



Valentina Adami and Mara Logaldo\*

## NOT SO PRETTY: DISCOURSES ABOUT MODEL'S RIGHTS

“You need to have a brain to be a model,” she explained, emphasizing why it's important for models to speak up for themselves. “You need to have a voice because you're not going to last in this business just being stupid.”<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction: giving a voice to the faces of the fashion industry

Journalistic writing has been explored by linguists from a wide range of perspectives. These include content and discourse analysis, informal and formal study of language, semiology, sociolinguistics, critical and multimodal linguistics, pragmatics, rhetorical analysis, framing, narrative and storytelling (Zelizer 2004). However different, most of these approaches present some common aspects. First, a merging of structuralist, culturalist and functionalist methods. Second, the common assumption that, despite traditional claims to absolute objectivity, unmarked uses of the language are hardly found in news reports. Far from being a sort of transparent mirror of reality, journalistic writing is actually a highly constructed kind of discourse in which the formal features of language – grammar, syntax and vocabulary – combined with visual components such as font, layout and pictures, are as relevant as other kinds of patterns, particularly textual and cognitive frames (van Dijk; Fowler; Bell; Fairclough).

This complexity has also emerged in our analysis of a corpus of online articles dealing with models' rights collected in the press section of the Model Alliance website.<sup>2</sup> The articles (about 60, plus the related blogs and forums) were originally published in diverse newspapers and magazines, from renowned newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* to fashion magazines, gossip tabloids and even free press newspapers such as *Metro*, between 2010 and 2013.

The texts present most of the typical features of journalistic language. They are even, in some cases, examples of metajournalism. Indeed, the articles do not only report the problems related to modeling and to the lack of norms regulating the world of fashion, but also discuss the ways in which these issues can effectively be reported and expressed through language. If the claim of the Models' Alliance is “Giving a

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Valentina Adami (PhD, English Studies) is Adjunct Professor of English language and literature at the Universities of Verona and Padova. She has been visiting researcher at the Centre for Values, Ethics and the Law in Medicine (University of Sydney) and at the University of New South Wales (Australia). Her fields of research are literature and trauma studies; law, literature and culture; literature and medicine; ecolinguistics and ecocriticism. She has published monographs on Martin Amis and Margaret Atwood. Among her recent publications, “Rights of Humans/Rights of Nature: The Language of Environmental Rights in United Nations' Documents,” in *Literature and Human Rights. The Law, the Language and the Limitations of Human Rights Discourse*, ed. Ian Ward (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015): 271-287; “Earth Jurisprudence and the Myth of Gaia,” in *Fables of the Law*, eds. Daniela Carpi and Marett Leiboff (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016): forthcoming.

Mara Logaldo (PhD, English Studies) is tenured Research Fellow in English language and translation at IULM (International University of Languages and Media), Milan, where she teaches courses of British culture and English for Media Studies. Her research interests include rhetoric, media discourse, urban slang (“Only the immigrants can speak the Queen's English these days' but all kids have a Jamaican accent: overcompensation vs. urban slang in multiethnic London,” in *From International to Local English – And Back Again*, eds. Roberta Facchinetti, David Crystal, Barbara Seidlhofer (Bern: Peter Lang): 115–144), language and law. She has published monographs on Henry James, on discourse analysis, on *New Journalism and communication in the age of Augmented Reality* (Augmented Linguistics (Milano: Arcipelago, 2012)). Among her recent publications, “On Crimes, Punishments, and Words. Legal and Language Issues in Cesare Beccaria's Works,” in *Literature and Human Rights. The Law, the Language and the Limitations of Human Rights Discourse*, ed. Ian Ward (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015): 289–308).

<sup>1</sup> McCall, Tyler, “Alcohol, older men and weight loss: Anne V opens up about life as a teen model,” Aug 30, 2013. [www.fashionista.com/2013/08/alcohol-sex-and-weight-loss-anne-v-opens-up-about-life-as-a-teen-model](http://www.fashionista.com/2013/08/alcohol-sex-and-weight-loss-anne-v-opens-up-about-life-as-a-teen-model). Last visited June 24, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> [www.modelalliance.org](http://www.modelalliance.org). Last visited June 24, 2015.



voice to the faces of the fashion industry,” a similar endeavour has to be undertaken by the journalists who want to discuss models’ rights. Therefore, the articles represent an interesting object of analysis for the linguist who intends to investigate how language is used to build up semantically and syntactically coherent forms of discourse about social and cultural issues that are perceived as yet “unexplored.” It is worth mentioning here that the press section also includes links to some video-interviews recorded in the documentary *Picture Me*, co-authored by ex-model Sarah Ziff – the founder of the Models’ Alliance – and filmmaker Ole Schell. Although for the purposes of this paper we have decided to focus exclusively on written texts, references to the documentary film within the articles delineate an interesting metadiscourse, since they point to it as a pioneering work and assume it as a hallmark in the journalistic treatment of models’ rights.

In our analysis, centered on the observation of how ‘model’s rights discourse tries to find a way to construct meaning in a controversial matter, we have adopted two main perspectives. First, we have carried out a quantitative and qualitative lexical analysis based on semantic fields theory and discourse analysis; second, we have focused on the use of semantic, morphological and rhetorical strategies within the articles. During the latter phase, emphasis has been placed on forms of negativization as well as on the use of modifiers, prefixes and suffixes. This stage of the analysis has also highlighted personalizing and storytelling processes (Sorrentino 211). As van Dijk argues

Acts of discrimination, for instance, require specification in terms of underlying prejudices (ethnic group schemata and the strategies of their use in action planning), shared norms and values of an ingroup, general goals and interests, actual personal goals and interests, and a full analysis of the situation. This explains why such acts are not merely individual (and hence incidental) but are structurally tied to the cognitively represented and processed properties of the group. (...) From personal evaluations of actions or actors in situations, we thus find the socially based insertion of shared opinions in models of the situation. (110)

Narrative categories are used to analyze and order text segments of a story and help the representation of stories in memory. Such additional structuring of a discourse is also relevant during retrieval: Discourse segments that correspond to a narrative category (like setting, event, reaction, or similar general categories) can be retrieved better because language users can use the story grammar categories as a routine retrieval cue. (...) readers are able to judge whether a story is complete or well formed on the basis of such a schema. (149)

Besides storytelling, journalistic discourse in the articles analyzed also presents personalization procedures, as well as the extensive use of figures of speech such as irony, oxymoron, litotes, hyperbole, pun and metaphor. The combination of semantic choices and discursive devices which, however tentatively in most cases, try to cover the issue as efficiently and exhaustively as possible, has shown interesting phenomena of topic realization. It has also revealed the progress undergone by journalistic discourse along with the development of actions aimed at defending models’ rights. From the texts dealing with the establishment of the Model Alliance to those focused on the discussion and final passing of the New York State Law for the protection of child models (June 12, 2013), we witness a progressive shift from the emotional to the normative mood and, concurrently, a fixing or “normalization” of discursive features.

