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# Naming practices and negotiation of meaning: A corpus-based analysis of Spanish and English newspaper discourse<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction: Legal measures towards sexual equality

In the Western countries, a number of legal measures have been adopted in order to achieve full equality between men and women, between the different family models and between the different sexual options. In particular, we are witnessing within the last few years a battery of legal measures granting same-sex couples different degrees of recognition and visibility, as well as equal rights with the rest of couples. In Spain and the United Kingdom, two key legal measures have been adopted: the *Civil Partnership Act* was passed on 18 November 2004, while the Bill no. 121/000018 (*Proyecto de Ley por la que se modifica el Código Civil en materia de derecho a contraer matrimonio*) was passed on 30 June 2005, and amended the Civil Code to grant full marriage rights to gay couples.

The aim of our research is to document and analyze the concepts, the discursive processes, the ideological tensions, the semantic negotiation as a consequence of the recent legal measures. And we believe that the best site to analyze such phenomena is what we have called socio-ideological texts, i.e. those texts – such as newspaper articles, religious or institutional texts – which, due to their prescriptive or persuasive nature, help to shape the citizens' discourses, ideological attitudes and rhetorical frameworks in today's democratic societies. As Stubbs (2001: 215) observes, “repeated patterns show that evaluative meanings are not merely personal and idiosyncratic, but widely shared in a discourse community. A word, phrase or construction may trigger a cultural stereotype”. We believe that the analysis of keywords, concordances and discourse prosodies can shed light on the identification of values, beliefs, attitudes and discourses.

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<sup>1</sup> The present study is part of the work of the group GENTEXT (*Género y (des)igualdad sexual en las sociedades española y británica contemporáneas: Documentación y análisis discursivo de textos socio-ideológicos*) under a Research Project financed by the *Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación* [FFI2008–04534/FILO].

Contrastive pragmatics, as part of intercultural pragmatics, is “concerned with inter-lingual differences, i.e. with pragmatic variation between different languages” (Barron & Schneider 2009: 426) and can, accordingly, offer valuable insights into the ways in which different languages convey meaning in interaction. In this paper we compare and contrast the complex ways – in English and in Spanish – through which newspaper discourse produces, resists or challenges the naming practices and the semantic/discourse prosodies associated with same-sex marriages. This analysis goes beyond the traditional association between languages and cultures; even within a single language domain – i.e. Spanish – different (confrontational) discourses or attitudes are likely to emerge, as they are heavily/strongly linked to ideological values, as well as to social or religious beliefs and discourses. In this respect, intercultural pragmatics proves a rich analytical tool in understanding the extent to which specific contextual knowledge and cultural scripts affect and modify the retrieval of the intended meaning (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2004; Moeschler 2004). Meaning is not only unstable and the result of a process of social construction and negotiation, but it is also heavily dependent on the interplay between oppositional ideological discourses.

## 1 Newspaper discourse: Our corpus

In order to offer a more uniform analysis, we will focus on the two acts mentioned above (the 2004 *Civil Partnership Act*, and the *Proyecto de Ley 121/000018 por la que se modifica el Código Civil en materia de derecho a contraer matrimonio*, passed in 2005), and we will study their representation in Spain’s and UK daily press. And specifically, we have selected all the news articles where the term ‘homosexual’ is present; the data collected is restricted to the month where the aforementioned laws were passed – i.e. 1–30 November 2004 and 15 June–15 July 2005, respectively. We have collected our corpus from two Spanish (*El País*, *El Mundo*) and two British newspapers (*The Guardian*, *The Times*), each pair showing similar progressive vs conservative ideological stances.<sup>2</sup>

Ours is an *ad hoc* corpus, which is “created with a specific use at a concrete moment: collecting in the smallest space the largest possible amount of certain documents” (Valero 2006: 452), and whose main asset is that it is homogeneous

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<sup>2</sup> In general terms, and without further precision, we can consider the dailies *The Guardian* and *El País* as progressive newspapers, while *The Times* and *El Mundo* can be defined as conservative. We are aware that a more refined consideration of these implications is needed if we want to present a more accurate analysis.

and highly specialized. The total number of words is 354,048 and is made up of four sub-corpora, as follows:

**Table 1:** Number of words per each of the four sub-corpora (news articles containing the term 'homosexual')

The Guardian	The Times	El Pais	El Mundo
55,228	32,741	185,527	80,552

Our point of departure is that when a legal measure is adopted, as is the case here with same-sex marriages, a major part of the social debate around it is transferred to the media. Newspapers, for instance, show the citizens' ideological stances, the slogans of political parties or of religious authorities, the institutional measures. Besides, there is a significantly higher frequency of articles on the particular topic. Words such as *homosexual*, *matrimonio*, *pareja* or *boda* are used throughout in some media, are resisted in other, and undergo processes of (de) legitimization whose aim is, basically, to impose or recommend a specific value system. The task of discourse analysis is to uncover *how* language is employed, often in quite subtle ways, to reveal these discourses and their workings (Baker 2008: 76).

