Italian Political Communication and Gender Bias: Press Representations of Men/Women Presidents of the Houses of Parliament (1979, 1994, and 2013)

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Abstract

The study considers mass media communication as intertwined with social norms, as assumed by the perspective of social representations. It explores the Italian press communication by focusing on three pairs of men and women politicians with different political orientations and all serving as presidents of the Houses of Parliament in three legislatures. The article concentrates on five newspapers in order to sound out the presence of a possible gender bias in favor of men in the coverage. It explores the strategic use of language to enhance or penalize the role of women politicians. In order to scrutinize the role of gender visibility and discrimination, the study compares how women and men presidents are named and examines the linguistic sexism/nonsexism used for women politicians also in relation to the ideological/cultural orientations of newspapers. Thereby, 591 headlines were collected and analyzed with SPAD-T statistical package. The results, for some cases, confirm the trends revealed in the international literature, in other cases, disprove expectations.

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1. Introduction

Political communication characterized by gender bias is an issue of particular interest in social psychology and mass media research. At an international level, early studies on elections in the 1980s revealed gender bias (Carroll & Schreiber, 1997; Kahn, 1992, 1994; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991), where less space was dedicated to female candidates than to their male counterparts. Over the next electoral cycles, part of the literature emphasized the new balance in the coverage of men and women politicians in the news (Bystrom, 2004; Bystrom, Robertson, & Banwart, 2001; Devitt, 2002; Jalalzai, 2006; Kittilson & Fridkin, 2008; Meeks, 2012; Smith, 1997), whereas other studies showed the persistence in the disparity between women and men, where the latter were favored (Falk, 2009; Lühiste & Banducci, in press.).

Alongside this research tradition, there are three perspectives centered on the linguistic dimension. One line of study, on social representations, proposed the analysis of the lexical style in media texts to unveil traditional stereotypes in representations of gender relationships, as in the case of the pioneering work of Kruse, Weimer, and Wagner (1988). Two other lines of research, starting in the late twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, centered on linguistic sexism applied to political communication (Wodak, 2003). The first one centered on 'gender and language' (Attenborough, 2014; Talbot, 2006; Wodak, 1997), and the second one focused on 'political linguistics' (*Politolinguistik*) (Wodak & de Cillia, 2006). All three approaches assume the opacity of language, capable of masking power relations that are revealed through the analysis of the context and the specific linguistic devices, which are bearers of discrimination. Based on early results thus attained, there was a clear need to encourage research in this still somewhat unexplored area (Martín Rojo, 2006).

This lack of development in empirical research is also true as regards the Italian context where only a few studies exist on the role of language in media representations of women politicians. Our research, thus, attempts to bridge this gap, by focusing on the comparison of representations of men/women politicians in the press. This study, mainly descriptive, examines how communication is intertwined with social norms as assumed by the tradition of social representations. In particular, we explore the political communication of three pairs of male and female politicians, each with different political orientations, and all serving as presidents of the Houses of Parliament over the course of three legislatures. We will start by focusing on newspapers coverage in order to sound out the presence of a possible gender bias in favor of men, analyzing its possible evolution over time. This will allow us to adopt both a diachronic and an ideological/ cultural perspective, as we will examine the different political orientations of our six politicians and of the newspapers over several years.

As social representations theory suggests, we contend that language is a symbolic repertoire that contributes to producing and reproducing, or refuting shared norms, by activating specific social-psychological processes. In the light of this assumption, we will explore the strategic use of language in journalistic communications that enhances or penalizes the role of women politicians. Aiming to uncover visibility and discrimination, we will then pay particular attention to how women and men presidents are addressed—whether their first names or surnames are used. We will also consider the linguistic sexism/non sexism when women politicians are referred to. Finally, we will examine the role played by the ideological/ cultural orientation of newspapers in relation to media coverage, to how they choose to address the six different presidents, and to the extent in which sexist/nonsexist language is used for women politicians. In some cases, the results confirmed the trends revealed in the international literature, while in others, they proved expectations to be not verified.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Media, Gender, Language, and Politics

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), created in 1889, was the first permanent forum for political multilateral negotiations. It recently showed interest in supporting gender equality and in backing women's participation in politics. At the Geneva International

Symposium in 1989, the IPU underlined the important role played by the media in promoting the participation of women in political life (Sensales, Areni, & Dal Secco, 2016). On 26 March 1994, in the Inter-Parliamentary Council in Paris, the plenary policy-making body of the IPU, at its 154th session, scheduled a 'Plan of action' to correct imbalances in the participation of men and women in political life worldwide. This Plan was conceived as a guideline to inspire and stimulate national action. It contained a section on the media, affirming their role in promoting a higher presence of women in politics, avoiding stereotyped and prejudicial images of women. It was later revived in 1997, emphasizing the gendered nature of political communication and the necessity for the media to change the political culture, traditionally androcentric (IPU, 1997).

Since 1987, in Italy, awareness about the function of the media had led to the publication of a book, commissioned by the Presidency of Ministers Council, on possible rules to prevent the use of sexist language in journalistic communications (Sabatini, 1987). The assumption was that, already at a linguistic level, gender discrimination was operating in the Italian society, leaving women out of certain aspects of society. Alma Sabatini (1987) thus devoted several parts of her book to the use of discriminatory language obscuring the presence of women through specific devices, such as using the masculine declination when referring to women (the so-called "generic masculine" (p. 22)). Many of the cases studied by Sabatini were about the predominantly androcentric political world. Therefore, as an example, Sabatini (1987) stressed the absence of women from the first pages of newspapers dedicated to politics. She underlined the connection between grammatical form and socio-cultural dynamics, at a linguistic level, by stating that "the basic principle is always the one that the male (grammatical gender) is higher, as is the male (social gender) in society" (Sabatini, 1987, p. 27).