## 2. The Model Alliance

Before moving on to the linguistic analysis of the articles, let us briefly explain what the Model Alliance is and what it purports to achieve. The Model Alliance is a not-for-profit organization founded in 2009 by former model Sarah Ziff in cooperation with other models and with the Fashion Law Institute at Fordham Law School.<sup>3</sup> It is a network of models and industry leaders whose aim is “to give models in the U.S. a voice in

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<sup>3</sup> “The Fashion Law Institute is the world’s first center dedicated to law and the business of fashion. (...) [it] offers training for the fashion lawyers and designers of the future, provides legal services for design students and professionals, and makes available information and assistance on issues facing the fashion industry.” See [www.fashionlawinstitute.com/about](http://www.fashionlawinstitute.com/about). Last visited June 30, 2015.



their workplace and organize to improve their basic working conditions in what is now an almost entirely unregulated industry.”<sup>4</sup>

According to Ziff, “the lucrative careers of high-profile supermodels misrepresent the reality for most working models, who are young, mostly female, and uniquely vulnerable. (...) these images have a powerful, far-reaching effect on women in general.”<sup>5</sup> This short quotation refers to some of the semantic fields on which our analysis will be focused: work and money (“lucrative,” “working”), age (“young”), gender, sex and power (“female,” “vulnerable,” “women”). Semantic fields are actually much more numerous in the discourses analyzed and often overlap. This is inevitable in discussing an issue which touches on physical, legal, moral and cultural aspects. In the introductory note about the Model Alliance, entitled “Health Starts with Having a Voice,” for instance, Ziff highlights what she considers to be the main problems of the modeling industry by simultaneously referring to different semantic fields:

- **disregard for child labor law:** “the industry relies on a labor force of children, valued for their adolescent physique.” Related semantic fields: WORK, MONEY, AGE, BODY
- **encouragement of eating disorders and endorsement of a child-like body:** “Model Amy Lemons, who started modeling women’s clothing at age 12, reached instant supermodel status when she graced the cover of Italian Vogue at 14. But just three years later, as the gangly 17-year-old began to fill out physically, her New York agent advised her only to eat one rice cake per day; and, if that didn’t work, only half a rice cake. Lemons got the hint, ‘they were telling me to be anorexic – flat-out.’” Related semantic fields: AGE, BODY, HEALTH
- **lack of financial transparency:** “As a model, simply getting paid can be a major issue, and, of the models who achieve a coveted spot walking in New York fashion week, many in fact are never paid at all, instead working for free or for “trade,” meaning just clothes. (...) Many young models also become crippled by debt to agencies that charge myriad of unexplained expenses and hold significant power over a model’s security as the sponsor for a model’s work visa.” Related semantic fields: WORK, MONEY, GENDER, SEX, POWER
- **tolerance for sexual abuse:** “in an industry that relies on kids working in unchaperoned situations, often far from home, the incentive to say nothing in order to keep your job creates an environment of coercion that is not only unconscionable, but also illegal.” Related semantic fields: AGE, WORK, POWER, SEX, LAW.

Accordingly, the Model Alliance’s mission statement reads:

The Model Alliance believes that models deserve fair treatment in their workplace, and we aim to establish ethical standards that bring real and lasting change to the fashion industry as a whole. We seek to improve the American modeling industry by empowering the models themselves (...). We have five primary goals to improve professional standards for working models: 1. Provide a discreet grievance and advice service. 2. Improve labor standards for child models in New York. 3. Promote greater financial transparency and accountability. 4. Provide access to affordable health care. 5. Draft a code of conduct that sets industry-wide standards for castings, shoots and shows.<sup>6</sup>

The Model Alliance has also produced a draft “Models’ Bill of Rights” that aims “to empower models to demand fair treatment from modeling agencies and clients.”<sup>7</sup> The Bill states that “Every working model has a right to: Professionalism. (...) Transparent Accounting Practices. (...) Control their career. (...) Negotiable commissions.” It also recognizes specific rights for models under eighteen.

<sup>4</sup> Ziff, Sara, “Introductory Note: Health Starts with Having a Voice,” February 6, 2012. [www.modelalliance.org/introductory-note](http://www.modelalliance.org/introductory-note). Last visited June 28, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Ziff, “Introductory Note.”

<sup>6</sup> The Model Alliance, “Mission Statement.” [www.modelalliance.org/mission](http://www.modelalliance.org/mission). Last visited June 28, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> The Model Alliance, “Models’ Bill of Rights.” [www.modelalliance.org/models-bill-of-rights](http://www.modelalliance.org/models-bill-of-rights). Last visited June 28, 2015.



In her 2012 “Introductory Note,” Ziff noted that “Unlike actors in the U.S., who rely on strong unions like SAG and AFTRA, models in the U.S. lack union support and basic workplace protections.”<sup>8</sup> However, in recent years this situation has started to change worldwide, and the Model Alliance has become part of a growing global movement to fight the exploitation of models. As early as in 2007 the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) formed a health initiative to address the concern that some models are unhealthily thin and to recognize the high incidence of eating disorders among models. As part of this health initiative, in 2012 it recommended its members to use only models who are at least 16 years old. Moreover, since the foundation of the Model Alliance in 2009, several initiatives have been launched for the protection of models. The most important of these has certainly been the passing of a New York State Law for the protection of child models’ labor rights in June 2013. The new law, supported by the Model Alliance, established that underage models must be granted the following special protections that were previously denied to them, as emphasized in the Independent Democratic Conference (IDC) press release announcing the IDC’s support to this legislation:

Under current law, child models are denied the following protections afforded to other child performers:

- **Responsible person:** a responsible person must be designated to monitor the activity and safety for each child performer under the age of 16 at the work place.
- **Nurse:** an employer must provide a nurse with pediatric experience.
- **Education Requirement:** mandates employers to provide teachers and a dedicated space for instruction.
- **Health and Safety:** employers must provide safety-based instruction and information to performers, parents/guardians and responsible person.
- **Financial Trust:** a trust must be established by a child performer’s parent or guardian that an employer must transfer at least fifteen percent of the child’s gross-earnings into.<sup>9</sup>

As our analysis of the semantic fields will reveal, the articles reported in the 2013 press section of the Model Alliance website focus almost exclusively on the passing of this New York State law. By dividing the texts to be analyzed into two groups (2010-2012 vs. 2013), we have identified relevant differences between the main semantic fields in the articles published between 2010 and 2012 and those that were predominant in the articles published in 2013. These differences, in turn, point to a change in the attitude of the press towards the Model Alliance in the two periods, from a more general understanding of the Model Alliance as a support group for models to a more specific focus on its role in the approval of the New York State law on child models’ labor rights. Unlike the 2013 articles, in fact, the 2010-2012 ones clarify that child labor is only one of the concerns of the Model Alliance, which also aims to stop sexual harassment, create more transparent accounting processes and protect the health of all models. This wider approach seems to be more in tune with Ziff’s own understanding of her organization, as revealed by her claim that

We cannot promote healthy images without taking steps to promote healthy bodies and minds, and that starts with giving the faces of this business a unified voice. By giving models a platform to organize to improve their industry, the Model Alliance aims to enhance the vitality and moral standing of the fashion business as a whole. Correcting these abuses starts with seeing models through a different lens: not as dehumanized images, but as workers who deserve the same rights and protections as anyone else.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ziff, “Introductory Note.”

<sup>9</sup> Independent Democratic Conference, “Senate Co-Leader Jeff Klein, Sen. Diane Savino Announce Legislation Preventing the Exploitation and Abuse of Child Models in New York,” June 9, 2013, Press Release.

[www.nysenate.gov/files/pdfs/IDC%20Press%20Release%20Reforming%20Child%20Model%20Labor%20Laws%202013.docx\\_.pdf](http://www.nysenate.gov/files/pdfs/IDC%20Press%20Release%20Reforming%20Child%20Model%20Labor%20Laws%202013.docx_.pdf). Last visited June 28, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Ziff, “Introductory Note.”



### 3. Semantic field analysis

#### 3.1 Methodology

As already mentioned, the articles we have analyzed were retrieved from the press section of the Model Alliance website. They date from 2010 to 2013 and originally appeared in different newspapers, magazines and tabloids, including *The New York Observer*, *The New York Times*, *The Grindstone*, *The Cut*, *Today*, *Elle*, *The Guardian* and *The Huffington Post*.

