

Adapting George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones*. A Corpus Linguistics Analysis from a Gender Perspective

Abstract: George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* is one of the most successful fantasy series to date, and its popularity has incredibly increased over the last decade thanks to several adaptations into different media. The success of Martin's fantasy series is also due to the enormous popularity of its female characters, which has sparked a hot debate in terms of gender and power relations. This paper aims at offering a corpus-based analysis, from a gender perspective, of the language adopted by the characters of Martin's first book of the series, *A Game of Thrones* (Bantam, 1996), and two adaptations which closely follow the novel's original storyline: the first season of the TV series *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011) and the graphic adaptation titled *A Game of Thrones. The Graphic Novel* (Dynamite Entertainment, 2011-2014).

Keywords: *adaptation studies, corpus linguistics, gender studies, fantasy literature, graphic novels, American TV series*

1. Introduction

George R. R. Martin's fantasy series, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, has become in recent times so popular that it might be considered as a global cultural phenomenon. The author of the series, born in New Jersey in 1948 and currently living in Santa Fe, New Mexico, started his career as a writer in the 1970s, mostly focusing on fantasy, science fiction, and horror short stories and novels, but also actively working as a screenwriter. The winner of numerous literary awards, Martin began the saga that made him worldwide famous with the publication of its first volume, *A Game of Thrones*, in 1996. As recently reported by Charles Yu in the *New York Times* (October 15, 2018), the book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (which comprises five novels) is currently available in 47 languages and has already sold 85 million copies worldwide. At the same time, the TV series adaptation of Martin's book series, produced by HBO and titled *Game of Thrones*, has become "by many measures the most popular television show on earth, airing in 170 countries".¹ In 2011, or the same year in which the first season of the TV series adaptation was aired, the graphic novel adaptation of Martin's series was launched by Dynamite Entertainment; when it was republished in four hardcover volumes by Bantam Books, it immediately reached the top position in the New York Times Graphic Books Best Sellers List.² In addition, role-playing games, card and board games, online video games, and a huge online fanbase further define the dimensions of the worldwide interest and passion toward Martin's creation. The author himself is still involved in the process of concluding the book series (two more volumes are supposed to complete what will eventually become a heptalogy). Martin has also endorsed two of the most fortunate adaptations of his novels, the TV series produced by HBO as well as the graphic novel adaptation, as the author himself asserts in the introduction to the first hardcover volume of the graphic novel: "A series of novels. A television show.

¹ Charles Yu, "George R. R. Martin, Fantasy's Reigning King" (*The New York Times Style Magazine*, 15 October 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/15/t-magazine/george-rr-martin-got-interview.html>, accessed 10 November 2018.

² See George Gene Gustines, "Graphic Books Best Sellers: *Game of Thrones* and the *Avengers*" (*The New York Times*, 6 April 2012).

A comic book. Three different media, each with its own strengths and weaknesses, its own pleasure and frustrations...but all ultimately telling the same story”.³

Set in a quasi-medieval fantasy world, full of dark magic and supernatural creatures, *A Game of Thrones* has a complex plot, with various storylines narrated from different points of view. The sudden death of the principal advisor to the King of the Seven Kingdoms sets in motion a dramatic power play that involves the most important families in the kingdom: The Baratheons, with the death of King Robert and the political crisis that ensues, and the Starks, after Lord Eddard and his family become involved in various ways in a war against the Lannisters for the succession to the throne. In the meantime, another illustrious family, the Targaryens, is planning a comeback (with the help of the powerful Dothraki tribe) after a period of exile in order to take over the Iron Throne; however, at the northern border of the Seven Kingdoms, Lord Eddard Stark's illegitimate son, Jon Snow, and the Night's Watch are guarding the Wall, a huge barrier that protects the kingdom from the Northern wilderness, and they are dealing with other dangerous threats to the Seven Kingdoms, such as potential attacks from the Wildlings and a series of mysterious murders of members of the Watch who reanimate as undead.