Although this first study was clear in indicating possible lines of research, these have remained underdeveloped, particularly in relation to the political sphere. It was not until the early twenty-first century that empirical studies were found on the role of selective and biased language in mass media political communication dedicated to men and women involved in politics. There are two of these studies on gender bias. The first one is on journalistic language (Pescia, 2010), and the second, on the press interviews of men and women politicians (Basile, 2010). A third study is concerned with the sexist language used on representations, in the press, of twenty women ministers from four different governments (2006, 2008, 2011, & 2013) (Sensales et al., 2016).

Pescia's (2010) year-long survey of the newspaper *La Repubblica* and of the press agency ANSA, showed a predominant use of the masculine generic, in particular for the offices of assessor, minister, mayor, and undersecretary, whereas there is a noted use of the feminine for the positions of councilor, governor, deputy, and senator. Basile's (2010) survey, however, directly analyzed linguistic behaviors of men and women politicians over eighteen interviews. The results support the conclusion that the use of specific linguistic devices showed more agency for men than women. Finally, the survey of Sensales et al. (2016) demonstrated that, in the last two governments (2011 & 2013), the presence of sexist language was decreasing in headlines concerning women Ministers of the last two governments and in headlines concerning women politicians of the Center-Left (compared to women politicians of the Center-Right).

Overall, research shows how language functions as a powerful marker of sexism and gender discrimination. International social psychological research has studied the impact of this use by demonstrating its possible adverse consequences on women. For example, linguistic sexism stimulates the persistence of stereotypes and prejudices, of a collective imaginary male-dominated, and even leads to the undermining of the same performances, motivations, persuasive effectiveness, and self-esteem of women (Cralley & Ruscher, 2005; Crawford & English, 1984; Gastil, 1990; McConnell & Fazio, 1996; Merkel, Maass, & Frommelt, 2012; Mucchi-Faina, 2005; Sczesny, Moser, & Wood, 2015).

Accordingly, we decided to carry out a mainly descriptive study on press representations of three pairs of politicians—men/women. The

pairs differ in political orientation, and the five newspapers were chosen because of their different ideological and cultural viewpoints. They were monitored for more than three decades. We included all the news dedicated to these politicians, in 1979, 1994, and 2013, falling within a temporal range of four weeks ensuing the first day of their election. We chose such a temporal span because it corresponds to the phase when politicians are presented to the public. The debate can, therefore, be more heated and exposed to any gender bias.

During these three legislatures, there is a different female presence in the parliament that could have had a different impact on journalistic political communications. In the Chamber of Deputies, the percentage of elected female politicians significantly changed over these three periods: in 1979, there were 8.25% and in 1994, 14.44%; while in 2013 the figures jumped to 31.4% (Calloni & Cedroni, 2011; Camera dei Deputati, 2015). These percentages are a representation of the political landscape, in which the media worked.

The reason for our choosing to focus on headlines is twofold. They have proven valuable in different media analyses for their capability, first, to 'frame' the news (Condit, Ferguson, Kassel, Thadhani, Gooding, & Parrott, 2001; León, 1997; for the general role of headlines see also Atai & Mozaheb, 2014), and, second, to act as 'cognitive shortcuts' by calling attention to, guiding and filtering the reader's comprehension (Andrew, 2007).

The objective of the present descriptive study is to analyze gender bias in the political press and to examine how language is used strategically to enhance or obscure the presence of women in politics. At the operational level, we monitored the following three points: first, gender bias in media coverage and in the use of first names and/or surnames of men/women politicians, all serving as presidents of the Houses of Parliament in three legislatures; second, the extent to which sexist/nonsexist language is used for women presidents; and third, the role played by the ideological/cultural orientation of newspapers in relation to the first two points. Through these three points, we

promote a synchronic/diachronic comparative perspective concerning the representations of men/women politicians of different political and cultural leanings over the periods of three different legislatures. We also explore the diversity of newspapers in their ideological/cultural orientations.

3. Methodology

3.1. Materials

We collected 591 headlines through an automatic search, using the name, and/or surname of the six politicians, on the database Quid of the Senate Library in Rome. The search comprised of headlines, subheadings, and nut graphs of five newspapers with different ideological orientations over a period of three years: 1979, 1994, and 2013. The newspapers examined are *L'Unità* (frequencies 116; cultural orientation: Left), *La Repubblica* (frequencies 139; cultural orientation: Center-Left), *Il Corriere della Sera* (frequencies 131; cultural orientation: Center), *Il Tempo* (frequencies 92; cultural orientation: Center-Right), *Il Giornale* (frequencies 113; cultural orientation: Center-Right in 1979, Right from 1994, after the transfer of ownership to the Berlusconi family and Indro Montanelli's resignation from the position of Director) (for the ideological-cultural characterization of the five newspapers see Castronovo & Tranfaglia, 1994, 2002). To avoid excessive data dispersion (especially in reference to those of the first legislature analyzed here), the five newspapers were grouped into three ideological/cultural areas: Left/Center-Left (frequencies 255), Center (frequencies 131), Right/Center-Right (frequencies 205). Each period under observation, referred to the three different legislatures, ranging from the date of the election of each president to four weeks later.

The six politicians chosen for our analysis are three women and three men. The three women, who are at the head of the Chamber of Deputies, are: Nilde Iotti (*PCI*, *Partito Comunista Italiano*, Italian Communist Party, Left, elected in 1979 - VIII legislature); Irene Pivetti (*Lega Nord*, Northern League, Center-Right, elected in 1994 - XII legislature); and Laura Boldrini (*SEL*, *Sinistra, Ecologia e Libertà*, Left, Ecology and Freedom, Left, elected in 2013 - XVII legislature). The three

men, who are at the head of the Senate, are: Amintore Fanfani (*DC*, *Democrazia Cristiana*, Christian Democrats, Center-Right, elected in 1979); Luigi Carlo Scognamiglio (*Forza Italia*, Forza Italy, Center-Right, elected in 1994); and Pietro Grasso (*PD*, *Partito Democratico*, Democratic Party, Center-Left, elected in 2013).