After downloading the 60 press articles, we copied them in one single Word-file and performed a close reading. At a second stage, we manually scanned the corpus to identify the key topics and verified to what extent they actually corresponded to the main issues tackled by the Model Alliance as described in the website. Then, we carried out a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the vocabulary used within the articles, thus delineating ten key topics: age, education, health, body, work, money, rights, law, sex, power. Although each of these topics may constitute a semantic field of its own, we decided to group together those often discussed in close relation to one another. The categorizations may appear arbitrary: nonetheless, we have tried to consider the context in which words appeared most frequently. In fact, semantic categories often overlap. As stated by Jackson and Amvela, “(English) vocabulary is not made up of a number of discrete lexical fields in which each lexeme finds its appropriate place” (2000, 15). From this perspective, the specificity of the articles helped us disambiguate lexical items and refer them to the specific context of use. Given the particular setting, the ten key topics were therefore reduced to five semantic fields: age and education, health and body, work and money, rights and law, sex and power. Lemmatization was, of course, also considered, since the words appeared in different forms (nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs) as well as in word compounds. Finally, we decided to split the texts into two groups to be analyzed separately and then compared: the first group comprised the articles published between 2010 and 2012 (about 15.000 words), which focus mainly on the foundation of the Model Alliance and on Ziff’s video-documentary, while the second group contained the articles published in 2013 (about 20.000 words), which focused mainly on the passing of the New York State Law on child models’ labor rights.

#### 3.2 Data and results

This part of our analysis focuses on the vocabulary used by the press to speak of the Model Alliance. We identified the 8 most recurrent terms within each of the five complex semantic fields identified as above (age and education, health and body, work and money, rights and law, sex and power) by selecting the find button in the word file. Then we counted the occurrences of each term (taking into account lemmatization) in the two groups of articles (2010-2012 and 2013) and calculated the total number of words in each semantic field in order to reveal, respectively, which aspect of each topic was particularly highlighted by the press in 2010-2012 and in 2013, and which of the five topics was given more relevance in general in the two groups of articles.

<b>SEMANTIC FIELD “AGE AND EDUCATION”</b>	2010-2012	2013
Young	44	82
girl (-s)	34	40
child (-ren)	33	183
old (frequently in “year-old” or “years old,” referring to the young age of models)	24	75
Age	11	47
Underage	6	29
Education	2	37
School	21	36
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>529</b>
<b>TOTAL 2010-2013</b>	<b>704</b>	

**Table 1. Semantic field: age and education.**



<b>SEMANTIC FIELD “HEALTH AND BODY”</b>	2010-2012	2013
health-	32	17
eating disorder- (-s)	19	1
pretty	12	11
beauty, beautiful	23	10
body	5	16
weigh-	7	15
size	3	7
thin	2	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>TOTAL 2010-2013</b>		<b>185</b>

**Table 2. Semantic field: health and body**

<b>SEMANTIC FIELD “WORK AND MONEY”</b>	2010-2012	2013
work-	166	193
Labor	37	108
Job	19	30
Business	30	15
pay-	23	13
Paid	22	11
earn-	14	20
Money	11	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>393</b>
<b>TOTAL 2010-2013</b>		<b>715</b>

**Table 3. Semantic field: work and money**

<b>SEMANTIC FIELD “RIGHTS AND LAW”</b>	2010-2012	2013
law	38	170
right-	43	32
legislation	1	55
union-	19	31
-regulate-	18 (of which 11 “unregulated”)	45 (of which 5 “unregulated”)
protect-	27	105
provision-	7	10
bill	7	52
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>500</b>
<b>TOTAL 2010-2013</b>		<b>660</b>

**Table 4. Semantic field: rights and law**

<b>SEMANTIC FIELD “SEX AND POWER”</b>	2010-2012	2013
sex-	34	23
exploit-	19	17
Abuse	17	10
free-	15	11
harassment	14	10
power-	7	11
Pressure	9	27
woman/women	21	33
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>TOTAL 2010-2013</b>		<b>278</b>

**Table 5. Semantic field: sex and power**

### 3.3 Data analysis

For what concerns the most common lexical items within the different semantic fields, the word “work-” has remained stable in first position both in 2010-2012 and in 2013 (with 166 and 193 occurrences respectively). However, while in 2013 it was followed quite closely by “child” (183) and “law” (170), in 2010-2012 the second- and third- ranked words (“young,” 44; and “rights,” 43) were quite distanced, and the number of



occurrences of “child” and “law” was even lower (33 and 38 respectively). This trend is reflected in the “ranking” of the five semantic fields in 2010-2012 and 2013. In fact, there is a relevant difference in the first three spots between the two periods: while in 2010-2012 the most highly recurring semantic field was, by far, “work and money” (322), followed by “age and education” (175) and “rights and law” (160), in 2013 the semantic field “age and education” (529) was the most highlighted, followed quite closely by “rights and law” (500) and “work and money” (393). We can therefore see a shift from a prevalently “monetary” and “labor rights” perspective to a stronger preoccupation with the young age of models and with the legal regulation of their job while they are still underage. This can be explained by the fact that, as we have seen, most of the articles in 2013 dealt with the Model Alliance’s role in the passing of the New York State law on child models’ labor rights. It also clarifies that the Model Alliance’s most highlighted goal is to regulate the fashion industry so as to guarantee certain rights to models, who are usually young, female and vulnerable, and thus in need of legal protection.

#### 4. What kind of journalistic discourse can deal with models’ rights?

In the articles analyzed models are often represented as children or, rather, as *infants*. Not only owing to their very young age but also, as the etymology of the word suggests (*infans* in Latin meaning “unable to speak” or “speechless”), due to their inability to utter their problems out of inexperience or fear of spoiling their careers. The journalists’ duty is therefore that of giving a voice to the infant-models. This task can mainly be performed through two techniques: 1) by interviewing the models and reporting their words as direct speech, so that the protagonists may speak for themselves; or 2) by documenting and telling about their experiences, thus indirectly interpreting their requests. In the latter case we frequently find the use of free indirect speech, as in the following examples: “She felt violated,” Ziff said. ‘This was a top fashion photographer who is well established and powerful. When you are replaceable, it’s not so easy to speak about abuse’<sup>11</sup>; and “Her big hope? That agent, casting directors, and other industry types who actually can make a difference will.”<sup>12</sup>

A general remark is that most of these articles provoke a sense of estrangement. In the first place, they unveil the dark side of a glamorous profession that is hardly associated with off-putting aspects. In doing so, they bring to light the stereotypical vision we have of models’ work. The core idea is that the models’ world and, broadly speaking, the world of fashion is a closed-off, separate dimension, far from everyday experience. As some journalists state, it is Sarah Ziff’s merit to have “let the world in on the increasingly shameful and often quite sad working conditions models face these days in *Picture Me*.”<sup>13</sup>

On the one hand, these articles share the general features of news reports, both at the level of thematic and textual structures (van Dijk). On the other hand, given the unusual subject and the pioneering, militant nature of the project, they also present some peculiar traits, which the analysis will try to highlight. As a premise, it is important to note that the world of fashion is represented as a domain that has not only its own people, its shared beliefs and values (or lack of values), but also its own in-group use of language: “fashion as meaningful communication constructs people as members, or nonmembers, of cultural groups because fashion is one of the ways in which people are constructed as members (and/or nonmembers) of cultural groups” (Scapp and Seitz 25). In fact, the authors of the articles have to face two interrelated problems: the first one is that of giving voice to the models; the second one is that of finding a suitable register and vocabulary to write about fashion without resorting to Fashion English, yet trying to find points of contact with it from a critical distance. Both intents result in discursive choices.

#### 4.1 Fashion English as ESP vs. journalistic discourse

<sup>11</sup> Epstein, Emily Ann, “Realities of the runway: Models organize against abuse,” *Metro*, January 30, 2012. [www.metro.us/local/realities-of-the-runway-models-organize-against-abuse/tmWlaD---08ndi3Ewxdxl/](http://www.metro.us/local/realities-of-the-runway-models-organize-against-abuse/tmWlaD---08ndi3Ewxdxl/). Last visited June 28, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Halpern, Ashlea, “Exclusive Video: Sara Ziff’s *Picture Me* Mini-series, Part Three,” *The Cut – New York Magazine*, September 20, 2010. [www.nymag.com/thecut/2010/09/exclusive\\_video\\_sara\\_ziffs\\_pic\\_2.html](http://www.nymag.com/thecut/2010/09/exclusive_video_sara_ziffs_pic_2.html). Last visited June 28, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Odell, Amy, “Sara Ziff Is Forming an Alliance to Advocate for Model Rights,” *The Cut – New York Magazine*, December 21, 2010. [www.nymag.com/thecut/2010/12/sara\\_ziff\\_is\\_forming\\_an\\_allia.html](http://www.nymag.com/thecut/2010/12/sara_ziff_is_forming_an_allia.html). Last visited June 28, 2015.