Martin's popular series has often been compared to the trilogy that started the fantasy genre, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. In a 2011 online interview, Martin asserts that he wanted to write “an epic fantasy that had the imagination and the sense of wonder that you get in the best fantasy, but the gritty realism of the best historical fiction”.⁴ He explains that, according to him, fantasy writers who were following Tolkien's example “were getting it all wrong,” and describes the fantasy world in their works as “a sort of Disneyland middle ages, where they had castles and princesses and all that. The trappings of a class system, but they didn't seem to understand what a class system actually meant”.⁵ One of the innovative elements of Martin's series within the fantasy genre is the fact that the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* presents several female characters who are among the most memorable protagonists of the whole series. Catelyn Stark, Daenerys Targaryen, Arya and Sansa Stark, but also Queen Cersei Lannister, Brienne of Tarth, Melisandre of Asshai and many other female characters populate the world created by George R. R. Martin as well as the imagination of millions of fans. As Frankel explains, Martin:

Considers himself a feminist, with female characters as vibrant and expressive as the male ones: “To me, being a feminist is about treating men and women the same,” he says. “I regard men and women as all human—yes there are differences, but many of those differences are created by the culture that we live in, whether it's the medieval culture of Westeros, or 21st century Western culture” (Salter). Most fans acclaim Martin for his three-dimensional female characters.⁶

³ Daniel Abraham, *George R. R. Martin. A Game of Thrones: The Graphic Novel*, vol. 1 (New York: Bantam Books, 2012), 5. In the preface to the volume *Inside HBO's Game of Thrones: Seasons 1 & 2* (Bryan Cogman et al., San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2012), Martin observes that “[m]oving from page to screen is never easy” and that “[a] novelist has techniques and devices at his command that are not available to the scriptwriter: internal dialogue, unreliable narrators, first-person and tight third-person points of view, flashbacks, expository narrative, and a host of others. As a novelist, I strive to put my readers inside the heads of my characters, make them privy to their thoughts, let them see the world through their eyes. But the camera stands outside the character, so the viewpoint is of necessity external rather than internal. Aside from voice-overs (always an intrusion, I think, a crutch at best), the scriptwriter must depend on the director and the cast to convey the depths of emotion, subtleties of thought, and contradictions of character that a novelist can simply tell the reader about in clear, straightforward prose” (Martin, *Inside HBO's Game of Thrones*, 4).

⁴ John Hodgman, “John Hodgman Interviews George R. R. Martin”, *PRI – Public Radio International* (21 September 2011), <https://www.pri.org/stories/2011-09-21/john-hodgman-interviews-george-rr-martin>, accessed 10 November 2018.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Valerie Estelle Frankel, *Women in Game of Thrones: Power, Conformity and Resistance* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2014), 2. Frankel also reports that, at least for the HBO adaptation, *Game of Thrones* is not “just a boys' show,” because women represent about 42% of the viewers, and 50% of the online conversations about Martin's series is conducted by women (Frankel, *Women in “Game of Thrones”*, 1).

Another recent publication that shows the academic interest for the importance given to female characters in Martin's fantasy series is *Women of Ice and Fire: Gender, Game of Thrones, and Multiple Media Engagements*, edited by Anne Gjelsvik and Rikke Schubart,⁷ which starts with an epigraph quoting a famous answer given by Martin to George Stroumboulopoulos during an interview on the Canadian TV channel CBC TV on March 13th, 2012: "George Stroumboulopoulos: 'There's one thing that's interesting about your books. I noticed that you write women really well and really different. Where does that come from?' George R. R. Martin: 'You know, I've always considered women to be people'".⁸

