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The role of a common language in determining ethical approaches in journalism. Exploratory research on Francophone journalists

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Abstract

In this paper, the ethical beliefs held by French speaking journalists will be considered in a comparative context. After presenting the results for French journalists based on the Worlds of journalism survey, the outcome will be compared to other French speaking journalists who are in a minority in their country, such as the French speaking journalists from Switzerland, Belgium and Canada. This comparison, for example on questions about the use of hidden cameras and microphones, paying people for confidential information or accepting money from sources etc., shows surprising similarities. It could be inferred that the journalists' common language plays a role in developing common ethical approaches of journalism. We could further assume that international codes such as the Munich declaration of the rights and duties of journalists combined with more local sources, influences and references, circulate in homogeneous linguistic spaces. But a further comparison with other language communities of the three countries considered tends to prove that the French particularity is smaller than firstly thought.

This paper¹ investigates the role of language in the identification of common journalistic cultures, especially in the building of ethical and professional standards. The data collected in the Worlds of Journalism study allows us to study large corpus of journalists speaking the same language, but working in different countries. A majority of international studies dedicated to cultures, practices and journalistic identities are based on national comparisons. This study is interested in the case of francophone journalists from Belgium, Switzerland and Canada². This research perimeter would be able to measure the weight of other variables in the constitution of journalistic cultures. We suggest that language, and the cultural background its carries, could be a relevant variable for understanding some journalistic particularities. Together, these three multicultural countries have tested the hypothesis of a possible French journalistic culture since all three have a minority of journalists who speak that language, integrated in different ways within the Canadian, Swiss and Belgian institutional apparatus. In other words, we are looking for a potential consistency of a francophone cultural identity and any specific journalistic features for individuals speaking this language. We aim to measure whether or not this francophone identity leads to a particular approach of ethical standards.

Language and *Francophonie*, between globalization and cultural heritage

So far, comparative studies of media systems and journalistic cultures have mainly compared journalists from different countries (Donsbach and Klett 1993; Weaver and Wu 1998; Deuze 2002; Donsbach and Patterson, 2004; Hallin and Mancini, 2004, 2011; Dobek-Ostrowska et al. 2010; Hanitzsch et al. 2011; Weaver and Willnat 2012). They have gradually become open to new comparative bases. Although the national framework remains relevant for many research questions, “it ignored other phenomena which may need to be formulated

¹ This communication is based on collective research carried out by members of the Worlds of Journalism Study: Geneviève Bonin, Filip Dingerkus, Annik Dubied, Stefan Mertens, Heather Rollwagen, Vittoria Sacco, Ivor Shapiro, Olivier Standaert and Vinzenz Wyss. *Quelle différence? Language, Culture and Nationality as Influences on Francophone Journalists' Identity*. This paper has been submitted to « Journalism Studies » in June 2016.

² French-speakers constitute approximately 38% of the population in Belgium (where the majority language is Dutch), 23% in Switzerland (majority German), and 21% in Canada (majority English). In all three countries, francophone populations and media are often concentrated in particular geographic regions. All these countries also have other important minority languages.

outside the frame of the national-territorial: cultural training linked to race, gender and ethnicity, and deterritorialized popular cultures. In addition, it obscures our view of what “media cultures” might be in an era of media flows that consistently overlap national borders” (Hepp and Couldry 2009, 32). Here, Andreas Hepp and Nick Couldry argue for a “transcultural” analysis of the realm of journalism. Our research is part of this trend and puts forward the question of a possible homogeneity of journalistic cultures in multicultural countries. Previous comparative studies (Hanitzsch et al. 2011, 288) have highlighted the interest in considering language criterion: “Language factors can also be significant, dividing media markets into separate segments (as in Switzerland and Belgium) or increasing the importance of competition from outside a particular national market (as in Ireland, Canada, Austria, and Belgium)” (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 26). While the study of the language of journalism has attracted scholars from a wide range of academic disciplines (Richardson 2010), studies comparing journalists speaking the same language across borders, however, remain rare (Mellado et al. 2012).