A first observation is that, although it deals with the world of fashion, this is not fashion journalism. Fashion journalism usually adopts Fashion English, which can be considered as a kind of ESP. In *Système de la mode* (1967), Roland Barthes provided a ground-breaking analysis of the semiotic power of fashion as a system of signs and, at the same time, a sociolinguistic enquiry into the rhetorical power of fashion discourse. In particular, he dedicated a large section of his study to descriptions in fashion magazines, concluding that the language of fashion is not meant to simply describe clothes but to transport the reader from a possible to a utopic world built on desire (Barthes 284). It is not clothes, but words that make the reader dream (10).

This goal is achieved through distinctive features that are still recognizable today. As the website devoted to “The Language of Fashion: Slang, Jargon, and Journalistic Style” highlights, fashion is a unique, “wacky, fantastical world,” which has “its own distinct language of slang and jargon.” Fashion English, it informs us, is actually taught all over the world: there are schools in Pisa, London and Tokyo. Like other kinds of ESP, the language of fashion is characterized not only by specific vocabulary, but also by particular stylistic and grammatical features. According to Whitley, these features include:

- **familiar obscurity:** the oxymoron suggests that, on the one hand, Fashion English is an inside jargon driven by an esoteric intent, that of being understood only by insiders, while, on the other hand, it has to be recognizable and alluring also for outsiders, thus displaying simultaneously an exoteric drive;
- **mix and match:** the expression underlines the fact that Fashion English contains a great deal of code-switching and code-mixing, particularly between English and French;
- **pictorialism:** Fashion English constantly refers to sensory experience, particularly sight.<sup>14</sup>

Even in this contemporary reading the existence of a jargon that can properly be deciphered only by the fashion adept is acknowledged as a powerful pragmatic component. This is also acknowledged in the articles analysed, to the extent that grasping the intended meaning of sentences uttered in the context of modeling appears to be of uppermost importance to understand the problems that may arouse within that world. To exemplify this point, we can mention the use of the adjective “healthy.” In ordinary discourse being “healthy” signifies a general – and positive – physical condition, while in the world of fashion it specifically refers to weight (“to get back to a healthier weight”, “healthier women”, “healthy models”) and is often, unfortunately, understood as being too “fat”. Therefore, in this specific context being “too healthy” acquires negative connotations. Models overtly recognize the presence of this codified language, which needs to be decrypted in order to get the real picture. “In modeling,” says Amy Lemon, “too healthy” is “code for ‘chubby’.”<sup>15</sup> As also Sarah Ziff reports about the same episode, “just three years later, as she [Amy Lemon] began to fill out physically, a New York agent advised her only to eat one rice cake a day. And, if that didn’t work, only half a rice cake. So Amy got the hint. She told me: ‘They were telling me to be anorexic, *flat-out*.’”<sup>16</sup> As a result, here journalistic discourse performs the function of signalling how speech and intended meaning may diverge. The expression “flat-out” that concludes Sarah’s sentence can actually be read as a pun which refers, at once and the same time, to the physical strain of extremely skinny models, and to the gap between the rhetoric of Fashion English and a more referential or “plainer” dimension of the language. The latter dimension seems to identify with journalistic writing. As in news reports concerning other domains (politics, economics, culture and society, etc.) also when dealing with the world of fashion and modeling journalists appear to adopt the factual stand that characterizes their discursive practice. Indeed, as argued by Teun van Dijk, it is typical of journalistic discourse to present itself as an assertive speech act:

The perlocutionary or persuasive dimension that sustains such intentions in practice, then, is the formulation of meanings in such a way that they are not merely understood but also

<sup>14</sup> Whitley, Rosalind, “The Language of Fashion: Slang, Jargon, and Journalistic Style.” [www.questgarden.com/78/72/2/090323093818/process.htm](http://www.questgarden.com/78/72/2/090323093818/process.htm). Last visited June 22, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Vanchieri, Cori, “When Size 6 is Fat.” [www.onethingnew.com/index.php/revenge/270-when-size-6-is-fat](http://www.onethingnew.com/index.php/revenge/270-when-size-6-is-fat). Last visited January 14, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> “Viewpoint: Do Models Need More Rights?,” *BBC News Magazine*, November 29, 2012. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-20515337](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-20515337). Last visited January 14, 2014.





accepted as the truth or at least as a possible truth. Rhetorical structures accompanying assertive speech acts like those performed by the news in the press should be able to enhance the beliefs of the readers assigned to the asserted propositions of the text. (van Dijk 82)

In other words, journalistic discursive practice implies a dismantling of fictions and a shift towards the literal and the true-to-life, even if, as shall be seen, this process entails the use of rhetorical strategies and narrative devices to achieve the journalist's communicative goals

#### 4.2. Personalization and storytelling patterns

The analysis shows that the general traits shared by the articles are a personalization of the news, the presence of storytelling patterns and the use of similar, recurring rhetorical devices. The combination of these discursive practices shows the journalists' attention to cognitive frames and to the illocutionary potential of formal features of language to enhance the readers' involvement. The journalists seem to have two principal aims: first, getting people to support the models' cause by reporting facts in a way that is comprehensible to everyone, also those who are unfamiliar with the world of fashion; second, finding the correct register and arguments to give voice to a subject which has so far rarely been investigated.

Personalization is of uppermost importance in articulating individual experiences within a world perceived as undifferentiated. In fact, in the past critical positions taken by journalists were mainly targeted to the fashion industry as a whole. If anything went wrong, it was the entire system to be blamed. In a sense, if girls decided to enter the fashion world they had to take the risk, like Little Red Riding Hood flirting with the wolf. The idea is still sometimes endorsed by the models themselves. During an interview in *Picture Me*, one of them said: "problems are not personal, they are *systemic*." The impression that the world of fashion is prone to be treated as an indistinct whole is reinforced by the statements made by some journalists, among whom even ex models, who underline the homogeneity and reification of the profession. They stress the fact that all models look alike, resembling not human beings but dummies deprived of an identity and thoroughly objectified to meet the requests of the market. As former model Ashlea Halpern, now a reporter and senior editor for *The Cut* (the online fashion section of *The New York Magazine*) remarks:

I was struck by the homogeneity of the cast of rail-thin, tall, blond models. When I was one of the models walking in the shows, I saw the subtle differences between us, but it's eerie how similar the models look from a distance. En masse, they look like interchangeable, disposable clothes hangers – not memorable individuals.<sup>17</sup>

For these reasons, all the articles try to give a name and a face to the individuals who compose the allegedly indistinct mass of girls. In the first place, they constantly include personal details. They also, constantly follow narrative patterns. In fact, storytelling has the effect of reporting individual experiences without resorting to generalizations. The main narrative form adopted both in the online articles and in the blogs and forums that expand them, is the diary. Significantly, also the subtitle of *Picture Me* is "A model's diary." The interviews therein presented are meant to trigger a sort of retrospective narration, while aiming, at the same time, at suggesting an up-to-the-moment immediacy. Furthermore, the interviewers seem to display a sort of maieutic power aimed at bringing models to an awareness of their rights as human beings and as workers. Both their questions and their comments on the interviewees' answers have the general effect of providing the models with a voice, or at least with a vicarious discourse. As Sarah Ziff explains, storytelling is "a very kinetic activity": "So we use first person experiences. We are giving models a voice."