3.2. Procedure

The headlines were imported into a textual file, a numerical file was built encoding informations, derived from the newspapers and the headlines, about the name of the newspaper and its ideological-cultural area, the name of the president and his male or female gender, and the year related to the three legislatures.

As mentioned above, we measured gender bias in the following variables, by either comparing the three pairs of male/female politicians, or by focusing on female politicians only: (a) media coverage, detecting the number of news headlines dedicated to each politician, whether they were mentioned alone or in pairs, and considering the newspapers' positioning in terms of gender, legislature, and cultural/ ideological; (b) the frequency in which their first names and/or surnames were used; which also contributed to (c) gender visibility, which is either clearly manifested when both first names and surnames are used, obscured when only the surname is mentioned, or trivialized when only the first name is used. (In Italian journalism, this is a process regarding the news in the Second Republic, which started from 1994 with Berlusconi's government. In this case, we have a communication that refers to politics and politicians in a familiar form, avoiding the traditional formal way that in the past concerned the political world, see Sensales & Areni, 2008); (d) the extent of sexist/nonsexist language used for the three female politicians.

For (d), we considered *Presidente* (President) as a neutral grammatical form. Originally a masculine word, *Presidente*, with the use of 'engendering' (or 'regendering') today becomes feminine with the use of the definite article in its feminine form, rendering *Presidentessa* obsolete (see the observations of Alma Sabatini (1987, pp. 51-52), and the entry of

Presidente in Vocabolary Treccani [http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/Presidente/]. They note that *Presidentessa* is now used in situations where irony is directed toward the politician, or to refer, in jest, to the wife of a President.). Therefore, the use of sexist language, as well as the extent of its use, were identified by detecting the presence and frequency of the following two modalities in the vocabulary of the headlines: the generic masculine (e.g., **_il_** *Presidente*, with the definite article in the masculine for women); and the dissymmetric feminine (with the feminine definite article before the surname, e.g., **_la_** *Jotti*). The latter is dissymmetrically used only for women and not for men. On the contrary, the use of a nonsexist language, as well as the extent of its use were identified by detecting the presence and frequency in the vocabulary of the headlines of the following two modalities: the specific feminine (e.g., **_la_** *Presidente*, with the definite article in the feminine form), and the neutral form (e.g., *Presidente*, without any definite article).

3.3. Data Analysis

With the support of the SPSS software, we carried out an analysis of frequencies of numerical variables. With the SPAD-T software (Lebart, Morineau, & Bécue, 1989), we conducted a lexicographical analysis on all the words of the headlines. With the latter, we used the step *Mots* (Words). Through *Mots*, we obtained the frequency distribution of the overall vocabulary. The *Mots* output offered a first descriptive analysis that allowed us to focus on the frequency of the lexicon related to: (i) first name only, surname only, and the full name, of each politician; (ii) sexist/ nonsexist language.

With VOSPEC step (*Vocabulaire Specifique*, Specific Vocabulary), we obtained the typical words of newspaper headlines grouped in three areas concerning their ideological/cultural orientation—Left/Center-Left (*L'Unità* and *La Repubblica*), Center (*Il Corriere della Sera*), Right/Center-Right (*Il Giornale* and *Il Tempo*). This step, based on chi-square logic, identifies typical words used by the different newspapers clustered in the three areas. 'Typicality' occurs when a word appears in a group with a frequency significantly different from the total frequency (probability <0.01).

The importance statistical significance of the differences was based on a comparison made between the frequency of the word in the group and the frequency that this word would have under the assumption of random distribution in the various groups. For our purposes, we analyzed the results—of the typical words—looking only for the frequencies related to the ways in which the six presidents were named, and to a sexist/nonsexist language, comparing the differences between the frequency within the group and the global frequency, and omitting all other data presented by the output.