In the days prior to, or subsequent to, the passing of an important piece of legislation – and more particularly, gender-related legislation –, a sort of *discursive frenzy* can be clearly detected (see also Gabrielatos & Baker 2008 on *RASIM*). The above-mentioned terms are overused, both in news articles on same-sex marriage and in general news articles. To illustrate this phenomenon, we can see the total number of news articles per month published in 2004 (in *The Guardian* and *The Times*) and in 2005 (in *El País* and *El Mundo*) containing the word 'homosexual':

**Table 2:** Number of articles per month containing the term 'homosexual' in 2004 (*The Guardian* and *The Times*) and 2005 (*El País* and *El Mundo*)

2004 – The Guardian												
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Ago	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
16	9	20	16	12	16	25	25	22	24	26	14	225
2004 – The Times												
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Ago	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
26	37	20	21	27	23	30	23	20	35	24	23	309

**2005 – El País**

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Ago	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
91	52	53	150	123	240	175	50	96	80	59	62	<b>1231</b>

**2005 – El Mundo**

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Ago	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
23	19	20	44	48	88	71	21	42	24	24	26	<b>450</b>

The figures for *El País*, for instance, reveal that, while in June and July 2005 (around the time when the Spanish same-sex marriage was legalised) ‘homosexual’ was a buzzword and was overexploited in different kinds of news articles, the very same term lost media appeal in the remaining ten months of the same year, with the exception of the ‘preparatory’ (in terms of discursive practices) months of April and May. The number of news articles in *El Mundo*, although notably more moderate, offers a similar pattern. In the case of the British broadsheets, the sequence remains more uniform, with no significant peaks in occurrence. This confirms that, while media interest in the topic of same-sex marriage is clearly discernible in the Spanish dailies, the British ones seem to work on a more global agenda, with less immediate response to such legal issues. It would not be redundant to remember that legal norms might be amongst the most transcendental social texts in today’s world, as they shape – to a large extent – the discursive strategies of a democratic community. The press in general, and each individual newspaper in particular, is also shaping an ideologico-discursive area which is becoming more and more transcendental. Each newspaper generates its own idiom, creates a version of the language of the segment of population to whom it is addressed and for whom, maybe, creates a suitable public rhetoric. In a way, “[n]ewspaper and reader negotiate the significance of the text around the stipulations of the appropriate discourse” (Fowler 1991: 44). As Fairclough states (1989: 54),

[t]he hidden power of media discourse and the capacity of (...) power holders to exercise this power depend on systematic tendencies in news reporting and other media activities. A single text on its own is quite insignificant: the effects of media power are cumulative, working through the repetition of particular ways of handling causality and agency, particular ways of positioning the reader, and so forth.

However, mere quantitative or statistical data are not relevant enough in themselves, though they may constitute an index of social (or public) relevance. When dealing with moral or ideological matters, the language of certain newspapers seems like a public stylization of a set of predetermined ideological traits. Newspapers generate specific ideologies and are, in turn, fuelled by these very ideolo-

gies they help to construct. Due to their importance in shaping and structuring public opinion, the analysis of newspaper articles dealing with the naming practices related to same-sex marriages is overtly political.

In particular, “categorization by vocabulary” – as Fowler argues (1991: 84) – “is an integral part of the reproduction of ideology in the newspapers”, and may constitute the basis of discriminatory practices when naming marginal sexual identities or minority social groups, or also when portraying the life and attitudes of those groups. Homosexuals, in particular, are heavily discussed in newspapers, and the way they are discussed or portrayed is not innocent – this is part of an ongoing debate on how to constitute them in/through discourse, what place to give them in public, legal or institutional discourses. Semantics, according to McConnell-Ginet, is not innocent. Concepts are not innocent, and all representations of events – whether mediated or not – are *polysemic* – that is unstable and ambiguous in meaning. We are “unwittingly trapped in a world of biased perceptions and ‘stories’” (Riggins 1997), all of which both exceed and shortchange reality.