The three countries considered in this study have a French minority language community. The question implicitly posed is that of a possible French culture of journalism, across borders of nation states and the different socio-political, economic and cultural peculiarities of the three countries considered. Comparative studies about the *Francophonie* or Francophone minority areas (Quebec, Wallonia, French-speaking Switzerland) demonstrate unequivocally that they have each developed their own idea of multiculturalism, their own history in relation to the dominant linguistic group (German, Dutch or English), as well as specific policies of using and promoting the languages (Demont-Heinrich 2005; Caulier and Courtois 2006).

The search for a common culture driven by the language and its uses cannot be discounted either. Anthropologists, social psychologists, sociologists or historians confirm that the spoken language remains in the eyes of individuals, one of the main defining features of their ethnic and personal identity (Francard and Blanchett 2003, 159). Language constructs the identities and subjectivities of our daily existence (Hanks 1996). Many scholars point out the influence of globalization in the renewal of the theoretical frames (Heller 2003). “Nowadays, with the global spread of information technologies and global migrations, culture has lost much of its national moorings. It lives in the communicative practices of native and non-native speakers” (Kramsch 2011, 306). Some have proposed “language ecology” as a

metaphor for this complexity approach to the study of language as cultural context (Kramersch and Whiteside 2008). Following Kramersch, “Culture might slowly lose its power to explain human behaviour in a multilingual/multicultural world where people are born in one culture, grow up in another, and end up living and working in a third. More important than a person’s ‘language’ and ‘culture’ might be the socioeconomic, historical or ideological subject positions that people take and that get expressed through the multiple symbolic systems they choose to use” (Kramersch 2011, 313). Moreover, other scholars argue that “there is little evidence of cultural uniformity and sameness, but a distinct awareness of the significance of national cultures being used as guidelines for communication” (Ladegaard 2007, 160).

We should remain cautious about any over-interpretation of the features of the French culture. This caution has led to the formulation of the concept of “fluid identity” (Camilleri et al. 1990) or “liquid francophonie”, especially because in the era of globalization, communication contexts are detached from their geographic anchorage (Johansson and Dervin 2009), but also because the Francophonie carries in himself “potential differences at a linguistic, cultural and identity level” (Johansson and Dervin 2009, 397). It is clear that a francophone identity really exists in each of the three countries, referring to the fact that collective identities become more pronounced when confronted with other (linguistic) groups (Azzi and Klein 1998, 77). However, it is very doubtful that Francophone journalists from the three countries envisaged feel consciously that they belong to a greater whole whose common denominator is their francophone character.

Similarly, the question of national frameworks does not disappear entirely from a multicultural approach. As studied by David Hallin and Paolo Mancini (2004), Canada, Switzerland and Belgium do not share the same media system: the first belongs to the North-Atlantic or Liberal model, characterized by a relative dominance of market mechanisms and commercial media, the other two are part of the Democratic Corporatist model (characterized by a coexistence of commercial media tied to organized social and political groups, and by a relatively active but legally limited role of the state [Hallin and Mancini 2004, 11]), but not in the same way: Belgium is placed closer to the Polarized Pluralist Model, along with several Latin and Mediterranean countries. In this third model, the structure of the media market is influenced by its integration into party politics, a weaker historical development of commercial media and a strong role of the state. The impact of political systems, both in terms of similarities and differences in journalistic cultures, should be included in every

interpretive effort. The caution that should be taken in a study of language as the common denominator is basically the same as evidenced in many national comparative studies: “The analytical unit of nation or culture as an explanatory variable is much too diffuse and complex to truly serve as an independent variable in empirical-analytical terms” (Dobek-Ostrowska et al. 2010, 168). The complexity discussed here also refers to the fact that even within relatively comparable national spaces, referring for instance to western democracies, the many facets of journalism differentiate in some way the professionals from different countries: “Donsbach and Klett (1993) found very different perceptions of the objectivity norm in a comparative survey of journalists in Germany, Great Britain, Italy and the United States. They interpreted this disparity in terms of “partially different ‘professional cultures’ where the boundaries can be drawn between the Anglo-Saxon journalists on the one hand, and the continental European journalists on the other side”. Even larger differences were discovered by Weaver (1998) and Berkowitz et al. (2004) with respect to ethical standards in journalism” (Hanitzsch et al. 2011, 275).