#### 4.3. Morphosyntactic features, modifiers, figures of speech

A common impression that the texts seem to convey is that journalists are "trying for words" to describe something new. Particularly until the passing of the New York State Law in June 2013, discourse reflects the inadequacy not only of regulations but also of language to deal with such unheard of perspective on models' rights. The continuing search for forms of discourse that could best represent the situation is evident in all the articles. Specifically, the analysis shows that communicative effectiveness in dealing with the subject is

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<sup>17</sup> Halpern, Ashlea, "Exclusive Video: Sara Ziff's *Picture Me* Mini-series, Part Three."



achieved through several techniques, which can be traced within phenomena of negativization and modality or related to the use of particular rhetorical strategies.

#### 4.3.1 “Not so pretty”: processes of negativization

A possible way of discussing these issues is by resorting to negative clauses. If the world of fashion is difficult to describe, at least it is possible to say what it is *not*, as in the following examples:

As independent contractors, models **don’t have** the same basic workplace protection as a lot of other industries do. They **don’t have** workmen’s compensation. They often **don’t have** access to affordable health coverage. There are **no provisions** for rest and meal breaks [during work hours].<sup>18</sup>

**Nobody** talked about it, and only recently have model friends opened up about the pressure from their agencies to prevent their young bodies from developing naturally.<sup>19</sup>

The use of the privative prefix **un-** is also very frequent, particularly in the articles published before the passing of the law. It is used to refer to the models’ rights in general, to working and health conditions, sexual harassment and young age, which makes them unsuitable for such a sophisticated and corrupted world. Finally, un- is found before the adjectives normally used to refer to the modeling profession with a positive connotation, and whose original meaning is thus reversed.

	<b>UN-</b>	2010-2012	2013
<b>Rights</b>	Unregulated	11	3
	Unlawful	1	1
	Unacceptable		1
	Unprotected		1
	Unauthorized	1	
<b>Work conditions</b>	Unprofitable	1	
	Unacceptable		2
	Unpaid	2	1
	Unsafe	2	
	Uncomfortable	2	
<b>Health conditions</b>	Unpleasant	1	
	Unhealthy	2	
<b>Sexual harassment</b>	Unclaimed/unwanted (attentions/sexual advances)	2	1
<b>Young age</b>	Unprepared		
	Unfamiliar (environment)		
<b>Un- (before adjectives with positive connotations usually related to the profession)</b>	Unsavory	1	1
	Un-airbrushed		
	Unfortunate	2	1
	Unwearable	1	
	Unrealistic	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>TOTAL 2010-2013</b>			<b>44</b>

Table 6. Negativization: use of the privative prefix un-

<sup>18</sup> Odell, Amy, “Sara Ziff Is Forming an Alliance to Advocate for Model Rights.”

<sup>19</sup> Halpern, Ashlea, “Exclusive Video: Sara Ziff’s *Picture Me* Mini-series, Part Three.”



The analysis shows a rather constant and unvaried use of negativization processes both in the 2010-2012 and in the 2013 articles. The only exception is the adjective “unregulated,” with only 3 occurrences during the year in which the New York State Law concerning the modeling profession was passed.

#### 4.3.2 Use of modifiers

Discursive strategies to describe models’ conditions and promoting their rights are also found in the use of modifiers. The modifiers detected in these articles seem principally to undermine the glamorous aura that surrounds the world of fashion. They mainly consist of hedging expressions. Adverbs may act in this sense, as in “Modeling is a *seemingly* glamorous profession.” Sometimes, on the contrary, they are adopted as emphasers associated with negative adjectives, as in “*Uniquely* vulnerable”, “*extremely* judgmental” and “*unusually* thin body ideal.” This practice sometimes overlaps with the process of negativization observed in the previous section with reference to adjectives, for instance in the expression “unrealistically thin.” Also prepositions can be useful to modify the meaning of a sentence so as to highlight a different point of view on the world of modeling. The sentences “*beyond* the catwalk”, or, “[walking] *on* and *off* the runway”, for instance, figuratively suggest the possibility of stepping in and out the world of fashion therein described, thus activating a shift in focus or a distancing processes towards the topic of the news. Although the following sections will report only a limited number of examples chosen among the most significant ones, the analysis of the articles has highlighted that adjectives are used as powerful modifiers of nouns, and so are prefixes and prepositions recurring in phrasal verbs.

#### HIGH

The adjective “high” is frequently used in Fashion English.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the language of fashion is intrinsically hyperbolic, since it aims at intensifying the experience of the senses. Generally speaking, “high” contrasted with “low” constantly confers to discourse social and cultural connotations, according to shared knowledge and standards about “upper” and “lower” status. “High-society,” “High Church” and “high-brow” are examples of this use in common English. This use is also confirmed in the articles analyzed: “**high pay**” (“**highest-paid**”, “**highest earning**”), “**high profile**” and, of course, “**high fashion**,” “**highly** exclusive.” It should be noted that, beside the social use, in Fashion English “high” or “low” often contain hints at creativity and artistry, as part of the same system of values. High-fashion is not only affordable by high-society; it is also supposed to be the highest example of craftsmanship and style. In the articles analyzed the critical stance associated with this scale of values and its potential deceitfulness is underlined either by making “high” precede nouns with negative connotations, so as to obtain a negative compound adjective (as in “high-pressure world of modeling”), or by coupling it with some kind of understatement: “the **high-pressure, high-fashion** world of modeling is a small slice of the large modeling pie.”<sup>21</sup> The effect is thus anti-climatic or, at least, it generates a sense of instability which asks for the reader’s judgment about the subject under scrutiny.

#### MIS-

In the articles analyzed, the prefix **-mis** stresses either the lack of genuine information about the world of modeling or the fact that something is awry in that world and therefore needs to be redressed: “There’s this **mis**perception that models are making millions of dollars.”<sup>22</sup> “There’s a **mis**conception about how we get paid.”<sup>23</sup> In the 2013 articles, the prefix **mis-** seems to disappear; we only find “**mistake**” (2 occurrences)

<sup>20</sup> Maythee Rojas, “Puro High Life.” *Fashion Statements: On Style, Appearance, and Reality* Eds. Ron Scap and Brian Seitz. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010. 81-88

<sup>21</sup> Cori Vanchieri, “When size 6 is fat,” [www.onethingnew.com/index.php/revenge/270-when-size-6-is-fat](http://www.onethingnew.com/index.php/revenge/270-when-size-6-is-fat). Last visited June, 26, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Acuna, Kirsten, “New Alliance of Models Reveals Scary Industry Statistics.” [www.businessinsider.com/models-form-alliance-and-reveal-scary-industry-statistics-2012-1?IR=T](http://www.businessinsider.com/models-form-alliance-and-reveal-scary-industry-statistics-2012-1?IR=T). Last visited January 14, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Jothianandan, Shakthi, “Coco Rocha, Doutzen Kroes, and Shalom Harlow Talk Models’ Rights.” [www.nymag.com/thecut/2012/02/coco-rocha-doutzen-kroes-talk-models-rights.html](http://www.nymag.com/thecut/2012/02/coco-rocha-doutzen-kroes-talk-models-rights.html). Last visited June 26, 2015.



## UNDER(-)

The use of **under**, both as a prefix and as a preposition, is very frequent in the 2010-2012 (where it appears 45 times) and even more so in the 2013 articles (where it appears 133 times). It may refer to the discovery of a hidden underworld, to “the downsides of American modeling,”<sup>24</sup> but also, more literally, to the models work conditions (“**underpaid**”) and, above all, to their age (“**underage**,” “**under 16**,” “**under 17**,” “**under 18**”).