4. Results

4.1. Coverage of Politicians Grouped by Legislature and by Gender

Figure 1 shows the number of headlines for each president. Lower frequencies (fr.) are for the presidents of the VIII legislature (starting in 1979), Fanfani and Jotti (fr. 45), followed by, with much higher frequencies, Pivetti and Scognamiglio (fr. 250), presidents of the XII legislature (starting in 1994), while Grasso and Boldrini, presidents of the XVII legislature (starting in 2013), received the highest coverage (fr. 296). Coverage therefore sees an increase over time, with a very large margin compared to the first legislature. Within these general trends, Pivetti shows the greatest coverage (fr. 147), followed by Grasso (138), Boldrini (fr. 92), Scognamiglio (fr. 79), and ending with Fanfani (fr. 16) and Jotti (fr. 15).
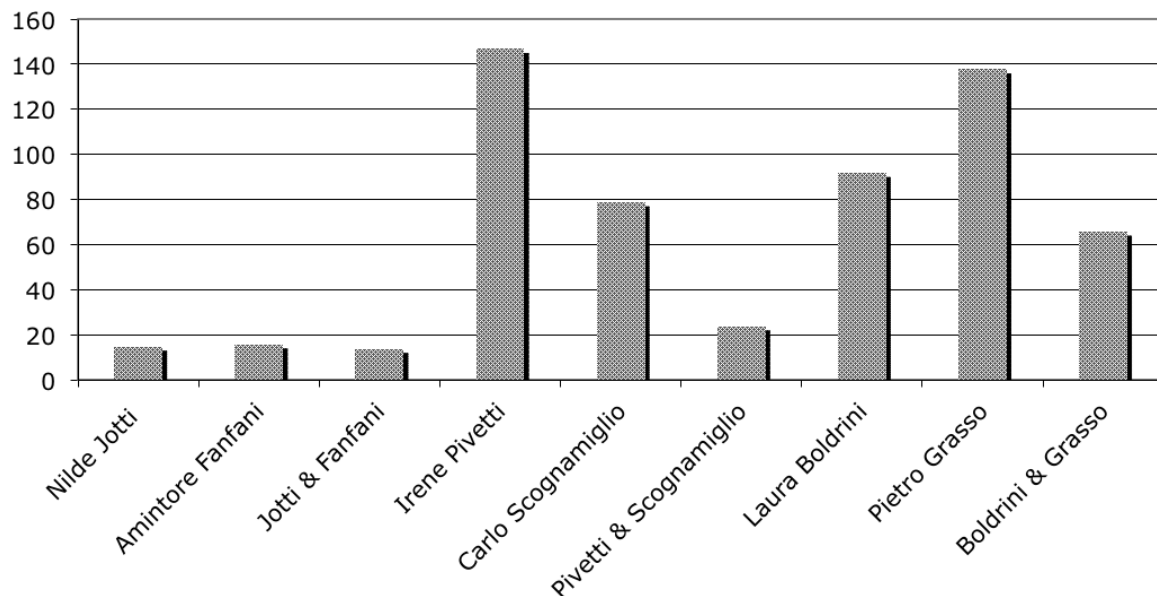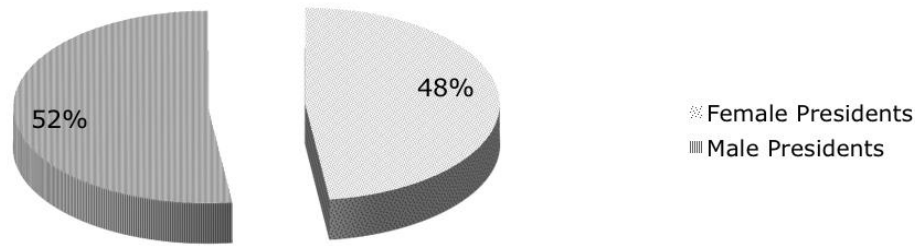

Figure 1
Coverage by Politician. The Frequency of Headlines for Each President: Nilde Jotti, Amintore Fanfani, both Named (1979), Irene Pivetti, Carlo Scognamiglio, both Named (1994), Laura Boldrini, Pietro Grasso, both Named (2013)

Figure 2 illustrates the coverage by gender, showing differences between men and women, in favor of the first, also if of very little range.
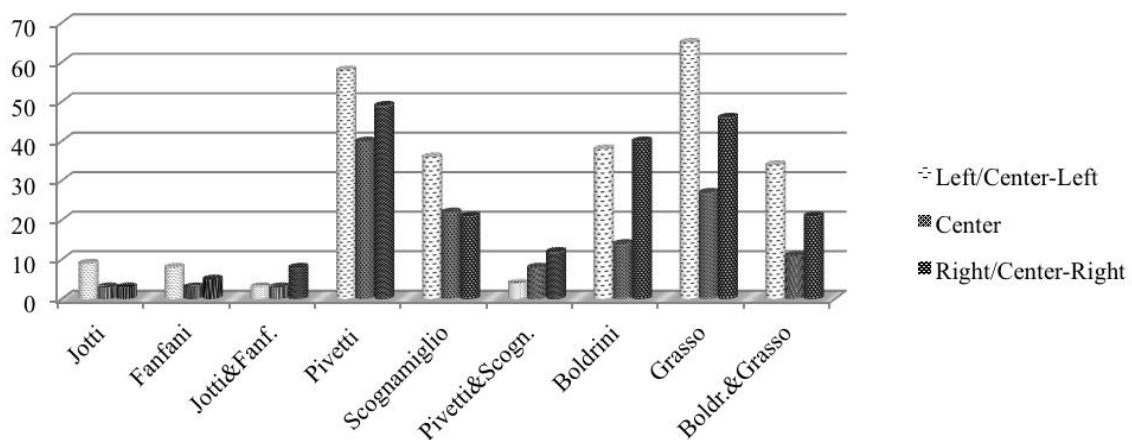
Figure 2

Coverage by Gender. Frequency Distribution Percentages of Female and Male Presidents in Headlines

4.2. Coverage of Presidents Determined by the Ideological/Cultural Orientation of Newspapers

Figure 3 shows how the newspapers of the left in general give more coverage to the presidents, with the exception of headlines devoted to the same time to Jotti and Fanfani, to Pivetti and Scognamiglio, as well as to Boldrini. In these cases, the right-wing newspapers ensure greater coverage, with more evidence for the first two pairs of presidents, and in a more nuanced way for the third president. There is only one newspaper that is centrist in its political orientation, out of the five selected (two are left-wing, and the remaining two are right-wing). Thus the coverage of *Il Corriere della Sera* has greater salience, on the one hand, for Scognamiglio, than the coverage of the two Right/Center-Right newspapers, and on the other hand, for the pair Pivetti and Scognamiglio, than that of the two Left/Center-Left newspapers.
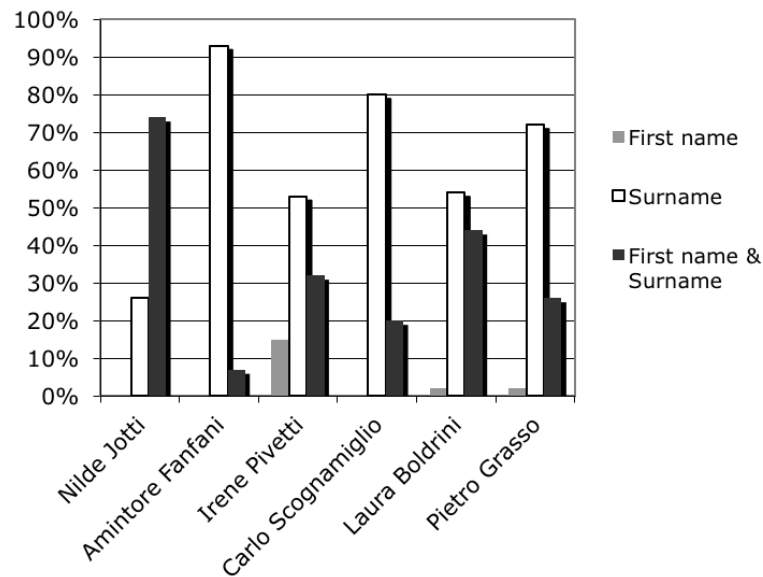