From the perspective of the distribution of ethical standards in journalism, it is important firstly to consider the case of France as the “capital” of Francophonie and the country where the elements of a possible francophone culture of journalism were historically built and disseminated. “It is clear, writes Spiteri (2001, 289), that ethics was not a major concern in the country of Voltaire marked by the “*presse d’opinion*”, the vengeful verb, direct insult, in line with the pre-revolutionary pamphlets”. But things changed progressively. “The efforts to make the newsgathering practices recognized as professional dates at least from the late 1800s, when anti-semitism and other excesses in the coverage of the treason court martial of Alfred Dreyfus prompted some Paris journalists to found the country’s first journalism school” (Abare Mc Cane 2012, 187). France established a first charter for journalists at the end of the First World War. This charter was first amended in 1938, and most recently in 2011. The 1918 text lays the foundation for major ethical rules and reporting practices, such as financial independence, source protection and honest reporting. The latest version of this charter described itself as the direct descendent of the ethical code of the French *Syndicat des journalistes* published in 1918 (Abare Mc Cane 2012, 200). The ethical and moral issues of journalism therefore have long been among the concerns of the professional group. They symbolize the social role, the nobility and the journalistic prestige of the profession, generally practiced in the most famous newspapers, magazines and broadcast media (Rieffel 1984). It seems important not to underestimate the role of ethics in the hierarchy of values and

professional identities. Regarding our research question, it is very difficult to assess how the French model inspired Francophone journalists from other countries. We can nonetheless assume that the French vision of journalistic ethics is not unknown to other French-speaking journalists.

Table 1: Ethical orientations of French journalists

	N	Percentage saying “strongly” and “somewhat agree”	Mean
Journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context	226	89,4	4,46
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	225	49,3	3,11
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	222	23,9	2,55
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	222	38,3	3,06

Question: The following statements describe different approaches to journalism. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree. 5 means you strongly agree, 4 means somewhat agree, 3 means undecided, 2 means somewhat disagree, and 1 means strongly disagree.

The results of the French sample of the Worlds of Journalism show that members of the sample are closer to the idealistic pole than to the relativistic one³. Looking at Table 1, low expression of relativism means high values for the first ethics question and lower values for questions two and three. A middle expression of idealism is represented through the fourth question. Previous studies (Hanitzsch 2009) established that we shouldn't expect big differences between the language regions within our three countries, because the countries themselves are very close to each other. Considering the particular position of France in the ethical discourse, it is important to underline the prevalence of adhering to professional codes, ascribing a high value to the idealistic dimension of ethics (question one). But the mean of questions two and three does not confirm this first pattern: French journalists also underline the relative importance of specific situations and extraordinary circumstances in their ethical judgment. With regards the fourth ethical question about extraordinary circumstances, the

³ The Worlds of Journalism study focuses on the approach from Donalson Forsyth (1984), who created two ethical dimensions, the relativism and idealism scale. The relativist orientation is reflected in the idea that when journalists face an ethical dilemma, the right response depends on the context in question” (Hänksa-Ahy 2011, 125). Hanitzsch worked in the study from 2009 with different questions that represented Forsyth's two dimensions than the actual study from 2016. He could distinguish country cluster that fit to the concepts of relativism and idealism. The results show that Western countries show a low expression of relativism and rather middle expression of idealism.

lower mean could indicate that French journalists aren't as ethically independent, and may not adhere to the ethical code under extraordinary circumstances.

When looking at the tradition of the worldwide ethical discourse, ethics do have a long tradition in French philosophy, for example with Ethegey (1991), and have also been frequently discussed in the journalistic field. Daniel Cornu describes the problems and ethical borders in journalism and sets forth the idea of the already mentioned "déontologie". Therefore it is assumable that French journalists have a very high affiliation with an ethical and moral access to journalism. It is expectable to get higher importance values for the French speaking parts of the three countries, compared to their language contraries (Flemish, English and German). As Abar Mc Cane stresses, "French journalists continue a long-held belief that professional ethics are important, and most believe their colleagues do well in this area" (Abare McMane 2012: 201). Kuhn (2014) stated that France isn't established in the European journalistic tradition of the critical watchdog. They seem to be less distant towards politics and are less autonomous. "French journalistic tradition rather favours the so-called 'presse d'opinion', placing greater importance on the freedom of speech than on the freedom of information" (Wolterdorff 2001, 34). So on the one hand they have an undeniable ethical tradition, but on the other hand they aren't as detached as other Western European journalists, which could reflect on the here presented results. Balle (1987) argued "that the role of the journalists in France was limited by both an inability to breach highly suspicious public and private institutions and by the limited financing of an audience for newspapers" (Abare Mc Cane 2012, 190).