While Martin is, at least in his fantasy series, a strong proponent of the equality of treatment between men and women, the male and female characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire* have not always been portrayed in the same way. Especially in relation to the TV series, this issue has already been pointed out on the web, where fans and bloggers have noticed that the screen time of the female characters is on average lower than that of the male characters;⁹ in addition, some of the choices made in the TV series adaptation, such as the abundance of sex scenes (especially the rape scenes) happened to cause intense debate in terms of alleged gender equality in the show.¹⁰

This paper aims at offering a preliminary corpus-based analysis of the language¹¹ employed by the characters of Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* by focusing on the first book of the series, *A Game of Thrones*, and two different adaptations which closely follow the original storyline: the graphic novel adaptation published by Dynamite Entertainment, and the first season of the HBO TV series. Since these two very popular adaptations, which became concurrently available starting from 2011, closely follow the original storyline from Martin's novel,¹² they represent a unique opportunity to study simultaneously how the language employed by male and female characters in the novel might have changed in the process of adapting it for two media adaptations created for different intended audiences.¹³ The result is a study based on a corpus which is made by three different versions of the same story told in three different media: literature, graphic novel, TV series.

Given the specific nature of the corpus compiled for this research, this paper concentrates on offering a quantitative corpus-based study which focuses specifically on what the language that the characters employ can reveal in terms of power and gender relations which characterize the fictional world created by Martin. In other words, this study specifically explores the degree of active participation of the female characters in the narrative universe of *A Game of Thrones* through their verbal agency, and whether the power relations enacted in the story change in the two intersemiotic translations of Martin's novel.

⁷ Anne Gjelsvik and Rikke Schubart, eds., *Women of Ice and Fire: Gender, "Game of Thrones", and Multiple Media Engagements* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

⁸ Ibid., 1.

⁹ See for example, Shannon Carlin, "The Women of *Game of Thrones* Get Far Less Screen Time Than Their Male Counterparts" (Refinery29, June 28, 2017), <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2017/06/160818/game-of-thrones-female-characters-less-screen-time>, accessed 10 November 2018.

¹⁰ See for example, Nicole Silverberg, "Whatever Happened to (Consensual) Sex on *Game of Thrones*?", *GQ* (13 July 2017), <https://www.gq.com/story/consensual-sex-game-of-thrones>; Christopher Orr, "Why Does *Game of Thrones* Feature So Much Sexual Violence?", *The Atlantic* (17 June 2015), <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/06/game-of-thrones-sexual-violence/396191/>, accessed 10 November 2018.

¹¹ See Paul Baker, *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

¹² Martin was also personally involved in the development of both adaptations: he was a co-executive producer and creative consultant to the TV series adaptation, and he was a consultant for the graphic novel adaptation (for the latter, see also Daniel Abraham, "Same Song in a Different Key: Adapting *A Game of Thrones* as a Graphic Novel," in James Lowder, ed., *Beyond the Wall: Exploring George R. R. Martin's "A Song of Ice and Fire"* (Dallas: Benbella Books, 2012), 29-42).

¹³ As a consequence, this research also aims at avoiding the path already followed by many existing adaptation studies in relation to exclusively comparing literature and movie adaptations. See Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (Derby, UK: Routledge, 2013).

Considering the complex features of the corpus compiled, this research does not aim at offering a thorough analysis of the patriarchal discourse in and around *A Game of Thrones*. Such a study would be virtually impossible to be covered within the space of a journal article, and it would probably lead to a rushed (and inevitably superficial) overview of the many aspects that should be taken into consideration. Instead, this research mainly focuses on comparing the dialogues performed by the male and the female characters in the three versions of Martin's story. In addition, it includes a more general analysis of the visibility of male and female characters across the different media versions from a quantitative perspective by examining the narrative component of the novel, the screen time of the characters in the TV series and the visibility of male and female characters in the panels that compose the graphic novel adaptation. Finally, in order to take a closer look at the language employed by the main characters of Martin's novel and its two adaptations, the research includes a preliminary keyword analysis which offers further insights into the power and gender relations in force in the world of *A Game of Thrones*.