Figure 3

Coverage of Presidents by the Ideological/Cultural Orientations of Newspapers. Frequencies of Headlines

4.3. Naming Politicians

Figure 4 shows trends in percentage in the use of first names, surnames, and full names for the six presidents. Jotti is the only president who was mostly addressed by his full name, as its high frequency attests. In contrast, only surnames were used for the other politicians. Only Pivetti presents a higher frequency in being called by his first name. Grasso and Boldrini have a low frequency in that respect. First names are never used for Fanfani, Jotti, and Scognamiglio.
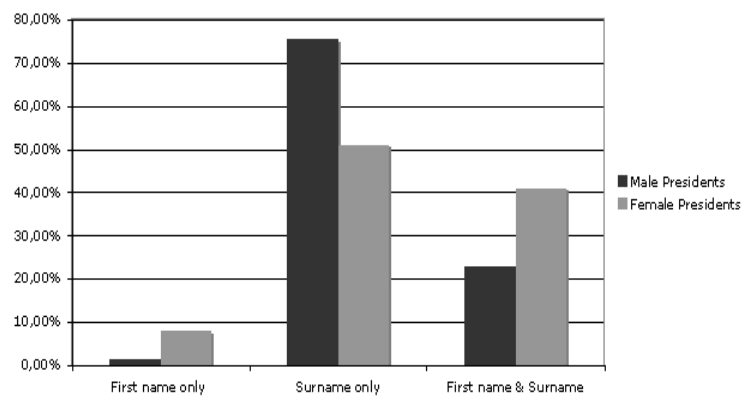
Figure 4

Naming Politicians by President. Trends in Percentage of the Use of First Name, Surname, and Full Names for the Six Presidents

Figure 5 illustrates trends in percentage of the three modalities of naming politicians, grouped by their gender. Higher frequencies are in general observed for the use of surnames with men, whereas the women are called more frequently by their full name, and even sometimes only by their first names, but the latter has a very low frequency.

Figure 5

Naming Politicians. Trends in Percentage of the Use of First Name, Surname, and Full Names for Male and Female Presidents

4.4. The Extent of Sexist/Nonsexist Language

Figure 6 presents the frequency distribution for sexist/nonsexist language analyzed for each of the four modalities. The specific feminine and the dissymmetrical feminine have the higher levels, followed by the neutral form, and ending with the generic masculine.
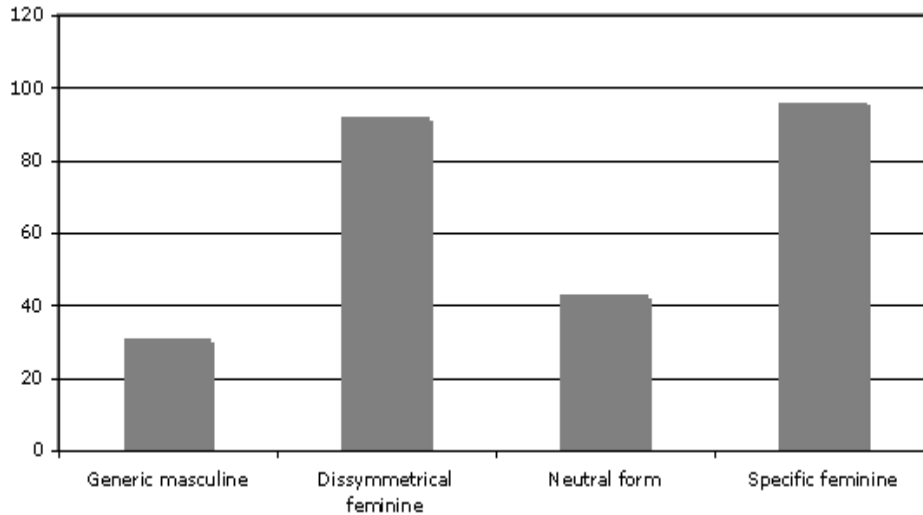
Figure 6
Sexist/Nonsexist Language by Modality. Frequencies Distribution

Figure 7 groups together the four modalities of linguistic sexism/nonsexism, and shows that nonsexist language prevails over sexist language.

Figure 7
Sexist/Nonsexist Language. Frequency Distribution Percentages

Finally, Figure 8 shows trends in percentage of sexist/nonsexist language for each of the three women presidents. Jotti and Boldrini present the higher level of nonsexist forms, whereas Pivetti has higher values for sexist forms.
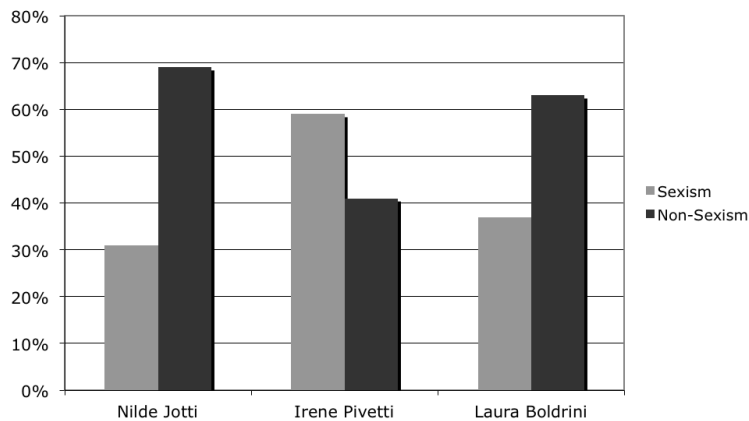
Figure 8
Sexist Language by Gendered Subject. Trends in Percentages Frequencies of 'Sexist/Nonsexist Language' for Each of the Three Female Presidents

4.5. Typical Words Used in Newspaper Headlines Grouped by Their Ideological and Cultural Orientation

Using Vospec step, we analyzed the typical words used in newspaper headlines, grouped by their ideological and cultural orientation, searching for the way the six presidents are named and whether a sexist/nonsexist language was used. Table 1 points out the general results indicating after each linguistic form, in parenthesis, the frequency within the group versus the global frequency.