## 2 Same-sex marriage: A battle of naming practices

Legislative measures on same-sex couples in Spain and the UK have generated a wealth of naming practices around the different actors and practices involved. A cursory look at a few newspaper articles, in English and in Spanish, yields an astonishing number of similar (albeit different) terms:

In English:

‘gay marriage’, ‘civil partnership’, ‘same-sex marriage’, ‘same-sex wedding’, ‘same-sex unions’, ‘lesbian unions’, ‘male partnerships’, ‘homosexual marriage’, ‘civil unions’, ‘registered partnerships’, ‘equal marriage’, ‘same-gender marriage’, ‘reciprocal beneficiary relationships’, ‘life partnership’, ‘stable unions’, ‘civil pact’ and so on.

In Spanish:

‘matrimonio entre homosexuales’, ‘matrimonio entre parejas del mismo sexo’, ‘matrimonio entre personas del mismo sexo’, ‘matrimonio gay’, ‘matrimonio homosexual’, ‘boda homosexual’, ‘unión homosexual’, ‘bodas gays’, ‘uniones legales de gays y lesbianas’, ‘unión entre gays’, ‘matrimonios gays’, ‘uniones gays’, and so on.

These are different names for new (legal) types of relationships, which are the result of the struggle of the whole society offering opinions: ordinary people,

lawyers, judges, politicians, etc. For some, it is irrelevant whether same-sex people enter a marriage or a partnership – this is ‘just semantics’, as McConnell-Ginet (2006: 228) put it. For others, however, “it matters considerably whether the word marriage shall be construed as including or excluding same-sex unions” (*ibidem*).

A name is a label to distinguish or identify objects or people, and it confers individuality on the object or person so named. But naming is far from innocent, and is usually allied to power, as it can confer strengths and limitations and, more importantly, an (im)mutable identity. This can be proved in a recent coining in the field of economics, where experts distinguish – with uncertain purposes – between two types of countries, as far as economic prospect is concerned: on the one hand, the less-than-flattering acronym PIGS refers to four European countries (*the four pigs?*) whose economies are doing rather badly in times of crisis (i.e. Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain); and on the other hand, the acronym BRIC refers to the four top emerging economies in the world (Brazil, Russia, India and China). Are these newly-coined acronyms innocuous or well-meant? Hardly so. Names, once adopted, are difficult to eradicate. Oppositions like PIGS vs BRIC countries or *matrimonio homosexual* vs *civil partnership* – which have been imposed after severe meaning negotiation in the legal, political or economic fields – tend to become (more or less) *fixed* identities. Achieving public recognition for certain identity categories involves a large-scale mobilization of conflicting ideological discourses and counter-discourses (in the Foucaultian sense). This is pretty obvious in the Western debate on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Names, then, have a great potential both to shed light on the linguistic and social reality, and to index the discursive struggle that the issue of same-sex marriages is generating. Many crucial (ideological) battles in our world are fought in the arena of semantics, through language labels that are used by the press in order to facilitate and maintain discrimination against minority social or sexual groups. These are some of the reasons why we observe the “dense presence in newspaper discourse of category labels” (Fowler 1991: 93).

### 3 Naming practices in our data: Same-sex people and relationships

In this paper we combine critical discourse analysis and relevance-theoretic lexical pragmatics (Carston 2002; Sperber & Wilson 1998; Wilson 2003; Wilson & Carston 2007) to offer an initial analysis of the key semantic sets regarding naming practices for ‘people’ (e.g. *pareja homosexual*, *novio gay*, *pareja gay*, *gay*

*couples, homosexual couples, partner*, etc) and ‘relationships’ (e.g. *matrimonio homosexual, matrimonio gay, pareja de hecho, homosexual couples, civil partnership, same-sex partnerships*, etc) drawn from an *ad hoc* corpus of news articles from two Spanish (*El País, El Mundo*) and two British newspapers (*The Guardian, The Times*), as stated above. Specifically, the collected data is restricted to the month where the aforementioned laws were passed: June–July 2005 and November 2004, respectively. Initial data is then contrasted according to such variables as number of articles, focus (i.e. if the topic is addressed directly or the terms are marginally used), and frequency of the semantic sets under analysis.