UNDER (-)	2010-2012	2013
Under	45	133
Underpaid	2	
Underage	6	29
Under (the age of) 16	2	10
Under (the age of) 17	2	
Under (the age of) 18	8	29
Under (federal/New York, state, labor) law; under the legislation/amendment/guidelines/arrangement/governance	2	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>221</b>
<b>TOTAL 2010-2013</b>		<b>288</b>

**Table 7. Use of the prefix under-**

We notice a surge in the use of “under(-)” referred to age in the articles published in 2013. This can be explained by the semantic shift from the moral to the juridical level occurred in the discourses about models’ rights. In fact, between the first and the second period the focus has definitely moved from the emotional perspective to the legal one. In the 2010-2012 articles the adjective “under” is used before terms referring to the law only in a negative sense: “Some models even work under arrangements that recall indentured servitude.”<sup>25</sup> Even in the first months of the year 2013, before the actual passing of the law, “under” is used to refer to the existing legal situation (“Current laws place child models under the puzzling jurisdiction of the New York Department of Education”).<sup>26</sup> However, after the signing of the amendment by the governor of New York Andrew Cuomo, the prefix becomes associated with the idea of being legally protected. After June 2013, we find 20 phrases containing “under” associated with “law” (federal, New York, state, labor law), “legislation,” “amendment,” “guidelines,” “arrangement,” or “governance.”

## OFF

In the articles analyzed, the preposition “off” – particularly in phrasal verbs – is used to stress 1) the separateness of the world of fashion from the ordinary world (as in “the **closed-off** world of modeling”);<sup>27</sup> 2) the fact that these very young girls are thrown into a dangerous world they’re not yet able to cope with, as in “a 13-year-old Siberian girl who wins a modeling competition and is **whisked off** to Tokyo” and in “What kind of idiot parent lets their 14-year-old **go off** to a big city to model without being on top of them?”;<sup>28</sup> 3) sexual

<sup>24</sup> Feitelberg, Rosamary, “New Alliance Aims to Protect Models,” (*WWD*, December 21, 2010). [www.wwd.com/retail-news/organizing-effort-for-models3406982/?browssets=1292947874639&browssets=653144219615&browssets=385218485022](http://www.wwd.com/retail-news/organizing-effort-for-models3406982/?browssets=1292947874639&browssets=653144219615&browssets=385218485022). Last visited June 26, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Mears, Ashley, “Poor Models. Seriously,” (*The New York Times*, September 14, 2011). [www.nytimes.com/2011/09/15/opinion/its-fashion-week-poor-models.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/15/opinion/its-fashion-week-poor-models.html?_r=0). Last visited June 26, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Cline, Elizabeth, “Fashion Models are Workers, too,” (*The Nation*, September 11, 2013). [www.thenation.com/article/176141/fashion-models-are-workers-too](http://www.thenation.com/article/176141/fashion-models-are-workers-too). Last visited June 29, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Dibaja, Emma, “Picture Me a Model’s Diary and the Closed-off World of Modeling.” [www.stumbleupon.com/su/1FmSKC/blog.modelmanagement.com/2010/09/15/picture-me-a-models-diary-and-the-closed-off-world-of-modeling/?\\_nospa=true](http://www.stumbleupon.com/su/1FmSKC/blog.modelmanagement.com/2010/09/15/picture-me-a-models-diary-and-the-closed-off-world-of-modeling/?_nospa=true). Last visited June 29, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Grant, Drew, “The Sorrow and the Pretty: Model Alliance Looks to Empower the Ridiculously Good-Looking.” [www.observer.com/2012/09/the-sorrow-and-the-pretty-model-alliance-looks-to-empower-the-really-really-ridiculously-good-looking/](http://www.observer.com/2012/09/the-sorrow-and-the-pretty-model-alliance-looks-to-empower-the-really-really-ridiculously-good-looking/). Last visited January 14, 2014.



abuse, by literally indicating what the girls are required to do in front of photographers, as in “**take off** their clothes” (5 occurrences); 4) financial exploitation in general, as in “**pay off** their debts to agencies;” 5) that something should be done to unveil the truth: “Fashion is a glamorous industry, but **rub off** the sheen, and quite another scene emerges;”<sup>29</sup> 6) the militant action taken by the Model Alliance: “When Ziff **kicks off** its membership drive next week it won't be with a march through the streets. Or a bake sale or pancake **cook-off** to raise much-needed funds. Instead it will be with an evening cocktail soiree at Manhattan's swish and trendy Standard Hotel.”<sup>30</sup> And “As New York prepares for Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week **to kick off** on February 9, some models who will walk those runways are putting together a different kind of industry event.”<sup>31</sup> The 2013 articles use “off” to denounce the behavior of fashion business people who seem to feel free to “kidnap” children from the street to show them off like monkeys. Significantly, after the passing of the law, this is something they can no longer do: “They can't **pull** a 15 year old **off** the street and say, ‘Wear this! Here's some lettuce for lunch.’”<sup>32</sup>

### 5.3 Figures of speech

The analysis shows that the articles published between 2010 and 2012 present a much higher frequency of figures of speech than those published in 2013. This seems to confirm the progressive shift from implicitness/indirectness towards more explicitness/directness undergone by the discourses about models' rights along with their cognitive and juridical recognition. The most pervasive figures of speech have been identified as follows.

#### 5.3.1 Irony

The presence of irony has been subject to many debates (see Colebrook). One of them has revolved around the impossibility of detecting it from grammatical features. Irony is rather “a matter of delicate interaction between code and context (Scholes 36), often independently from the semantic and syntactic structure of sentences (see also Searle; Barbe). The same is true for both oral and written communication. However, in written texts, although there are much subtler ways of producing irony, graphic devices may signal the fact that the writer is taking a distance from the subject about which he/she is writing. This is the case with inverted commas when used not for direct speech but to single out words or sentences within the text. It should be noted that this rhetorical device seems to go against today's standards regarding journalistic writing, which tend to stress the necessity of reducing graphically marked uses of the language (bold types, italics, etc.) to a minimum. This stylistic rule includes the use of inverted commas for ironic remarks. Handbooks of style underline that the ironic use of quotation marks “is very much overdone, and is usually a sign of laziness indicating that the writer has not bothered to find the precise word or expression necessary” (Brian 170).

In the articles appearing between 2010 and 2012 the expressions between inverted commas are very frequent (316 occurrences). About half of the times, they are not used for direct speech (namely reported interviews to models) but for ironic comments. An example of this use is the imaginary slogan “anorexia is in this season,” where irony can be grasped only if the reader knows the expression “to be in” or “to be out” referring to fashionable or unfashionable clothes. Another example is the reference to models' payments in clothes rather than in money as “gross high pay.” In these articles, irony is principally meant to show the gap between illusion and reality. The search for a language apt to express the models' real experiences has to draw from stereotypes in order to dismantle them from the inside. What is important to notice is that most of

<sup>29</sup> Mears, “Poor Models, Seriously.”