However, the literature teaches us that **dissemination and affirmation of ethical standards also depend on multiple factors and a global context**: Journalists are integrated in a mesh of economical, technical and hierarchical structures (Weischenberg 1992). Therefore journalism ethics are similarly integrated and underlie the same mechanisms. They can't be looked at as something unattached of the global contexts. They are increasingly influenced by various elements. "Country-level, ideologically based factors such as degree of press freedom, economic development and professionalization appear to have some influence on journalists' degrees of relativistic and idealistic thinking" (Plaisance et al. 2012, 656). A continuously evolving multicultural society with the fragmentation of languages, behaviours and customs, leads towards a heterogenic understanding of ethics. Norms and values are shifting and not equal in the cultural sphere. They might still be resilient in specific groups and milieus but

aren't firm for the whole society (Müller-Scholl and Ruß-Mohl 1994: 272). According to this quote we could expect differences in ethics perception among the three countries Belgium, Canada and Switzerland and maybe even among their language regions. Plaisance et al. 2012 investigated the question which parameters influence ethics and how the journalists from the 18 investigated countries perceive ethics. Their findings indicate that "ethical outlooks are indeed related to larger structural system in which they operate. [...] Recent journalism studies initiatives around the globe appear to suggest a growing consensus around claims that theories of cognitive processing, professional socialization, and cultural ideology point toward elements of universalism in journalistic behavior" (Plaisance 2012: 14). Differences were shown but there is a continuing approximation of the understanding of ethics in the Western world. So far, nobody has specifically investigated language cultures. Therefore it is hard to tell what kind of effect they could have on the ethics perception.

Methodology

In order to compare ethical approaches among francophone samples, the corpus of the study cited in the introduction is based on 1782 interviews divided between the three countries. The French corpus (228 interviews) is here only used on an indicative basis because the sample did not meet the size standards imposed by the Worlds of Journalism Study. Therefore, we only analyze Belgian, Swiss and Canadian samples. The questionnaire administered in each country has two sets of questions addressing ethical standards and practices in journalism. These questions used multiple-choice Likert scales. For these, we compared mean scores using a two-step method. First, we used a t-test to compare the mean of the entire sample of French-speaking journalists with the consolidated sample of German-Swiss, English-Canadian and Flemish journalists. We then similarly conducted t-tests within each of the three countries to test the consistency of the language-based difference against country-specific variation.

Following the hypothesis of specific French characteristics due to the French cultural heritage, the fruits of the scientific literature address other hypotheses, which were evaluated thanks to the data of the Worlds of journalism.

1. Francophone journalists from the three considered countries do not belong to the same media system defined by Hallin and Mancini (2004). Their perception of ethical issues is nevertheless broadly similar and this can be explained by their belonging to a coherent cultural whole, namely the Francophonie.

2. Respondents from Francophone countries, taken together, are to be distinguished from the German, English and Dutch samples. This reflects some particular inflections proper to the linguistic homogeneity of the French sample.

3. No language-based differences are likely to be observed concerning acceptance of controversial reporting practices.

Findings and analysis

A. Idealism or situationism?

Table 2. Approaches to ethics

	French speaking N= 565	Other (Dutch, German and English) N= 1,217	France N= 288	Global N= 25,833
Adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context.	4.55*	4.44*	4.46	4.46
What is ethical depends on specific situation	3.15*	3.28*	3.11	3.09
What is ethical is a matter of personal judgement	2.31*	2.18*	2.55	2.58
Acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	2.88*	2.38*	3.06	2.66

Question C13: "The following statements describe different approaches to journalism. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree". 5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree.

** Significant at $p < 0.05$*

A first comparison of language criterion shows that there is a strong similarity between French journalists and others (German, Dutch and English). In western democracies, journalists tend to display a low degree of ethical relativism; that is, they will favour compliance with professional principles. Without any doubt, our results firstly confirm that major ethical principles can be envisaged in a broad international context. Plaisance, Skewes and Hanitzsch already established that, across 18 countries from the five continents, “87.5% of journalists endorsed the statement on ethical principles, whereas overall support for situational ethics was only 45.2%” (2012, 650). When compared with all the survey population of the Worlds of Journalism study, French speaking journalists share a very traditional approach to ethics, which favours the idealistic model. The hypothesis of a distinctive French speaking feature cannot be confirmed. The choice of a new international framework for analysis, language, instead of countries, provides very few new points of comparison.