**Table 3:** Percentage of articles containing naming practices associated with the word *homosexual* and addressing the topic directly

	number of articles	topic addressed directly	%
El País	313	216	69
El Mundo	94	60	63.8
The Guardian	48	4	8.3
The Times	32	2	6.2

Table 3 shows the number/percentage of articles which directly address or report on subsequent reactions to the aforementioned legislations. The results drawn from the analysis of the four sub-corpora point towards some possible directions for further research that will certainly deserve more space and depth and that we can only adumbrate here:

- (1) As opposed to the reflection in the Spanish press, the *Civil Partnership Act* did not give rise to the same social and discursive ardour in the British dailies.
- (2) There is an overwhelming profusion of articles addressing the topic in the progressive *El País* when compared to the conservative *El Mundo* (219 vs 60).
- (3) However, there is no significant difference in the *percentage* of articles directly addressing the topic (69% vs 63.8%).

A simple glance at the articles evinces that these disparate reactions to the new legislation, shown in (2) and (3), could be conceptualised in terms of at least two discourses, through which the reality they purport to reflect is constructed: on the one hand, the provision of marriage rights to homosexual couples and, on the other, the depiction of the new law as an fierce attack on the institution of marriage and an infringement of traditional family rights.

Thus, whilst *El País* abounds in op-ed or think pieces (where their writers take up a stand against right-wing and Church leaders opposing the granting of civil rights to homosexual couples), *El Mundo* contributes to the debate generated

among social actors and communities of practice by giving authoritative voice through attributed discourse. The following instances illustrate both (counter-) discourses:

(1) ***El Mundo 18/06/2005***

*Rouco Varela: ‘La familia quedaría absolutamente desprotegida con la ley del matrimonio homosexual’*

MADRID.- El arzobispo de Madrid, cardenal Antonio María Rouco Varela expresó en el último Foro de *El Mundo* su posición ante el MATRIMONIO HOMOSEXUAL: „Lo que está ocurriendo es de muchísima trascendencia y gravedad. La familia queda absolutamente desprotegida con la modificación legal que se quiere hacer“. Tras asistir a la manifestación de repulsa por el asesinato de Miguel Ángel Blanco y en la concentración que hubo tras los atentados terroristas del 11-M, Rouco Varela acudirá hoy por tercera vez a una gran convocatoria. Será la cita organizada en Madrid por el Foro de la Familia contra el matrimonio gay.

***El Mundo 18/06/2005***

*Cardinal Rouco Varela: “The family will be left totally unprotected by the same-sex marriage law”*

MADRID. – *The archbishop of Madrid, Cardinal Antonio María Rouco Varela, voiced his stance on homosexual marriage in the last El Mundo forum: “This is of outstanding significance and seriousness. The family is left totally unprotected with the amendment of the law”. Following the demonstrations condemning the murder of Miguel Ángel Blanco and the Madrid bombings, Rouco Varela will attend a big call today for the third time: the one organized in Madrid by the Family Forum against gay marriage. [our translation]*

(2) ***El País 17/06/2005 Soledad Gallego-Díaz***

*Es la razón la que está contra las cuerdas*

La manifestación que se celebrará mañana en Madrid ha sido convocada por diversos grupos conservadores y por el Partido Popular „en defensa de la familia“, pero, sin duda, se trata de una confusión, porque lo que los convocantes defienden es, simplemente, su idea de matrimonio. (...) Obviamente, los manifestantes del sábado no pretenden defender la idea de la familia, que no está en peligro. Lo que quieren es que se reserve en exclusiva la denominación de matrimonio a la unión entre un hombre y una mujer. (...) Por mucho que lo intenten disfrazar con lemas travestidos, lo que los convocantes del sábado quieren es



que homosexualidad y heterosexualidad no sean consideradas equivalentes.

**El País 17/06/2005** Soledad Gallego Díaz

*Only reason is put on the ropes*

*The demonstration being held tomorrow in Madrid has been called by several conservative groups and the Popular Party (PP) “in defence of the family”, but this is utterly misleading. What the organisers are defending is, basically, their idea of family, which is surely not under threat. What they really call for is that marriage exclusively designates the union of a man and a woman. (...) Much as they try to conceal this under transvestite slogans, what they want is that homosexuality and heterosexuality are not considered equal. [our translation]*

