La Sapienza

Revisione esterna tesi dott. SOPHIE EYSSETTE (37 ciclo)

EYSSETTE SOPHIE CAROLINE

Evaluation form for PhD dissertation

Evaluation form

Title of the thesis

Taboo Language and Incest in the French and British press (2017-2022), a cross-linguistic corpus-assisted discourse analysis

Affiliation of the reviewer

University of Ferrara - Department of Humanities - Italy

Report

Report on PhD Thesis submitted by Sophie Eyssette

The PhD thesis presented by Sophie Eyssette aims to offer a cross-linguistic corpus assisted qualitative-quantitative study of media representations of Taboo Language and Incest in the French and British press (2017-2022).

The thesis represents a comprehensive analysis of newspaper articles published between 2017 and 2022 to investigate how media discourses around incest changed or are consistently similar between two cultures.

In the Introduction, the author provides a brief overview of the thesis's main topics and structure. She defines the scope of her research, elaborating on the importance of discursive approaches to linguistic taboo. In terms of structure, the thesis begins by introducing the most relevant theoretical approaches to incest and providing the definition adopted in the study (Chapter 2). Next, the PhD candidate discusses the theoretical framework (Chapter 3), defining language taboo through a comprehensive review of the key literature on the topic, extending beyond the field of linguistics. Regarding methodology (Chapter 4), Sophie Eyssette combines methods of analysis from (critical) discourse analysis and corpus linguistics (henceforth CADS), placing significant emphasis on the diachronic, cross-cultural, and cross-linguistic analyses conducted on authentic newspaper data from France and the United Kingdom. Chapter 5 is the first analytical chapter and forms part of the core of the thesis. In this chapter, the candidate investigates the representation of incest in the French and British press using various techniques from CADS, including collocation and concordance analyses. To address challenges associated with comparative cross-linguistic research, she focuses on the topicality of each corpus, beginning with the most frequent words, followed by a collocation analysis of the previously extracted relevant lexical nouns. Subsequently, she highlights the discourse prosody of incest, studying the metaphorical and paradoxical use of the adjective incestuous, and conducts a metalinguistic analysis of the presentation of the incest taboo in the press. Chapter 6 constitutes the second analytical section of the thesis and builds upon a previously published article. In this chapter, the candidate investigates absences in discourses—specifically, instances of incest that are either not directly addressed or are obscured. Finally, Chapter 7 is dedicated to a more qualitative, close-reading analysis of the incest taboo in the context of Woody Allen and celebrity news. Here, the candidate examines the portrayal of Woody Allen and his accuser, Dylan Farrow.

The final chapter is dedicated to conclusive remarks and outlines potential directions for future research.

Sophie Eyssette's thesis is well-structured, convincing, and effectively addresses her research question. With this work, the PhD candidate aims to contribute to contemporary studies of newspaper media discourse by examining the linguistic representation of the incest taboo. The thesis demonstrates how taboo language, understood as a linguistic avoidance strategy, operates on a progressive continuum of absence, ranging from explicit expression to silenced and omitted language. Eyssette provides an effective and illustrative taxonomy of linguistic taboos, identifying seven distinct categories on this continuum: explicit presence, unspecified presence, distanced presence, renamed presence, substituted presence, omitted presence, and silenced presence. She convincingly illustrates how linguistic taboos are culturally dependent, differing significantly between French and UK English. Specifically, the study highlights that the concept of incest is framed and interpreted differently in the two cultural contexts. In France, incest is predominantly understood and used to denote intrafamilial child sexual abuse, whereas in the UK, it is framed as a broader social taboo, representing a transgression of societal norms. She demonstrates expertise in applying the methodological tools of CADS research, particularly in relation to the study of absences and the use of triangulation methods. Lastly, this work effectively highlights and demonstrates how CADS studies can have a meaningful social impact.

I identified a few minor issues throughout the thesis, which have been noted in the provided PDF file attached to the platform. For instance, while her reflection on anglonormativity is intriguing, it would benefit from further elaboration in future research. Additionally, I noticed a tendency toward didactic repetition; the author frequently reiterates theoretical and methodological concepts that have already been addressed in previous sections, which may be unnecessary for the informed reader. Moreover, several theoretical notions discussed in the thesis (e.g., signaling nouns or celebrity news) could have been more appropriately introduced in the theoretical section to provide better context and structure. Lastly, I would have appreciated a more detailed discussion on news values and newsworthiness in relation to incest and taboo. While the concepts are mentioned and referenced, the connection between incest and newsworthiness remains unclear to me, and further exploration would have strengthened this aspect of the analysis.

However, these minor critical remarks do not diminish the significance of this work for contemporary news media research. Based on the assessment presented in my report, I conclude that Sophie Eyssette has undertaken a valuable and significant PhD research project. Therefore, I recommend that her thesis be accepted and approved for defense, subject only to minor revisions.

Should the committee have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.
Confidential report (it will not be shown to the candidate)

I sincerely thank you for the opportunity to review Sophie Eyssette's thesis. It has been a pleasure to engage with such a well-executed, well-structured, and methodologically precise work. Above all, the thesis showcases remarkable scientific maturity and excellent critical ability. I eagerly look forward to reading any future expansions or publications based on this research. In addition to this report, I have also uploaded a PDF file of the thesis with my detailed comments.

Evaluation file (optional)

File caricati:
Thesis SOPHIE CAROLINE EYSSETTE_rev.pdf

Presentation and clarity

[ ] None   [ ] Poor   [ ] Average   [ ] Good   [**X**] Excellent

The reviewer should be able to read the text without difficulty. This implies that the dissertation is clear and 'user friendly', without duplications or repetitions.

Integration and coherence

[ ] None　　[ ] Poor　　[ ] Average　　[ ] Good　　[X] Excellent

The manuscript should present logical and rational links between different parts of the thesis.

Introduction to scientific background

[ ] None　　[ ] Poor　　[ ] Average　　[ ] Good　　[X] Excellent

The text should contain a satisfactory introduction to the scientific background which is relevant to the research, preparing the reader to the exposition of the problem.

Review of relevant literature

[ ] None　　[ ] Poor　　[ ] Average　　[ ] Good　　[X] Excellent

The candidate must have a detailed knowledge of original sources, have a thorough knowledge of the field, and understand the main theoretical and methodological issues.

Statement of research problem

[ ] None　　[ ] Poor　　[ ] Average　　[X] Good　　[ ] Excellent

A clear statement of the research problem should be made, together with specific hypotheses, predictions, or questions which the research is designed to address.

Originality

[ ] None　　[ ] Poor　　[ ] Average　　[ ] Good　　[X] Excellent

The research must be the candidate's own work. The degree of independence may vary according to the research topic.

Contribution to knowledge and scientific relevance

[ ] None   [ ] Poor   [ ] Average   [ ] Good   **[X]** Excellent

The dissertation should be substantial enough to be able to form the basis of two articles on refereed journal, a book or research monograph.

Mastery of the English language

[ ] None   [ ] Poor   [ ] Average   [ ] Good   **[X]** Excellent

The candidate must be proficient in written English and show mastery of appropriate scientific/technical language.

The thesis can be considered for a 'cum laude' award

[X] Yes   [ ] No

A major goal of the review process is to evaluate if the present version of the thesis is:

1) adequate as is

2) require minor revision

3) require major revision

for admission of the candidate to the defense of the work in front of a national evaluation board.

[ ] Accept as is   **[X]** Minor revision   [ ] Major revision

Date: 12/18/2024
Reviewer: Del Fante Dario