<sup>30</sup> “Model Sara Ziff to launch workers' rights organisation for fashion industry.” [www.theguardian.com/fashion/2012/feb/01/sara-ziff-models-workers-rights-group](http://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2012/feb/01/sara-ziff-models-workers-rights-group). Last visited June 29, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Lehman, Daniel, “Model Alliance Fights Abuse and Harassment of Fashion Models.” <http://www.backstage.com/news/model-alliance-fights-abuse-and-harassment-of-fashion-models/>. Last visited June 29, 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Tyler, McCall, “What the Newly-Passed Child Model Labor Bill Means for the Fashion Industry,” <http://fashionista.com/2013/06/what-the-newly-passed-child-model-labor-law-could-mean-for-the-industry>. Last visited June 26, 2015.



these tongue-in-cheek comments try to revert the traditional connection of the world of fashion with an enchanted world. References are also made to the book *Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf, who defined models as “elite corps deployed in a way that keeps 150,000 American women in line” (41). The journalist further reports a joke by the same author:

(...) she added a crack about the challenges of being a paid beauty: “it’s really grueling under those hot lights.” But sarcasm aside, for many models, it is grueling. Confronted with the huge successes of modeling’s winner-take-all market, most people miss the mass of losers. This is how glamour works: as a spell. Even the word glamour has magic roots, as a charm cast to transform appearances.<sup>33</sup>

As we also hear from the voices of the models in the documentary film *Picture Me*, “It’s a world that’s based in fantasy”; “Fashion is an industry of illusion”; “I was myself under a spell”; “There’s a Peter Pan syndrome in the world of fashion.” Hence fairy-tales can provide a wide range of expressions that, even when used literally, can be re-utilized in an ironic way, to overturn appearances and discuss models’ issues critically. On this account it is relevant to point out that if journalists, on the one hand, have to resort to irony to highlight the gap between illusions and reality, on the other hand they have to strive in order to make their discourse sound literal rather than utterly absurd. In other words, they have to try hard to make their pleading for models’ rights sound serious rather than ironically overstated. The title of the article, “Poor Models. Seriously”<sup>34</sup> suggests that this is no trivial point. In discussion forums, the adjective ‘poor’ has raised an uproar of protest, especially when the video shows a top-model being handed an 80,000 dollar check: “A lot of people in our industry are not sympathetic because of that check (...). They think, ‘Well, she’s getting paid.’”<sup>35</sup> In this particular context, the polysemy of the adjective “poor” is therefore exploited to generate a conceptual wavering between commonplace assumptions and the ironic truth.

By contrast, in the articles published in 2013 we notice a more limited use of irony. Focusing on the one, particular marking of irony identified in some of the previous examples we may observe that out of 328 sentences inverted commas that single out ironic remarks are very few. Words are still sometimes placed between quotation marks to hint at the drawbacks and hidden side of the profession (“discovered,” “disposable,” “bad job,” “inappropriate touching,” “invisible,” “clothes hangers”) but the general tone has become more factual and direct. After the passing of the law, models’ rights can be treated as an unquestionably serious issue.

### 5.3.2 Oxymoron

Oxymoron is generally used in the 2010-2012 articles to show the clash between common beliefs about a model’s life and the real situation. The aforementioned title “Poor models, Seriously,” for instance, seems also to perform this function in the conceptual incompatibility of the adjective “poor” and the noun “model” with its connotations of glamour and easy money. Oxymoron here is actually intended to underline the contrast between the glamor and the drawbacks of the profession. References are made to the unnatural thinness and out-of-place, extreme youth of the models, as in “Alliance Looks to Empower **the Ridiculously Good-Looking**.” While the world of fashion is described as “**here-today, gone-tomorrow** modeling industry.”<sup>36</sup> “Pretty” used as an adverb deserves special attention in the articles (see also section below). Normally found in informal contexts with the meaning of “quite but not extremely,” the connotations of the term seem to be deliberately exploited on account of its homophony with the adjective (“pretty”= “pleasant to look at, especially of girls or women or things relating to them; attractive or pleasant in a delicate way,” according to the Cambridge Dictionary). The word is then juxtaposed to adjectives with negative

<sup>33</sup> Mears, “Poor Models. Seriously.”

<sup>34</sup> Mears, “Poor Models. Seriously.”

<sup>35</sup> “Documenting the Work Behind the Walk” (Style.com, October 26, 2010). [www.vogue.com/fashion-shows](http://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows). Last visited April 20, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Greenhouse, Stephen, “A New Alliance Steps Up to Protect a New Generation of Models,” *The New York Times* (December 23, 2013). [www.nytimes.com/2013/12/24/business/a-new-alliance-steps-up-to-protect-the-next-generation-of-models.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/24/business/a-new-alliance-steps-up-to-protect-the-next-generation-of-models.html). Last visited June 28, 2015.



meanings, thus obtaining a contrast. Although in other contexts they would not be considered as oxymoron, here phrases such as “**pretty vulnerable**” or “**pretty disempowered**” (“Having spoken directly to many models, who are often simply teenagers, straight out of school feeling pretty disempowered to talk up in case they lose the job”) referred to the models acquire, in our opinion, an oxymoronic connotation. The opposition between the concepts of “beauty” and “ugliness”, fraught with both aesthetic and moral values, seems to be confirmed by the following sentence uttered by Susan Scafidi, a member of the Model Alliance's Board of Directors: “The fashion industry needs to reject images of beauty that are created through truly ugly means.”<sup>37</sup>

### 5.3.3 Litotes and hyperbole

Litotes and hyperbole often go hand in hand in these articles. Once again the aim is that of producing a contrast between the elation and the downsides of the fashion industry, as well as that of suggesting the idea of a sort of split-personality, of a schizophrenic attitude shown by the world of fashion itself. A significant example is the definition of the dynamics of power in the fashion industry given by a model. She describes it in the following terms: “Huge egos and a very underdeveloped ego at odds.”<sup>38</sup> The hyperbolic image of abnormally inflated egos is thus coupled with that of subnormal personality (Earl). In another example, the project of Models' Alliance is minimized. It is of course a rhetorical strategy meant to emphasise this enterprise (the statement is also a perfect example of Fashion English mix-and-match): “It was a **rinky-dink** project we just did on the side with no agent, no PR. We had no intention of making it an exposé,’ model Sara Ziff said last night at the Fordham Fashion Law Institute’s screening of her documentary *Picture Me*.”<sup>39</sup> Litotes is also used in idiomatic expressions for ironic purposes. With reference to models paid in dresses instead of money, Sarah Ziff comments that “That and a buck will get you a cup of coffee.”<sup>40</sup>

### 5.3.4 Pun

In this section, we are going to concentrate on the exploitation of the polysemy of the word “pretty” to create puns. In the articles published between 2010 and 2012 we find 12 occurrences of “pretty,” in those published in 2013, 11 occurrences. These numbers are quite too high to suggest that the use of “pretty” is neutral and unrelated to the subject investigated in the articles. In fact, as seen in 5.3.2., the polysemy of the term and its multifunctional role as an adjective and as an adverb lends itself to rhetorical uses. In the following table, we would like to focus on the double use of “pretty:” a) as a qualifier; and b) as a modifier:

“Pretty”	2010-2012		2013	
	QUALIFIER	MODIFIER	QUALIFIER	MODIFIER
	The models are just pretty faces	Pretty disempowered	You’re being paid to look pretty	Pretty lucky
	You get paid to look pretty	Pretty positive	Models aren’t just pretty faces	Pretty adult situations
	We can be pretty	Pretty much every image	Get paid to stand around and look pretty	Modeling can be pretty mind-numbing
	Be pretty	I was pretty lucky		The Model Alliance has been pretty effective

<sup>37</sup> Lehman, Daniel, “Supermodel Sara Ziff Starts Labor Movement With The Model Alliance” (February 6, 2012). [www.backstage.com/news/supermodel-sara-ziff-starts-labor-movement-with-the-model-alliance/](http://www.backstage.com/news/supermodel-sara-ziff-starts-labor-movement-with-the-model-alliance/). Last visited June 26, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Jothianandan, Shakthi , “Coco Rocha, Doutzen Kroes, and Shalom Harlow Talk Models’ Rights.” [www.nymag.com/the-cut/2012/02/coco-rocha-doutzen-kroes-talk-models-rights.html](http://www.nymag.com/the-cut/2012/02/coco-rocha-doutzen-kroes-talk-models-rights.html). Last visited June 26, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Sara Ziff, “Documenting the Work behind the Walk,” October 26, 2010. [www.law.fordham.edu/newsroom/22397.htm](http://www.law.fordham.edu/newsroom/22397.htm). Last visited June 28, 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Mears, Ashley, “Poor Models. Seriously.”