2. Main features of the corpus

As already mentioned, in order to understand how the first volume of George R. R. Martin's series, *A Game of Thrones: Book One of a Song of Ice and Fire*¹⁴ was adapted from a gender perspective, the novel was compared with two of its most popular adaptations: a graphic novel and a TV series. The graphic novel version, scripted by Daniel Abraham and drawn by Tommy Patterson, was originally published in 24 issues by Dynamite Entertainment between September 2011 and July 2014, and then collected in four hardcover volumes published by Bantam Books between 2012 and 2015.¹⁵ The first season of the HBO TV series, written by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, aired on HBO between April 17 and June 19, 2011.¹⁶ Taken together, these three different versions of *A Game of Thrones* represent a heterogeneous corpus, each of them having its own specific features, and the corpus was consequently developed in different ways in order to suit the specific purposes of the current research project.

The corpus was initially built starting from the isolation of the only element which the original text and the two adaptations clearly have in common, which is the dialogues. The first volume of G. R. R. Martin's book series is composed by 71 chapters, each of them narrated in third person from the point of view of one of the eight main characters of the novel: four male characters (Eddard Stark, Tyrion Lannister, Jon Snow, Bran Stark) and four female characters (Catelyn Stark, Daenerys Targaryen, Arya Stark and Sansa Stark), plus a prologue chapter which is narrated from the point of view of a minor character, Will, a member of the Night's Watch. A quick look at the list of chapters in Martin's book reveals that the number of chapters narrated from the point of view of the female characters is 31, while those narrated from the point of view of the male characters are 40. In order to prepare the corpus for the analysis, all the dialogues were isolated and tagged according to the characters who perform them. The act of isolating all the dialogues in the novel was helped by the fact that Martin constantly uses a simple and clear narrative style during the entire novel, which favors direct speech over indirect speech and generally avoids narrative ambiguity.

In the case of the graphic novel adaptation, the whole textual component of the graphic novel (which means balloons, captions, and every other possible textual element that is meant to be read and does not represent a drawing element) was typed manually, since it was impossible to use any text recognition software that could automatically extract the text from the graphic novel. At the same time, the typed text was tagged in relation to the characters who perform the dialogues. In addition, all the panels were

¹⁴ George R. R. Martin, *A Game of Thrones: Book One of "A Song of Ice and Fire"* (New York: Bantam Books, 1996).

¹⁵ Daniel Abraham, *George R. R. Martin: A Game of Thrones: The Graphic Novel*, vol. 1-4 (New York: Bantam Books, 2012), 5.

¹⁶ David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, *Game of Thrones: The Complete First Season* (New York: HBO Home Entertainment, 2012).

carefully examined and categorized in terms of visibility of male or female characters, as an attempt to quantitatively determine how often male characters were portrayed compared to female characters.

Thanks to a huge fanbase and the availability of materials about the HBO production on the Internet, it was possible to find online the scripts of all the episodes of the first season, which were accurately checked through a comparison with the original audio of the episodes of the TV series.¹⁷ Starting from the online scripts, a section of the corpus based on the dialogues of all the characters in the series was developed. While it was possible to check the accuracy of the scripts, there was no certainty that the scripts were original, which means that there was no way to check the authenticity of the stage directions and the scene comments; consequently, both stage directions and scene comments were excluded from the analysis. Instead, in order to find a quantifiable way to compare the importance given to all the viewpoint characters in this specific retelling of Martin's story, the screen time of all the characters collected in 2013 by StannisEndGame, a member of A Forum of Ice and Fire, the forum section of the popular fansite Westeros.org, was taken into consideration.¹⁸