The first difference concerns the editorial policy or (political) agenda in terms of authorship. Whilst in *El Mundo* the writer of the news article is undisclosed, in *El País* it is the Assistant Director – Soledad Gallego Díaz – who openly takes issue with the *Popular Party* (PP) and the Church – the organisers of the demonstration in Madrid against the reform of the Civil Code. Discursively (and strategically), the negotiation turns around the overarching concept of MARRIAGE, now pragmatically adjusted to include same-sex couples. Conservative forces show resistance, and their contributions to the debate intend to reinforce the traditional cultural representation, focussing on the allegedly baleful implications of the new law. In terms of semantic/discourse prosodies (Sinclair 1991; Louw 1993; Stubbs 2001), Cardinal Rouco Varela evaluates the results as dramatic (“*de mucha trascendencia*” and “*gravedad*”). The fact that adoption rights are also granted to gay couples leaves the (traditional) family “*absolutamente desprotegida*” (totally defenceless). Liberal forces dissent from this view, and their counter-discourse applies negative prosodies to SENSE not FAMILY (“*Es la razón la que está contra las cuerdas*”). For the writer, the real issue behind the demonstration is their strong disapproval of equal rights to homosexuals (“*que homosexualidad y heterosexualidad no sean consideradas equivalentes*”), thereby denying them their right to marry (“*que se reserve en exclusiva la denominación de matrimonio a la unión entre un hombre y una mujer*”).

In the case of the British dailies, our results show that the discourse vs counter-discourse logic is, generally, more dispassionate and less virulent. Differently from the Spanish legislation (see below), the sanction in the law of the label ‘civil partnership’ has abated semantic negotiation in naming and lessened the polarity of the discourses. In the weeks prior to the passing of the *Civil Partnership Act*, the *Guardian* and *The Times* reported on Tory backbencher Edward Leigh’s

proposal on extending property and pension rights given to homosexual couples to cohabiting siblings, which encounters strong opposition of MPs on all parties:

(3) ***The Guardian* 09/11/2004**

*MPs condemn Tories' gay bill amendment*

*Ministers have attacked [Edward Leigh's] proposed amendment, which MPs will vote on later today, as an attempt to wreck the government's civil partnership bill. As it stands, the bill extends to same-sex couples the legal rights over property and pensions enjoyed by married heterosexuals. [...] The UK civil partnership bill's progress through parliament has been vexed. [...] "All we are trying to do is ensure this bill does not create more injustices," [Mr Leigh] said. "I cannot understand, given that the bill is going to become law, that homosexual couples are going to have these rights, why people are so violently and strongly opposed to extending the same rights to siblings." Mr Leigh said there was a "fundamental dishonesty" about the debate on civil partnerships. "This, in fact, is homosexual marriage by any other name, but the government is determined, for political reasons, not to call it a homosexual marriage bill because they do not want to alienate public opinion," he said.*

(4) ***The Times* 10/11/2004**

*A fearful outbreak of sibling rivalry*

*Mr Leigh has become the champion of the dispossessed. Yes, I know, it seems unlikely. He is a barrister and quite eccentric. Some believe that he spends his free time orbiting somewhere near Neptune. It is not known if that is where he came up with his scheme to give siblings who live together the same rights as those given to gay couples in the Civil Partnerships Bill. [...] Labour MPs watched Mr Leigh with something close to incredulity. There were only five or so in the chamber and most were gay. The Tories were much better represented and were certainly having a gay old time, giggling and plotting and fighting with each other. They were acting, in fact, just like siblings. [...] He was furious: "There is a fundamental dishonesty about this debate. This is in fact homosexual marriage by any other name. The Government are determined for political reasons not to call it a homosexual marriage Bill because they do not want to alienate public opinion." He demanded: "Why not be honest about it?"*

Whereas both dailies converge on evaluating negatively Mr Leigh's proposal, the way they engage in meaning negotiation makes manifest their ideological undertones. For the *Guardian*, the equation of homosexuals and siblings is an attempt

to *wreck* and *vex* the *Civil Partnership Act*, thus rejecting cohabiting siblings to fall under the denotation of ‘civil partnership’. The confronting discourse characterises civil partnerships as a ‘fundamental dishonesty’, as they are seen as an attempt to conceal from public opinion the fact that marriage rights are granted to same-sex couples. The sarcastic drift in the discourse of *The Times* aims to ridicule the debate and civil partnerships by portraying Mr Leigh (Tory) as ‘*the champion of the dispossessed*’, ‘*eccentric*’, or ‘*orbiting near Neptune*’ in his free time; and homosexual MPs as ‘*having a gay old time*’ and ‘*giggling, plotting and fighting with each other...they were acting just like siblings*’. It is also worth noting that the addition of one last utterance in *The Times* might also be intended to voice Mr Leigh’s concern: ‘*why not be honest about it?*’.