The way men politicians are addressed changed with each legislature. In the VIII legislature, newspapers used the president's surname. Only the centrist newspaper used full names. In the XII legislature, newspapers continued to address the president by surname. The Left/Center-Left and Center newspapers

used full names. In the XVII legislature, four newspapers, Left/Center-Left and Right/ Center-Right, call the president by surname. Like in the previous legislature, the three newspapers, Left/Center-Left and Center, use the president's full name. Finally, only in the last legislature do we find first names being used by Left/Center-Left newspapers.

For women politicians, in the VIII legislature, all newspapers always use the president's full name. In the XII legislature, newspapers continue to address the president by her full name. Three newspapers, Left/Center-Left and Center, call the president by her surname. Three other newspapers, in this case Center and Right/Center-Right only use her first name. In the XVII legislature, all newspapers address the president either by her full name, or by surname only, except the Left/Center-Left newspapers, which use also first name only.

Table 1

Typical Words of Newspaper Headlines Grouped by Three Legislatures and the Ideological/Cultural Orientation of Newspapers

Legislatures	Left/Center-Left newspapers	Center newspaper	Right/Center-Right newspapers
VIII - starting in 1979	Fanfani (10vs27), Nilde Jotti (11vs23), the generic masculine (2vs3), the dissymmetric feminine (1vs7), the neutral form (1vs2)	Fanfani (5vs27), Amintore Fanfani (1vs2), Nilde Jotti (6vs23)	Fanfani (12vs27), Nilde Jotti (4vs23), the generic masculine (1vs3), the dissymmetric feminine (5vs7), the neutral form (1vs2), the specific feminine (1vs1)
XII - starting in 1994	Scognamiglio (32vs83), Carlo Scognamiglio (10vs21), Pivetti (18vs41), Irene Pivetti (24vs57), the dissymmetric feminine (16vs56), the neutral form (5vs5), the specific feminine (3vs5)	Scognamiglio (22vs83), Carlo Scognamiglio (8vs21), Pivetti (14vs41), Irene Pivetti (16vs57), Irene (7vs22), the dissymmetric feminine (8vs56)	Scognamiglio (28vs83), Irene Pivetti (15vs57), Irene (10vs22), the dissymmetric feminine (24vs56)
XVII - starting in 2013	Grasso (84vs176), Pietro Grasso (28vs69), Pietro (6vs6), Boldrini (43vs89), Laura Boldrini (27vs70), Laura (6vs6), the dissymmetric feminine (9vs20), the neutral form (3vs16)	Pietro Grasso (17vs69), Boldrini (16vs89), Laura Boldrini (17vs70), the neutral form (5vs16)	Grasso (59vs176), Pietro Grasso (24vs69), Boldrini (30vs89), Laura Boldrini (26vs70), the generic masculine (2vs2), the dissymmetric feminine (11vs20), the neutral form (2vs16), the specific feminine (9vs16)

The linguistic sexism/nonsexism also changes in the following ways for each legislature. In the VIII legislature, the results show the prevalence of sexist grammatical forms with the generic masculine, and the dissymmetrical feminine is present in newspapers of the Left/Center-Left and the Right/Center-Right. The nonsexist form of the specific feminine is found in Right/Center-Right newspapers. In the XII legislature, the sexist grammatical form of dissymmetrical feminine prevails in all newspapers, whereas nonsexist forms are present in Left/Center-Left newspapers with the specific feminine and the neutral form. In the XVII legislature, the nonsexist grammatical forms prevail with the neutral form present in all newspapers and with the specific feminine present in Right/Center-Right newspapers. Sexist forms are present, with the generic masculine and the dissymmetric feminine, respectively in newspapers of the Right/Center-Right, and the Left/Center-Left.

5. Discussion

This article has analyzed for the first time the link between the Italian political communication and gender differences in a comparative perspective, both diachronic and synchronic. Our results allow some reflection and a confrontation to some of the trends highlighted in the literature cited. They reveal in some cases their consistency. However, in other cases, they show unexpected directions that we will try to interpret in relation to the specific historical and cultural context, as suggested by social representation theory (Valencia, Gil de Montes, & Ortiz, 2013).

In the aggregated data on media coverage of the three pairs of presidents of the Houses of Parliament, we have found a general gender bias in favor of men, albeit very small. From an analytical point of view, in one case, this trend is even reversed with a higher coverage for President Irene Pivetti in 1994, whereas in the previous legislature—in 1979—the two presidents received about the same coverage, and in 2013, the woman president was less covered than her male colleague. These results are different from those affirmed by the international literature that, in a convergent way, found in the 1980s a higher coverage for men (Carroll & Schreiber, 1997; Kahn, 1992,

1994; Kahn & Golderberg, 1991), in the 1990s, a balanced coverage for men and for women politicians (Bystrom, 2004; Bystrom et al., 2001; Devitt, 2002; Jalalzai, 2006; Kittilson & Fridkin, 2008; Meeks, 2012; Smith, 1997), or in some cases, a persistent gap in favor of men (Falk, 2009; Lühiste & Banducci, in press), but never a higher coverage for women.