After the corpus was collected and its content tagged, the corpus linguistics analysis was conducted through the use of the software *Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC2015)*¹⁹ which operates through a comparison of the vocabulary used in a given corpus with a semantically tagged dictionary composed by about 6,400 words, word stems and emoticons. LIWC analyzes the data according to 90 different categories related to grammar, linguistic variables and psychological processes which are included in the internal dictionary.²⁰ For the sake of the current analysis, some of the most common parameters (word count, number of words per sentence, and percentage of words with more than 6 letters,) which are typically used for corpus linguistics analysis, were taken into consideration. In addition, the corpus was analyzed in terms of *analytical thinking*, a summary variable offered by LIWC and based on previous research (Pennebaker et al., 2014). The *analytical thinking* variable is related to large samples of writing which were analyzed in terms of “categorical versus dynamic thinking”.²¹ More specifically, according to Pennebaker, categorical thinking writers “methodically define and categorize thoughts and experiences. The writing is structured and largely impersonal but, at the same time, ponderous”.²² On the other hand, a more dynamic writing style “is far more personal and works to tell a story. The language is more informal and simple, using shorter words. Every sentence has multiple verbs, which has the effect of making the story more alive”.²³ LIWC converts the results to a percentile scale in which the higher the number, the more an analyzed text results “categorical;” on the other hand, a text that obtains a lower number can be interpreted as more “dynamic”.²⁴

¹⁷ <https://genius.com/artists/Game-of-thrones>, accessed 10 November 2018.

¹⁸ <https://asoiaf.westeros.org/index.php?/topic/94295-a-game-of-screentime/>, accessed 10 November 2018.

¹⁹ James W. Pennebaker et al., *Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count: LIWC2015* (Austin: Pennebaker Conglomerates, 2015). Available from www.LIWC.net.

²⁰ For more information on the analysis conducted by LIWC, see James W. Pennebaker et al., *The Development and Psychometric Properties of LIWC2015* (Austin: University of Texas at Austin, 2015).

²¹ James W. Pennebaker, *The Secret Life of Pronouns: What Our Words Say about Us* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 285.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 286.

²⁴ Pennebaker et al., *Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count: LIWC2015*, 22. It is important to add that, according to the already mentioned research conducted by Pennebaker et al., texts written in a categorical style are usually more rewarded at the academic level compared to more dynamic ones (see also Pennebaker, *The Secret Life of Pronouns*, 286). However, the research only refers to writing samples in an academic context, which means that further investigation needs to be conducted in order to ascertain the degree of effectiveness of this tool in relation to dialogues or spoken texts. Having said that, I personally believe that the data analyzed in the present research, which show the striking difference in terms of results found in relation to the characteristics of the language used by male and female characters as well as the general consistency found in the three different versions of *A Game of Thrones*, still deserve to be taken into consideration.

3. Data analysis

The following tables report the findings from the corpus linguistics analysis. The results obtained show a marked imbalance in terms of language performed by male and female characters, and a striking resemblance of such a disparity across the three different versions of Martin’s story.

	GoT dialogues		GNA dialogues		TVS dialogues	
	Male Characters	Female Characters	Male Characters	Female Characters	Male Characters	Female Characters
Word count (%)	81890 (84%)	15026 (16%)	37093 (76%)	11606 (24%)	34997 (79%)	9508 (21%)
Words/sentence	11,02	10,59	7,44	7,01	6,68	6,22
Words > 6 letters (%)	9,95	8,52	9,94	9,25	10,14	9,05
Analytical thinking (%)	39,58	23,20	36,95	25,11	32,55	17,50

Tab. 1: Comparison between the dialogues included in Martin’s novel *A Game of Thrones* and its two adaptations.

The first table shows a comparison between the dialogues performed by male and female characters across the three different versions of G. R. R. Martin’s *A Game of Thrones*, where “GoT” stands for the original book version, “GNA” refers to the graphic novel adaptation published by Dynamite Entertainment, and “TVS” means the TV series broadcast by HBO. All the characters (the eight viewpoint characters as well as all the minor characters) are included in this analysis. The numbers in bold are the highest values in each pair. In the first row, the table shows the word count of all the dialogues divided between male and female characters in the three different versions of Martin’s story, and the relative percentages. The results are evident: the female characters only perform between 16 and 24% of the dialogues in the story, with a remarkable similarity between the novel and the two adaptations.

