, M. de Moragas ed. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1985.
- McQuail, Denis. 2000/1983. *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. 4th edition (Reprinted in 2002) Londres: Sage.
- Mercator Media. *Minority Language Media In The European Union 2007* [cited 7-10-07. Available from http://www.aber.ac.uk/cgi-bin/user/merwww/index.pl?rm=e_main.
- Peiser, Wolfram. 2000. Setting the journalist agenda: Influences from journalists' individual characteristics and from media factors. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 77 (2):243-257.
- Siebert, Fred, Theodore Petersen, and Wilbur Schramm. 1956. *Four theories of the press*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Weaver, David H. 2006. *The American Journalist in the 21st Century: U. S. News People at the Dawn of a New Millennium*. New York: Routledge.
- Weaver, David H., and G. Cleveland Wilhoit. 1996. *The American Journalists in the 1990s: U. S. News People at the End of an Era*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Wright, Charles. 1959. *Mass Communication*. New York: Random House (Spanish edition: *Comunicación de masas, una perspectiva sociológica*. Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1976; vid. also in M. de Moragas, *Sociología de la comunicación de masas*, 1985, op. cit.).
- Zabaleta, Iñaki, Santiago Urrutia, Miren Arantza Gutierrez, Nicolas Xamardo, and Antxon Mendizabal. 2004. Minority Language Media in the European Union: Reality, Issues and Development Strategies. In *Mass Media in Transition: An International Compendium*, edited by Y. Pasadeos. Athens: Athens Institute for Education and Research.
- Zabaleta, Iñaki, Nicolas Xamardo, Miren Arantza Gutierrez, Santiago Urrutia, and Itxaso Fernández Astobiza. 2007. European Minority Language Media: Reality, Distribution and Comparison. In *Applied Econometrics Association (AEA), 96th International Conference on "Press and Media Econometrics"*. Paris (Sorbonne).
- . 2008. Language Development, Knowledge and Use Among Journalists of European Minority Language Media. *Journalism Studies* 9 (2):195-211.

ⁱ If we also include media of seven communities (Corsican, Breton, Frisian, Irish, Welsh, Scottish-Gaelic) with any content percentage in minority language, due to their relatively low media development, then the estimate raises to 1,098 outlets (45.9% press, 36.5% radio, and 17.6% TV).

ⁱⁱ "A person who has a full-time or near full-time occupation reporting, writing, editing, photographing, broadcasting or directing news stories or other information to the public by established media."

ⁱⁱⁱ 1) *Catalan sample*: 82 questionnaires; population estimate, 3,677 journalists. 2) *Basque sample*: 31 questionnaires; population estimate, 650 journalists. 3) *Galician sample*: 25 questionnaires; population estimate, 460 journalists. 4) *Irish sample*, from both The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland: 17 questionnaires; population estimate, 121 journalists. 5) *Sámi sample*: 17 questionnaires; population estimate, 103 journalists. 6) *Welsh sample*: 15 questionnaires; population estimate, 95 journalists. 7) *Frisian journalists*: 10 questionnaires; 81 journalists. 8) *Breton sample*: 11 questionnaires; population estimate, 51 journalists. 9) *Scottish-Gaelic sample*: 12 questionnaires; population estimate, 35 journalists. 10) *Corsican sample*: 10 questionnaires; population estimate, 28 journalists.

^{iv} We express our gratitude to media directors and managers.

^v The other three functions were the *adversarial function* (18.6%), i. e., adversarially skeptical to public officials and businesses; the *disseminator function* (15.6%); and the *populist mobilizer function* (10.4%).