Nonetheless, we can distinguish some minor differences between French speaking respondents and others. The first question reported in Table 2 indicates that francophone journalists are more likely than majority-language peers to agree with the statement that journalists should adhere to ethics codes, “regardless” of particular situations. This tendency is significant across the total sample⁴, and also within Belgium and Canada, with the difference, if any, less marked in Switzerland. The “regardless” part of this finding is nuanced, however, when the possibility of “extraordinary circumstances” is introduced: in that case, francophone journalists, and especially French ones, become more likely to agree to set ethical standards aside. This suggests that while francophone journalists are, in principle, somewhat idealistic about ethical standards, they are also not disinclined to be swayed by unusual particularities. This combination of approaches may seem contradictory⁵. It refers, among others things, to the very important issue of individual autonomy of journalists, namely in France. The conscience clause (*clause de conscience*) for journalists, enshrined in

⁴ Remember that we did not make any statistical analysis for the French sample, which was still too short when the study was completed.

⁵ Following Thurman, Cornia and Kunert (2016, 50), who observe the same kind of contradiction with British journalists, “acknowledging that the specific situation defines what is ethical or not does not mean that specific circumstances can justify an infringement of codes of professional ethics. The codes themselves recognise that specific circumstances define whether a given practice should be considered justified. (...) Most UK journalists, then, seem to be aware of the contextual flexibility in their professional codes of practice”.

law since 1935⁶, is one significant example of this quest for individual freedom. Abare Mc Cane reports that “the importance of personal autonomy drew by far the highest support among French respondents, more so than for the U.K., U.S, and German samples” (2012, 197). These “extraordinary circumstances”, related to the journalists’ claim of individual autonomy, tend to strengthen their role as a counterweight, namely against political and business leaders. It is interesting to note that francophone journalists indicate a more pronounced interest in political matters and the importance of scrutinizing political leaders.

Regarding the first hypothesis, it is thus very difficult to assess if their common language can explain the high level of similarity between French speaking journalists. Indeed, Dutch, German and English speaking respondents are not very different from their counterparts.

Inside the roughly defined area of Western countries, these results show that the main ethical principles are conveyed relatively independently of languages and, more broadly, political systems as described by Hallin and Mancini. It is important to note that the different countries considered in this study represent the three models of media systems established by Hallin and Mancini. Regarding the authors, France is clearly a “borderline case”, finally included with the Mediterranean countries (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 90). **This ethical homogeneity, despite different media and political systems, probably refers to the fact that most of the ethical principles and rules are enshrined in international instruments such as the Munich Declaration.** Distinctive cultural features, Anglo-Saxon or French in this case, transported and transmitted by texts, education and language seem therefore to accommodate very well with general ethical principles. These are to be considered in a broader frame than nations or international languages such as French.

B. Controversial reporting practices

Again, the results of our comparative survey globally demonstrate a kind of homogeneity between the two groups of respondents. Table 3 presents a set of “controversial practices” and asks under which circumstances journalists are ready to use them. **When we turn to the acceptability of these particular journalistic practices, language differences are**

⁶ In France, a journalist can initiate the end of his employment contract without being at fault. He has the “right to leave” his media outlet through a redundancy payment. To this end, the reporter will have to prove a substantial change in the nature or orientation of the magazine if that change creates, for him, a situation likely to damage his honour, reputation or generally its moral interests (Baudson 1997).

very fade. As Table 3 shows, journalists in all three countries tend to be strongly opposed to practices such as using hidden microphones or cameras, using confidential documents without authorization, accepting money from sources, altering or fabricating quotes. There are differences of emphasis amongst particular countries and particular language groups, but there is no discernible pattern in these differences. The overall index of the three French speaking regions *versus* the other regions was significant, but without showing larger differences in the MANOVA (see Table 3). It is interesting to see, as well, that recent results from South African colleagues in the World of Journalism study (De Beer 2016, 64) show rather similar results to those in our three countries. This speaks to a somewhat globalized understanding of ethical practice.