A highly revealing discursive trait, and formerly defined by Sinclair (1991) and Louw (1993), *semantic prosody* is the *tendency* for words to collocate with sets of semantic classes extending over more than one unit or even whole texts. For Sinclair (2000), the idea behind the concept of *prosody* is that an awareness of both the referential and the evaluative/attitudinal aspects of meaning (in terms of *positive* or *negative* prosody) is necessary for accurate deployment of the lexical item. Thus, for instance, Sinclair (1991: 112) points out that *happen* is “associated with unpleasant things, accidents and the like”; and that the lexical items which collocate with *set in* and *cause* refer to unpleasant states of affairs. For Morley and Partington (2009: 141) semantic prosody is the way in which speakers innately establish and maintain *evaluative harmony* (good vs bad) within a stretch of discourse by co-selecting items with a similar attitudinal force. What we conclude from the above is that the motivation for expressing ourselves in one way rather than in another is *coded in the prosody*, which is an binding component of a lexical item.

Although we acknowledge the relevance and significance of semantic prosodies in our search for *traces* of ideological discourses in our corpora, we argue for a more flexible approach to meaning-construction that allows the pragmatic enrichment of concepts in the light of new contextual assumptions.<sup>3</sup> On the one

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<sup>3</sup> Stubbs (2001: 65–66) himself argues for a redefinition of the notion in terms of what he calls *discourse prosody*:

Discourse prosodies express speaker attitude... Since they are evaluative, prosodies often express the speaker’s reason for making the utterance, and therefore identify functional discourse items... Several studies use the term ‘semantic prosodies’ (Louw 1993; Sinclair 1996). ‘Pragmatic prosodies’ might be a better term, since this would maintain a standard distinction between aspects of meaning which are independent of speakers (semantics) and aspects which concern speaker attitudes (pragmatics). I will here prefer the term ‘discourse prosodies’, both in order to maintain the relation to speakers and hearers, but also to emphasise their function in creating discourse coherence.

hand, the notion presupposes a semantically-based positive or negative orientation, disregarding contextual aspects. Our qualitative analysis above suggests nevertheless that the meanings of individual forms surrounding the term *homosexual marriage* are dynamic and constantly renegotiated in discourse through the exploitation of a whole range of evaluative slants. On the other hand, if the pragmatic/evaluative dimension of meaning is emphasised, how is a quantitatively-based analysis justified? (see also Whittsit 2005). As Baker (2010: 128) points out

We should not assume that everyone experiences and processes language in the same way. Many people approach their encounters with certain types of language in a critical way and this may ‘immunise’ them to the ideologies inherent with certain collocational patterns. Additionally, the context in which we encounter a fixed pattern is likely to have an impact on the meaning we take from it: the text may have a much more negative subtext in, say, a right wing newspaper than in the liberal press.

For our purposes, and without further precision here, we prefer the term *discourse constellations* to refer to a form of organising the multiplicity of conceptual representations subject to ideological negotiation and social and political pressure in/between communities of practice. These are nebulous realizations of conflicting ideological concepts/discourses in today’s societies and as such they are imprecise and constantly changing, in continuous struggle to become legitimised or *core*, subject to processes of pragmatic adjustment when meaning negotiation comes into play. If we consider the case of *homosexual marriage*, we can observe that official characterisations (i.e. laws) are peripheral and perhaps sociologically minoritarian vs other ‘unofficial’ ones (i.e. (ultra)conservative parties, racist organisations, and the Church) that hold enormous power and influence. In Spain, associated with the semantic sub-constellation of the conservative Popular Party, we find elements such as ‘aberration’, ‘attack against the family’, ‘the true family’, ‘undermines (family and God)’, ‘confuses moral order and education’; etc. On the opposite shore, the sub-constellation of the left-wing Socialist party features elements such as ‘coexistence’, ‘diversity’, ‘free’, ‘egalitarian’, ‘support to the homes’, ‘extending rights’, ‘legalisation’, etc. Lexical opposition is far less virulent in the British dailies, and ideological stance is more evident in undertones and different forms of attribution.

The terminological amendments in the Spanish law do not show explicitly any preference for any *new* formula or designation for ‘people’ or ‘relationships’, albeit *same-sex marriage* seems to be implied. Specifically, the terms *marido* [‘husband’] and *mujer* [‘wife’] have been replaced by the gender-neutral *cónyuges* or *consortes* [‘spouses’]. Also, the terms *padre* [‘father’] and *madre* [‘mother’] have been substituted by *progenitores* [‘parents’]. This reform posits

a new social and cultural representation that needs to be designated. And the battle for the legitimation of specific naming practices is fought in the social and political arena, where the contenders take up the arms of *negotiation of meaning*. An initial approach to the naming preferences in the four sub-corpora shows the following results:

**Table 4:** Number of occurrences of the main naming practices associated with same-sex ‘people’ in the Spanish dailies *El País* and *El Mundo*

	Date – 15/06/2005–15/07/2005	
	<i>El País</i>	<i>El Mundo</i>
	185,527 w.	80,552 w.
Pareja* homosexual*	60	21
Pareja* (de personas) del mismo sexo	29	15
matrimonio* homosexual*	210	71
matrimonio* gay*	72	15

**Table 5:** Number of occurrences of the main naming practices associated with same-sex ‘people’ in the English dailies *The Guardian* and *The Times*

	Date – 01/11/2004–30/11/2004	
	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>The Times</i>
	55,228 w.	32,741 w.
Homosexual* couple(s)	2	2
civil partnership	16	2
gay marriage*	19	3

In this ideological struggle, we argue that the actors involved in the social practices (namely, journalists, newsmakers and readers) have fairly precise expectations about the sociocultural setting, which clearly defines social roles, and gives values to social categories such as power, social distance, solidarity, etc., which have to be reconciled with their conflicting goals (i.e. struggling to establish the pre-eminence of their antagonistic discourses). In terms of pragmatics, actors recursively and strategically negotiate the meaning of linguistically-encoded concepts, either countering or contending with instances of language use. In our sub-corpora, the battle over naming practices also turns around the concepts encoded by *matrimonio* and *familia*:

- (5) ***El Mundo* 04/07/2005** Ana Antón  
 Presidente de la Conferencia Episcopal  
 Blázquez dice que el matrimonio homosexual “afecta a la estabilidad de la familia y a Dios” e “introduce confusión en el orden humano y moral y en la educación”.

***El Mundo* 04/07/2005** Ana Antón  
*Head of the Synod*  
*Blázquez says that homosexual marriage “affects family stability and God’ and ‘introduces confusion in human and moral order and in education.” [our translation]*

- (6) ***El País* 19/06/2005** Martina Delacroix/Andrea Rizzi  
 Beatriz Gimeno, presidenta de la Federación Estatal de Lesbianas, Gays y Transexuales (FELGT) invita a la ciudadanía a luchar “por la convivencia de **modelos de familia plurales**” a todos los que creen en una sociedad libre e igualitaria.

***El País* 19/06/2005** Martina Delacroix/Andrea Rizzi  
*Beatriz Gimeno, president of the Spanish federation of Lesbian, Gay and Transsexual (FELGT) invites citizenship, those who believe in a free and egalitarian society to fight “for the coexistence of plural models of families.” [our translation]*

- (7) ***The Guardian* 10/11/2004**  
 Yesterday in Parliament  
 [...] The shadow constitutional affairs secretary, Alan Duncan, said: “The amendments wreck the bill because [they] create partnerships within an existing family, which in their confused and contradictory relationship are utterly unworkable.” The equalities minister, Jacqui Smith, said the amendments created “legal nonsense”. The bill was designed to address the disadvantages faced by same-sex couples who could not marry, she said. Opposite-sex couples had no need for civil partnerships because they could marry.

- (8) ***The Times* 14/11/2004** Jenny Hjul  
 Bible thumping is not the answer to our society’s ills  
 It didn’t take long for Scotland’s leading Catholic to jump on the George W Bush victory bandwagon and call for a return to good old Christian values here, too. Cardinal Keith O’Brien stepped into his

pulpit last week and castigated what he called political and media elites for “undermining the morality of a generation”. [...] American Republicans had taken a stand for traditional family structures, a stand for marriage but against gay marriage, and a stand against abortion. Meanwhile in Scotland, schoolchildren as young as 13 are being handed morning-after pills for free and areas such as Glasgow have among the worst teenage pregnancy rates in Europe, irrefutable evidence that substantial numbers of young people are engaging in sex outside marriage. The only solution to this, in the eyes of O’Brien, is to preach abstinence, not to tackle the issue pragmatically, as various health boards are attempting to do.

As regards the number of occurrences of the key naming practices for both same-sex ‘people’ and ‘relationships’ (as seen in Table 4 and Table 5 above), though no significant (at least quantitative) semantic negotiation can be detected between progressive and conservative newspapers, the higher profusion of occurrences in *El País* and *The Guardian* evinces the struggle of the counter-discourse to gain pre-eminence. The results are also indicative of less ideological pressure and a more balanced approach to the topic in the British dailies, despite the fact that ‘actors’ defend their specific party interests.