The second and third rows show the results respectively in terms of number of words per sentence and percentage of words with more than 6 letters, again comparing the results between male and female characters in the three versions of *A Game of Thrones*. While the difference between the figures related to the male characters and those related to the female characters is less conspicuous, in each and every case the male characters’ utterances are characterized by having longer sentences and using longer words compared to the female counterparts.

The fourth row refers to the LIWC variable *analytical thinking*, and it shows again an important difference in terms of language adopted by the male characters compared to the female characters in the novel, the graphic novel, and the TV series. According to the results, while all the numbers obtained are relatively low, the male characters use a language that is evidently (as well as consistently) higher compared to the female characters in terms of formality as well as logical and hierarchical thinking.

	Male viewpoint characters					Female viewpoint characters				
	Eddard	Tyrion	Jon	Bran	AVG	Catelyn	Daenerys	Sansa	Arya	AVG

Word count (%)	Go T	10378	7851	3919	1699	5961,75	6496	3404	2220	1590	<i>3427,50</i>
	G N A	4818	4132	1885	710	2886,25	3502	1903	1050	780	<i>1808,75</i>
	T V S	3453	3891	1234	567	2286,25	1709	1306	831	771	<i>1154,25</i>
Word s / sente nce	Go T	10,34	11,49	9,18	9,44	<i>10,11</i>	11,46	9,81	12,13	9,03	10,61
	G N A	7,27	8,04	5,73	5,55	6,65	7,83	6,12	6,25	5,17	<i>6,34</i>
	T V S	6,42	7,21	5,51	4,93	6,02	6,73	5,63	4,92	4,76	<i>5,51</i>
Word s > 6 letter s	Go T	10,58	10,15	8,62	7,42	9,19	9,96	7,70	9,41	6,86	<i>8,48</i>
	G N A	10,75	10,31	9,23	6,34	9,16	10,79	7,20	9,62	6,92	<i>8,63</i>
	T V S	10,98	11,67	7,94	8,29	9,72	9,01	7,50	8,42	6,49	<i>7,86</i>
Anal ytical thinki ng (%)	Go T	34,64	33,16	20,37	25,35	28,38	28,40	16,97	6,95	16,47	<i>17,20</i>
	G N A	32,71	31,25	14,30	13,32	22,90	29,49	15,10	8,30	11,16	<i>16,01</i>
	T V S	35,08	35,16	8,15	8,15	21,64	19,63	6,90	2,07	11,62	<i>10,06</i>

Tab. 2: Comparison between the dialogues included in Martin’s novel *A Game of Thrones* and its two adaptations with specific reference to the eight viewpoint characters.

Tab. 2 shows a more detailed overview of the analysis described in Table 1. In this case, while the four parameters considered (word count, words per sentence, percentage of words with more than 6 letters, and *analytical thinking*) are the same, the characters included in the comparison are not all the male and female characters that appear in Martin’s novel and its two adaptations, but only the eight viewpoint characters from the novel. The results from the analysis of the language used by each point-of-view character are averaged in the two AVG columns (one for the four male characters and one for the four female characters,) and the higher value of each pair is in bold. It is important to point out that, by dividing the corpus in a number of much smaller sub-corpora, the reliability of the data analysis might be affected (the rule of thumb is that the larger the corpus analyzed, the more reliable the results). However, in this table it is possible to notice that only in one case do the female characters ‘perform better’ than their male counterparts. Except for the number of words per sentence in the original version of *A Game of Thrones*, where the female characters have a slight advantage over the other four viewpoint characters, nowhere else do the characters of Catelyn Stark, Daenerys Targaryen, Sansa and Arya Stark have the opportunity to pronounce more words than Eddard Stark, Tyrion Lannister, Jon Snow, Bran

Stark, or use a language characterized by more words per sentence, longer words, or else show a higher degree of *analytical thinking* through the language they use.