When we compare the samples of the three multilingual countries with that of France, we see that the biggest nuance concerns the acceptance of exerting pressure on unwilling informants, and using confidential business or government records without authorization. In France, the level of acceptance for this kind of practice is quite high. The same result emerges in Belgian, Swiss and Canadian Francophone groups. For this particular question, it seems that there could be something distinctive about Francophone journalists, although we can see a high acceptance of this kind of practice in Great Britain, for instance (Thurman et al. 2016). The fact that this question involves the political authorities is not uninteresting to consider. Indeed, historical and sociological studies have shown the high importance of politics in the French journalistic field (Ruellan 1997; Delporte 1999; Muhlmann 2004). Other parts of the WJS questionnaire testify that French-speaking journalists tend to give more importance to tasks like setting the political agenda and scrutinizing political leaders, while influencing public opinion is clearly more important among the majority-language journalists of the three countries. It is worth noting, however, that two politically relevant functions—providing information to aid political decisions and letting people express their views—are significantly more important to Francophones both overall and in two countries, while only insignificantly different in the third country (Switzerland in the first case, Canada in the other).

The answers are most unanimously negative when it comes to the role of money. In none of the countries considered, nor in any language group, do we find any justification for accepting money from sources or, to a lesser extent, paying for information. This example is symptomatic of the common frames of reference for the journalists studied. Conversely, in some western countries like Great Britain, paying people for confidential information is

considered justified on occasion by the majority of UK journalists (Thurman et al. 2016, 55).

Table 3. Reporting practices

	French N= 565	Other N= 1,217	French Belg. N=280	Dutch Belg. N=312	French Can. N=109	Eng. Can. N=245	French Switz. N=176	Germ. Switz. N=660	Global N= 25,833
Paying people for confidential information	2.71	2.67	2.66	2.62	2.70	2.63	2.79*	2.70*	2.48
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	1.90*	2.02*	1.95*	2.09*	1.82	1.77	1.87*	2.08*	2.18
Claiming to be somebody else	2.43*	2.49*	2.36	2.39	2.38*	2.68*	2.56*	2.47*	2.41
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants	2.60	2.58	2.66*	2.45*	2.21	2.27	2.73	2.75	2.45
Making use of personal documents without permission	2.61	2.61	2.62	2.60	2.45	2.38	2.70	2.70	2.54
Getting employed for inside information	2.26*	2.20*	2.22*	1.93*	2.16*	2.31*	2.40*	2.28*	2.30
Using hidden microphones or cameras	2.10*	2.19*	2.04	2.03	2.05	2.02	2.23*	2.32*	2.19
Using re-creations or dramatizations by actors	2.38*	2.30*	2.30*	2.49*	2.37	2.36	2.51*	2.19*	2.38
Publishing stories with unverified content	2.89*	2.69*	2.89	2.85	2.91*	2.80*	2.89*	2.58*	2.67
Accepting money from sources	2.97	2.98	2.95	2.95	2.98	2.99	3.00	2.98	2.78
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources**	2.87	2.91	2.84	2.87	2.92	2.96	--	--	2.77
Altering photographs**	2.86*	2.78*	2.85*	2.69*	2.90	2.90	--	--	2.70

Question C14: "Given an important story, which of the following, if any, do you think may be justified on occasion and which would you not approve of under any circumstances? 1 means it is always justified, 2 means it is justified on occasion, and 3 means you would not approve under any circumstances."

** Significant at $p < 0.05$*

***Swiss respondents were not asked, and are not included in the overall sample for, this question*

Table 4: Justification of controversial reporting methods by French journalists

	N	Mean
Paying people for confidential information	215	2.61
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	224	1.62
Claiming to be somebody else	224	2.36
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	219	2.64
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	218	2.56
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	215	2.16
Using hidden microphones or cameras	216	1.99
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	213	2.71
Publishing stories with unverified content	223	2.97
Accepting money from sources	226	3.00
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	222	2.94
Altering photographs	222	2.93

Question: Given an important story, which of the following, if any, do you think may be justified on occasion and which would you not approve of under any circumstances? 1 means it is always justified, 2 means it is justified on occasion, and 3 means you would not approve under any circumstances.