In the examples above, the peripheral, counter-discourse attempts to negotiate an *ad hoc* concept MATRIMONIO\*/MARRIAGE\* where one of its defining features (the union of a man and a woman) is dropped and *same-sex* is given a constutive role. For this, positive prosodies such as ‘*plural family models*’ and ‘*free and egalitarian societies*’ are included (6). As a result, the lexically-encoded concept MATRIMONIO – in the core discourse – is broadened to include new forms of unions, also within FAMILY. In (7), the discussion turns around Mr Leigh’s proposal to extend to siblings (already under the denotation of FAMILY) some rights that are only granted by MARRIAGE, which the counter-discourse describes as ‘legal nonsense’ and ‘confused and contradictory relationship’.

(Ultra-)conservative forces and the Church show resistance, and their contributions to the debate intend to reinforce the traditional cultural representations by adding negative prosodies as consequences of MARRIAGE\* (‘*discriminates true marriages*’, ‘*offends intelligence*’, ‘*affects family stability*’, or ‘*introduces confusion in moral and human order and education*’) (5). Similarly, the Catholic Church in Scotland takes advantage of the overwhelming support in 11 US states to ban gay unions, under George W. Bush’s second term, in order to advocate ‘traditional family structures’ by saying that gay marriage, abortion and teenage sex are the result of a ‘*decline in moral values and education*’. It must be said, nevertheless, that the reporters in *The Times* are clearly against this view.

As we have seen in the examples above, ‘people’ and ‘relationships’ in the Spanish and British dailies in our corpus are ideologically constructed through processes of naming, negotiation, attribution and citation (Caldas-Coulthard 1994). The role of newsmakers is one of providing fodder for the construction of news stories; and even though they are given an authoritative voice in the media, writers retain the *power to craft the wording* (Scollon 1998). Two possible implications of this are: (1) readers are told not only that someone has said something but how they are expected to respond; and (2) writers may distance themselves from the claims made by others through the use of distance markers, specific lexical choices, quotation marks, and phrases such as “according to”, “alleged” and “said” (or even unattributed discourse) to *mitigate* and *disguise* statements not appreciated by an audience, and therefore to evade responsibility. Therefore, discourse representation of the various participants are set out in a complex array of characterisations which ranges from neutral ‘said’ to other lexical choices with a highly evaluative slant (Fairclough 1995; Scollon 1998). Further research on how to account for some forms of attribution in a quantitative analysis (as quotation marks, for instance) will certainly provide a more fine-grained picture of power relationships in the contending discourses through media representation.

## 4 Conclusions

In this paper we have begun to explore a wide variety of discursive practices generated by recent gender-equality legislation. New legal measures continue to be adopted internationally to favour social or sexual minorities, such as immigrants, homosexuals or battered women. Though social support for same-sex marriage seems universal in Western societies, and in fact some countries have granted full rights to homosexuals, we can still find a multiplicity of fierce *counter-discourses*, duly amplified by the Church and the ultra-conservative media, whose only objective seems to be to oppose any measure of recognition of the rights of minorities. Discursive struggle always accompanies all these legal measures, which we wish to study through media representation.

We are building an *ad hoc* corpus (GENTEXT-N), composed of all newspaper articles, in English and Spanish, from two progressive (*El País* and *The Guardian*) and two conservative (*El Mundo* and *The Times*) newspapers. At the moment our corpus contains 35 million words, and includes key gender-related terms (such as ‘homosexual’, ‘abortion’ or ‘domestic violence’) from 2005 to 2010. These are three of the most popular terms in newspapers today – they are widely used, defended, resisted, subject to constant redefinition, and so on. They are part of



our contemporary idiom, privileged objects of public and private negotiation. Newspapers – together with legislation and institutional publication – are possibly “the sites in which new gender and sexual identities are redefined. This is an arena for the enactment of a fierce battle between reactionary and progressive positions on the recognition of diversity” (Santaemilia & Bou 2008: xxiii). Ours is an ambitious corpus, which – we believe – will offer significant linguistic, ideological and discursive insights into today’s new family types, as well as into new gender and sexual configurations.

Given the powerful symbolic meaning of the institution of marriage, it is worth taking advantage of corpus linguistics and of contrastive/intercultural pragmatics in order to further investigate the legal, sexual or linguistic implications of the term used, in English and in Spanish, to refer to same-sex marriages. Among the issues that need more finely-tuned analyses are key lexical items, collocations and concordances, legitimized vs delegitimized concepts in different newspapers, the headlines, the use of euphemisms in gender-related news articles, the evolving naming practices across the years, and so on.

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