		Male characters	%	Female characters	%
GoT	Number of chapters per POV character	40	56	31	44
	Chapter word count per POV character	157.631	54	132.224	46
GNA	Word count (balloons only)	37.093	76	11.606	24
	Number of panels in which any male or female characters are visible	2.815	66	1.451	34
TVS	Screen time in minutes	649:45	74	225:00	26
	Screen time in minutes (POV characters only)	234:00	59	164:47	41

Tab. 3: Comparison between male and female characters in terms of general visibility in the novel, the graphic novel and the TV series adaptation of *A Game of Thrones*.

The table above (Tab. 3) shows an attempt at comparing the general visibility of the male and female characters in the three versions of *A Game of Thrones* examined in the present research. This table offers a summary of all the data obtained from the corpus which are not directly related to the dialogues but can be still considered relevant in order to understand the power relations and the degree of agency between male and female characters in Martin’s story. The main reason this table was created is because, while analyzing dialogues is a useful way to understand who is really talking and who has more often the role of the passive listener, it is also true that dialogues only constitute one of the elements with which these three different media are made. As a consequence, in the case of the novel, in order to add to the analysis also the narrative component that accompanies the dialogues, the first two rows show the difference, between male and female characters, in terms of number of chapters narrated and specific word count. For the graphic novel adaptation, the third row shows the word count for all the male and the female characters in relation to the balloons only; in the next row, due to the specific features of the comic medium, the panel was considered as the unit of measure, and the presence of male and female characters was traced in each panel (in a way that can be comparable to screen time in the TV series), in order to obtain the total number of panels in which male and female characters are visible.

Finally, and as already mentioned above, the screen time data offered by StannisEndGame on *A Forum of Ice and Fire* on the website Westeros.org have been added to the analysis, in order to take into consideration the visibility on the screen of all the male and the female characters of the HBO TV series adaptation. The author of the analysis explains that he has considered as screen time only the actual time in which every character is visible on screen (with the exclusion of walk-on characters), rather than the length of the scenes in which each character is included. Moreover, he gives “characters screentime for ‘deadtime’ when the whole body is still intact. Khal Drogo [i.e. the leader of the Dothraki tribe]’s corpse got screentime, Ned [i.e. Eddard Stark]’s head dit [*sic*] not”.²⁵

For the purposes of this research, the fifth row in Table 3 refers to all the screen time of all the male characters versus the female characters, while the sixth and last row only includes the screen time of the eight viewpoint characters.

In order to make Tab. 3 as clear as possible, each raw result is paired with its relative percentage number, and the higher values between male and female characters are in bold. As the table shows, even

²⁵ Ibid., 286.

without considering the dialogues only, the two adaptations of George R. R. Martin’s novel *A Game of Thrones* faithfully reiterate the imbalance between male and female characters: the male characters have more and longer chapters in Martin’s original novel; they also pronounce more words and are visible in more panels in the graphic novel, and they have more screen time in the HBO TV adaptation. In other words, the two adaptations of Martin’s novel faithfully transpose the same disparity, in terms of gender, that can be found in the original novel.

As an attempt to offer a preliminary analysis of the linguistic patterns that can be found in the collected corpus, a keyword analysis of the language employed by each of the eight point-of-view characters in the story was conducted.