	The sorrow and the pretty	Pretty much any other child performers		A pretty big impact
		Pretty vulnerable		Pretty hard to vote down
		Pretty significant		Pretty tight child labor laws
				The rules are pretty strict
<b>TOTAL</b>	5	7	3	8
<b>TOTAL 2010-2012</b>	12		11	

**Table 8. Use of “pretty” as qualifier and modifier.**

As the analysis highlights, “pretty” is more frequently used as a modifier than as a qualifier. Moreover, the collocation in the 2013 articles reveals a close connection to civil/political (vote, impact, effective) and legal (labor laws, strict) terms. This proximity suggests that the word may not perform a neutral grammatical function within the sentence (interchangeable with similar expression such as “quite” or “rather” but act as a pun. The effect is that of creating mental associations with the stereotypes of the profession, thus reinforcing the cause of models’ rights by producing cognitive involvement in the reader.

### 5.3.5. Metaphor

Figurative language is extensively used in the articles analyzed. As Lakoff and Johnson have clearly highlighted, metaphors, particularly ontological ones, are often of an experiential nature and systematically structured into conceptual systems (for instance, “argument is war” or “language is a conduit”) (Lakoff and Johnson). It is relevant to point out that here ontological metaphors mainly revolve around five semantic areas: the fashion industry is a ruthless artist; it is a veneer; it is a dazzling light; it is a slave-trader or a predator; it is an industry that not only deprives its workers of a voice, but also has a dumbing effect on the journalists who feel the need to articulate a discourse on the models’ rights. Trying to synthesize the joint effect of these metaphors, we can say that the fashion world is described as a jungle in which it is very difficult to survive; it is an unregulated world based on the power of the stronger. Since it is rather unusual to see the highly sophisticated world of fashion compared to the basic, instinctive kind of life led in the wilderness, the effect is quite powerful. As model Coco Rocha affirms, the complete lack of regulations regarding child models, “makes New York kind of like the Wild Wild West.”<sup>41</sup> Models, conversely, are passive prey or easy prey in the claws of the fashion industry; they are dumb dummies and so are journalists who try to write about their rights. As can be detected by the examples, similarly to what Lakoff and Johnson argued about “polar oppositions,” also in these articles metaphors are often set in a binary way against their opposite experiential metaphors, usually with the intent of suggesting what the fashion industry should be like but is not. Hence, veneer is opposed to transparency; clear vision to blindness, voice to dumbness.

#### THE FASHION INDUSTRY IS A RUTHLESS ARTIST

“She was **untarnished. A blank canvas.**”

#### THE FASHION INDUSTRY IS A PREDATOR/MODELS ARE PREYS

“Fashion modeling has **a dark underbelly**”

“It’s very important to understand that there is a stark difference between what happens here, at New York Fashion Week, and what happens **lower down the food chain.** (...) But many are saddled with debt and, in

<sup>41</sup> Odell, Amy, “Proposed Child Model Law Stands To Have Dramatic Impact On The Fashion Industry” (posted on June 11, 2013). [www.buzzfeed.com/amyodell/proposed-child-model-law-stands-to-have-dramatic-impact-on-t#.cc9Jr1z8wb](http://www.buzzfeed.com/amyodell/proposed-child-model-law-stands-to-have-dramatic-impact-on-t#.cc9Jr1z8wb). Last visited June 18, 2015.





some cases, even **pimped out by their agencies as arm candy** – and sometimes more – to influential clients and rich friends. This borderline prostitution goes on even at some top agencies.”<sup>42</sup>

“**We are meat**,” a Parisian male model told me matter-of-factly in a recent interview, “<sup>43</sup>

#### VENEER/TRANSPARENCY

“A lack of **financial transparency**”

“**Transparent accounting practices**”

“(…) models are certainly not the people you picture when you think of bad working conditions. But **wipe off the sheen** and another reality emerges.”

“Our **glossy industry** often provokes superficial criticism of models’ weight and body image.”

#### LIGHT/DARKNESS

“The film shows **modeling’s glitzy side** (….) **its darker aspect**, too.”

#### SIGHT/BLINDNESS

“**myopic disregard**”

“**blindly tolerates**”

“for the first time models were **on the other side of the lens**”

“But correcting these abuses starts with **seeing models through a different lens**”

#### VOICE/DUMBNESS

“**to give models a voice** in the workplace and to organize for better working conditions”

“**We are giving models a voice**”

“So the idea is to create an alliance that is **not just a voice of models standing outside the industry and shouting**, but working inside the industry to bring about change.”

“It only takes **a few voices to create a chorus**” “A Model Union: New Group **Gives Voice** to Fashion Workers”

“The Model Alliance is the latest organization of workers to emerge from a growing movement of workers often excluded from many employment protections we take for granted. Adding to the efforts of domestic workers, taxi drivers, restaurant workers, and farm workers **all seeking a voice** at the workplace and to transform their industries for the better, models are organizing to challenge workplace abuses.”

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<sup>42</sup> Halpern, Ashlea “Exclusive Video: Sara Ziff’s *Picture Me* Mini-series, Part Two” (*The Cut – New York Magazine*, September 15, 2010). [www.nymag.com/thecut/2010/09/exclusive\\_video\\_sara\\_ziffs\\_pic\\_1.html](http://www.nymag.com/thecut/2010/09/exclusive_video_sara_ziffs_pic_1.html). Last visited June 28, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Mears, “Poor Models, Seriously.”



“Imagine: fashion models organizing along with nannies and farm workers to improve working conditions and **gain a strong voice** at the workplace.”

“Picture Me” **gives voice** to a population of young women who are usually paid **to be seen but not heard**. “an industry that sometimes **left us feeling mute**.”

“If a child model is asked to pose nude or semi-nude in a sexually-themed shoot; if they are told to wear nothing but lingerie, hold a cigarette, wear fur or pose topless, **the chaperone on hand will be a young model’s voice of concern** – which previously, may have meant losing the job they were booked for.”

“The Model Alliance’s main objective is quite simple, and it just might be the group’s most difficult challenge: **to give models a voice** while educating the public to view them not as privileged preternatural beings, but as workers who have wage and health-and-safety needs like everyone else.”

“**You need to have a voice** because you’re not going to last in this business just being stupid

“**Models have an industry voice** through the MA. For more information, please visit our website at [www.modelalliance.org](http://www.modelalliance.org).”

## 6. Conclusion

The analysis has shown that, although journalistic language has its own discursive practices, problems may arise when dealing with new topics of discussion. From this perspective, particularly in the first phase (2010-2012), journalistic discourses about models’ rights presented a more tentative style compared to more consolidated subjects covered in news reports. The analysis has revealed a high number of terms related to complex semantic fields: “work and money,” “rights and law”, “age and education,” “health and body,” the recurrence and repetitions probably meant to topicalize the subject in unambiguous terms. Indeed, these discourses about models’ rights emphasize the fact that nothing should be given for granted or judged according to appearances and preconceptions. New formulae have been experimented, often obtained through a repetition of stereotypes, although filtered through critical distance. The analysis has also demonstrated that, whenever a new subject or perspective is presented, the journalist must try to convey it by resorting to universal cognitive patterns, such as personalization and storytelling. The same can be said about the use of morphological and rhetorical strategies, modifiers and figures of speech aimed at fixing ideas and provoking empathic reactions in the reader. Metaphor in particular has, once again, proved the most effective way to express issues not yet fully cognitively acquired.

Talking about metaphor, we may say that the last example listed within the semantic field of voice vs. dumbness (“Models have an industry voice through the MA. For more information, please visit our website at [www.modelalliance.org](http://www.modelalliance.org)) seems somehow to close the circle. Chronologically, it is contained in the second group of articles (it is dated February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013). If we compare it to the previous examples, we may actually notice a shift towards a literalization of the metaphor of “voice”. The analysis therefore confirms that an important shift occurred between 2010-2012, when most of the articles dealt with the foundation of the Model Alliance and aimed at highlighting the organization’s main goals, and 2013, the year which saw the passing of the law regulating the modeling profession. By then discourses about models’ rights had become more assertive; they could consist of specific legal expressions and finally report acquired facts and norms. By then, journalists too had found a voice.

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