Press coverage of presidents by the ideological/cultural orientation of newspapers showed trends difficult to interpret. Mostly, we witness a greater coverage in the newspapers of the Left/Center-Left, regardless of the political orientation of the presidents. Compared to this tendency, there are three exceptions where increased coverage by newspapers of the Right/Center-Right is seen when Jotti and Fanfani, Pivetti, and Scognamiglio are nominated together, and for the headlines concerning Laura Boldrini.

Furthermore, there is no gender visibility in the naming of presidents, because of an over-utilization of surnames, more evident for men than for women. In parallel, regarding women, the use of full names is higher than for men politicians. This offers a higher visibility for the female identity, even though it shows a gender bias. Then, in the first two legislatures, first names only, though rare, are used for Irene Pivetti, while completely absent for Jotti, as for the two male presidents, Fanfani and Scognamiglio. On the contrary, in the last legislature, no gender differences are detected because both presidents are referred by first names only, though always in rare cases.

Concerning the linguistic dimension of sexism/nonsexism for women, it is surprising to note that nonsexist language prevails on sexist language. One possible explanation for this result is attributable to the specific linguistic form 'president' that was originally derived from the masculine, but afterwards was considered neutral. This ambiguity, at the level of declination, was able to remain in journalistic use. This is confirmed in another study conducted in Italy (Sensales & Areni, in press). In this study, a higher level of nonsexist language when referring to the female president of Confindustria [Confederation of Italian industrials], Emma Marcegaglia (elected on 13 March 2008), is shown compared to thirteen female Ministers over

three different governments (2006, 2008, & 2011) and the female Secretary of the Cgil [the leftist Italian Trade Union], Susanna Camusso (elected on 3 November 2010). By contrast, in most of the other research conducted in Italy, linguistic sexism is still prevalent, although decreasing (Sensales et al., 2012, 2013, 2016). However, it concerned the form *ministr**o*** (male minister), when referring to women (the generic masculine or false generic), and is more rarely transformed into the specific feminine *ministr**a*** (female minister).

Regarding the role of the political-cultural orientation of politicians, a higher level of linguistic sexism for Right/Center-Right woman politician was remarked as in the following headlines: "Here is the Pivetti, devil and holy water" ("*Ecco **la** Pivetti* [dissymmetrical feminine], *diavolo e acquasanta.*", *Il Giornale*, 1994); "The president of the House Irene Pivetti" ("*Il presidente* [generic masculine] *della Camera Irene Pivetti.*", *Il Corriere della Sera*, 1994). However, this had already been underlined in previous Italian research (Sensales et al., 2016). It seems as though the press were discriminating against women politicians of the Right/Center-Right, but showed respect for women politicians of the Left/Center-Left. This reflects the gender stereotypes typical of that culture, more anchored in the traditional androcentric values (Hershey & Sullivan, 1977).

Finally, there are differences in the various ideological orientations of newspapers. Only the Center newspaper references male/female presidents with their full names, showing that no gender biases are present. For the Left/Center-Left newspapers, there is only an absence of gender biases in the last two legislatures, where presidents are also referred to with their full name. For the Right/Center-Right newspapers, though, this happens only once in 2013. The use of first names only suggests a gender bias in the case of the Center and the Right/Center-Right newspapers in 1994 concerning Irene Pivetti. In 2013, however, there is no gender biases for the Left/Center-Left newspapers as they address both men and women presidents by their first names.

The results for linguistic sexism/nonsexism showed an absence of sexism only for the Center newspaper in 1979 and in 2013, with the added presence of the nonsexist neutral form in 2013. An unexpected result, which should be better investigated, emerged from the trends relative to newspapers of the Left/Centre-Left and the Right/Centre-Right. Each manifested nonsexist forms in the news when referring to presidents of the opposition, rather than those of their own ideological/ cultural orientation. For example, in the news Nilde Jotti and Laura Boldrini, both Left-wing, were mentioned with a nonsexist language— the specific feminine—by Right/Center-Right newspapers, as in the following headlines: "The women president of the House elected with only 13 votes more than the minimum and 109 blank ballots" ("***La** presidente della Camera eletta con soli 13 voti più del minimo e 109 schede bianche.....*", *Il Giornale*, 1979); "From left are recognized radiant, president Pietro Grasso and the women president of the House Laura Boldrini" ("*Da sinistra si riconoscono raggianti, il presidente Pietro Grasso e **la** presidente della camera Laura Boldrini.*", *Il Giornale*, 2013); "Attack of Battiato in a meeting in Brussels. Revolt of Deputies. Asked the resignation. Laura Boldrini, the women president of the House has rejected <<the insult that affects the dignity of Parliament >>" ("*Attacco di Battiato in un incontro a Bruxelles. Rivolta dei deputati. Chieste le dimissioni. Laura Boldrini, **la** presidente della Camera ha <<respinto l'insulto che colpisce la dignità del Parlamento>>*", *Il Tempo*, 2013). Similarly, Irene Pivetti was addressed with the same nonsexist forms - the specific feminine - by the Left/Center Left newspapers, as in the following headlines: "Scalfaro receives the new women president of the House Irene Pivetti" ("*Scalfaro riceve **la** neo presidente della Camera Irene Pivetti*", *L'Unità*, 1994); "The women president of the House speaks of <<the corruption as lubricant of economic system>>" ("***La** presidente della Camera parla della <<corruzione come lubrificante del sistema economico>>.*", *La Repubblica*, 1994).