Discussion and conclusions

The objective of this study was to question the relevance of new variables in a complex attempt to define journalistic cultures. In this case, Francophone journalists seemed to offer an interesting opportunity because of the consistency of French cultural heritage and the existence of communities speaking this language in three multilingual countries on two continents. Therefore, the possible similarities between these countries cannot only be attributed to domestic factors (cultural or socio-economic). It is obvious that in a later stage, French-speaking African countries (like Tunisia, Morocco, Ivory Coast, Senegal, etc.) should be included in this research question.

With regards to Francophone journalists, two facts emerge: they seem to form, from an ethical point of view, a relatively homogeneous community, sharing a fairly unified view of these issues. This is in itself an encouragement to investigate further the question of cultural background in journalism since it is clear that language is a key expression of a culture. In many ways, however, francophone journalists do not significantly differ from other professionals in Switzerland, Canada and Belgium. If they form a coherent whole, they are not very different from their countrymen. If some particular characteristics about the ethical standards and practices tend to distinguish the samples from the language variable, French respondents globally confirm what Francophone samples of the three countries have already

hinted: there is no predominant French peculiarity when we consider their ethical orientations. The study as a basis for this article came to the same statement, with some nuances, about roles and perception influences on the daily work.

Two observations can be drawn from this research: Firstly, about the effectiveness of the methodology and the means to measure what impacts the creation of ethical identities of journalists. Choosing to isolate a single factor in the study of an issue as complex as ethics clearly raises a number of issues: “country-level, ideologically based factors such as degree of press freedom, economic development and professionalization appear to have some influence on journalists’ degrees of relativistic and idealistic thinking (...). We must acknowledge that journalistic norms are rooted in deeply invested social value systems that serve a variety of needs” (Plaisance et al. 2012, 656). In order to deepen the study of linguistic influence (relative or not) in the definition of ethical codes and sensibilities, it would obviously be necessary to observe journalistic practices in everyday life, as well as observing the content of training in journalism, references and texts circulating in newsrooms and Councils of media ethics. It is only from this kind of ethnographic investigation that it will be possible to accurately determine the weight of a possible French cultural identity in the three populations studied.

Secondly, this study raises, as others have, the issue of universal ethical standards in journalism. It would not be deduced from studies reflecting that trend that these rules are applied as they are in every newsroom, nor by every journalist throughout his entire career. It is important to interrogate the logic of universality. Plaisance, Skewes and Hanitzsch also conclude that although “plenty of agreement exists among journalists regarding what constitutes pressing concerns of professionalism, diverse cultural and ideological contexts (...) often drive journalists ethical orientations” (2012, 656). In fact, the most probable gap between the very moral discourse over ethics and the more complex daily practice, and its influences on an idealistic application of ethical standards, invite us to consider the dialogical dimension of any social discourse.

This study of Francophone journalists not only testifies that they share ethical points of view referring to the universal dimensions of journalism. The fact that so many respondents give together such a clear image of what is ethically acceptable or not shows the very fragility of individuals, who often deal with contradictory requirements. We come back

to the diversity of roles of ethical discourse. Following Denis Ruellan, we observed that in France, the gradual recognition of journalistic occupation from the late 19th century is progressively supported by the affirmation of ethical standards. Journalistic ethics states general rules for relationships that journalists have with their colleagues, their employers, their sources and their audiences. “The characteristic of journalistic ethical codes is never to impose, but to suggest common standards which provide therefore, intrinsically, its legitimate transgression” (Ruellan 2011, 22). Issues relating to ethics in the survey of the Worlds of Journalism demonstrated that adherence to these standards (and the possibility to not follow them) remains strong, time and time again.

One may wonder why. This quite unified vision of ethical principles, recalls Ruellan, is not just a matter of principles to be respected. Ethics are a matter of relations with all sectors of society which contribute to establish the identity of journalists. “Ethics are the collective response to a social question: who are we, that others are not?” And so, how must journalists establish and manage their relationships with their sources, their peers and their public so that they are both respected and different?” (Ruellan 2011, 21). In truth, journalists have never been the only ones to define the contours and the purposes of their profession. Hence arises a fragility of identity that the discourse on morality and ethics tries to sublimate. We can see in the almost unanimous affirmation of ethical principles among French-speaking journalists an affirmation of collective autonomy whose links with individual autonomy are historically complex and, sometimes, conflictive. And, more profoundly, a continued need to affirm the identity of a profession constantly changing and whose independence is often criticized.

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