In order to fully understand social representations, the context of each communications must be grasped (de Rosa, 2013). For the three periods analyzed, the context was particularly important because it

could change the perspective of a president's coverage and the use of specific linguistic devices. Each period follows a logic sometimes in line with politics, other times in line with the media, following a trend widely discussed in the literature (Esser, 2013; Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Magin, 2015; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Strömbäck, 2008). Our results therefore show the prevalence of political logic when the poor coverage of the two presidents in 1979 resents the dominant role of the party-centered politics that made nuanced attention to the leaders of the moment. In 1994, with the transition to the Second Republic, a crisis of political parties emerges in parallel with an increase in the amount of news devoted to the process of personalization following the mediatization of politics, which from then on became a feature of Italian political communication (Campus, 2010). The focus on the personality of the leaders makes political communication more attractive and in keeping with the media logic, favoring the increasing amount of news devoted to political leaders. The leap forward in coverage provided to the two pairs of presidents in 1994 and 2013 can be interpreted in the light of this process of mediatization that was accompanied by forms of trivialization of communication well represented by the use of first names when referring to politicians. Here are some examples of headlines referred to Irene Pivetti, president of the Chamber of Deputies in 1994, and to Laura Boldrini and Pietro Grasso, presidents of Chamber of Deputies and of Senate in 2013: "<<Irene, force that you can make it>>" ("<<*Forza Irene che ce la fai.*>>", *Il Tempo*, 1994); "Controversy over the Pivetti's speech <<Irene but why do you speak in masculine form? >> " ("*Polemica sul discorso **della** Pivetti* [dissymmetrical feminine]<<*Irene ma perché parli al maschile?*>>", *Il Corriere della Sera*, 1994); "Dear Irene, if I say lady you get offended?" ("*Cara Irene, se dico signora lei si offende?*", *La Repubblica*, 1994); "Laura, in the House thinking about the latest people. The third president of the House, over twenty years dedicated to the refugees as UN spokesman…" ("*Laura, a Montecitorio pensando agli ultimi. La terza presidente della Camera, oltre vent'anni dedicati ai rifugiati come portavoce Onu….*", *L'Unità*, 2013); "Pietro, man of the institutions. The politics will be less distant!" ("*Pietro, uomo delle istituzioni. La politica sarà meno distante!*", *L'Unità*,

2013). Just in this headlines we can see as, in creating a sort of proximity between politicians and ordinary citizens, newspapers were trying to popularize politics.

In addition to these general processes, the context is also important in explaining gender differences observed in the press coverage. As already noted in 1979, the difference in coverage between men and women presidents is completely irrelevant. Despite the high under-representation of women in Parliament (8%), for the first time, a woman—the second time for a Communist in this role, after Pietro Ingrao—was elected to one of the highest offices of the State, whereas the Christian Democratic politician Amintore Fanfani was confirmed president of the Senate. This novelty was highly newsworthy, and it eliminated, in the press coverage, the predictable gap in favor of men.

In 1994, the overall political framework completely changed. With the passage of the electoral system from proportional to majoritarian, new political forces assert themselves, together with a centrality of leaders. Again, trends in the press coverage devoted to presidents of the Center-Right can be explained in part as emerging from a new political reality: Irene Pivetti, from the Northern League, a political force of great success despite its recent birth, is the youngest president in the history of the House of Republic (31 years old), she is a recognized leader in a Parliament with only 14.44% of women; while Carlo Scognamiglio, elected in Forza Italy, but coming from the old Liberal Party, lacks a distinct personality which could be attractive to the media, even though he is the youngest president of the Senate (41 years old).

In 2013, the presidents were Center-Left. The pair was elected for the first time in Parliament, coming from a non-political work experience. Laura Boldrini, enrolled in the register of journalists, and came from the post of spokeswoman of the High Commissioner for Refugees of the United Nations (UNHCR). Pietro Grasso, magistrate, left his position as head of the national anti-Mafia Public Prosecutor. At the time of their election, parliament saw a leap forward in the number of women elected to the House of Deputies,

with 31.4%. Despite this result, the press coverage concerning the female president was for the first time clearly less than that of her male counterpart. One of the factors that may have influenced this result is the controversy between Grasso and another magistrate, Caselli, who occupied political news for a long time, and thus increased the coverage of Grasso.

Overall, the results show a complex, articulated and controversial picture, as it combines, in a biased gendered communication, aspects that sometimes discriminate against women obscuring their presence or their gender specificity (i.e., limiting their coverage, or using the generic masculine), showing discrimination against women by highlighting their gender (i.e., using the dissymmetric feminine, or using full names). This ambivalent attitude of political communications toward women, on the one hand, shows a fluid reality, but on the other hand, is among the causes that discourage women from engaging in political activities (Lawless & Fox, 2010; for Italy see Francescato, Mebane, Sorace, Giacomantonio, & Lauriola, 2008).

Fortunately and unexpectedly, the prevalence of linguistic forms, overcoming these contradictory aspects, gives visibility to the specificity of the female gender without the intervention of gender bias (i.e., the specific feminine). These elements of political communication lead to a reflection on how they can stimulate or inhibit a greater symmetry in gender relations. At the same time, they show the non-neutrality of language and its embedment in gendered cultural norms, just as the social representations theory affirms (Kruse et al., 1988). However, they also show a dialectical non-reductionist relationship between the use of language and the context in which such use takes shape (Zand-Moghadam & Bikineh, 2015). This relationship refers to a role of journalistic communication that actually seems to not just mirror what exists, but to force existing normative rules by effectively presenting itself as an instrument of social change, thus fulfilling the wishes expressed by the IPU in 1997 (IPU, 1997).

However, to check whether this emancipatory function is actually performed by Italian political communication, other studies, more qualitative, need to be made. These studies, focusing on the content analysis of communications investigated here, for instance, should examine the positive or negative coverage of the six presidents, or should explore the context of the use of nonsexist forms in the news concerning the three female politicians, focusing on newspapers of a different ideological/cultural orientation than the presidents. In this way, for example, we may find that the increased coverage given to Irene Pivetti is not in itself a guarantee of overcoming sexist bias. Taken together, these studies could spread awareness for the need to keep a close watch on mass media communications and for the interweaving between formal elements of language and content. An interweaving in which social-psychological research has shown to play an important role in overcoming the gender gap, making women more self-confident and helping to build a world where women are protagonists.

Acknowledgments

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