	Arya	Bran	Catelyn	Daenerys	Eddard	Jon	Sansa	Tyrion
GoT	t (45)	go (21)	robb (20)	drogo (25)	robert (65)	ghost (22)	t (58)	bronn (8)
	liar (8)	t (33)	riverrun (15)	jorah (18)	baelish (12)	sam (14)	please (24)	mord (6)
	nymeria (6)	summer (10)	petyr (9)	dragon (20)	jory (14)	t (59)	prince (14)	my (158)
	syrio (7)	hodor (8)	rodrik (11)	sun (13)	grace (29)	chain (7)	i (124)	i (321)
	i (98)	can (21)	frey (9)	viserys (11)	final (7)	s (84)	don (20)	gold (17)
	mycah (5)	rickon (5)	walder (9)	stars (9)	<i>arya (19)</i>	don (23)	ll (24)	dwarfs (5)
	don (16)	brandon (6)	<i>lysa (13)</i>	khal (18)	this (83)	bran (14)	marry (7)	grumkins (5)
	m (17)	didn (7)	lannisters (17)	blood (20)		read (6)	she (24)	shagga (9)
	going (9)	fly (5)	luwin (10)	<i>doreah (7)</i>		night (18)	joffrey (12)	prefer (7)
	hate (6)	he (40)	brynden (6)	<i>duur (5)</i>			queen (13)	wine (14)
	didn (7)		prisoner (6)	<i>maz (5)</i>			father (24)	rock (13)
	fat (5)		bran (18)	<i>mirri (5)</i>			grace (13)	casterly (11)
	a (60)		karstark (6)	please (15)			wouldn (7)	flagon (5)
	says (8)			me (60)			<i>arya (9)</i>	timett (5)
	was (27)			bride (5)			want (18)	
				him (48)			septa (6)	
				maegi (7)			dress (5)	
				eggs (5)				
				rhaego (5)				
				stallion (6)				
				them (33)				
				gift (6)				
				am (19)				
				i (146)				
				bring (12)				
				life (11)				
				khalasar (6)				

Tab. 4: Keywords for the eight point-of-view characters in Martin’s *A Game of Thrones*.

	Arya	Bran	Catelyn	Daenerys	Eddard	Jon	Sansa	Tyrion
GNA	t (27)	hodor (6)	walder (8)	drogo (17)	robert (39)	ghost (10)	please (16)	i (196)
	liar (5)	go (13)	robb (12)	jorah (12)	arryn (18)	t (35)	t (26)	mord (6)
	syrio (5)	stories (5)	petyr (6)	dragon (15)	jory (6)	sam (6)	prince (8)	dwarfs (5)
	says (6)	t (18)	must (24)	stars (7)	justice (8)	bran (11)	joffrey (9)	bronn (6)
	don (9)	summer (5)		viserys (8)		uncle (7)	don (10)	
	i (48)	i (45)		khal (11)		s (48)	want (11)	
		want (9)		sun (8)			oh (5)	
				maegi (5)			grace (7)	

Tab. 5: Keywords for the eight point-of-view characters in the graphic novel adaptation of Martin’s novel.

	Arya	Bran	Catelyn	Daenerys	Eddard	Jon	Sansa	Tyrion
TVS	liar (12)	robb (5)	ned (9)	stars (8)	baratheon (11)	sam (7)	please (15)	mord (8)
	fat (5)	family (5)		sun (9)	robert (17)	know (17)	<i>arya (7)</i>	bronn (5)
	m (14)			drogo (8)	hey (5)	uncle (5)	t (28)	vale (9)
	i (50)			jorah (5)			grace (9)	
	says (5)			dragon (7)			stop (7)	
				khal (8)			he (27)	
				stop (7)			i (53)	
				am (8)				

Tab. 6: Keywords for the eight point-of-view characters in the TV series adaptation of Martin’s novel.

The three tables above (Tabs 4-6) show the keywords for the eight viewpoint characters in Martin’s *A Game of Thrones* from the novel (GoT), the graphic novel (GNA), and the TV series (TVS) respectively. The keywords are based on a comparison between the language of each of the viewpoint characters against a reference corpus composed of the other seven viewpoint characters in each of the three versions of Martin’s story. In the tables, the keywords are in descending order according to keyness, and for each keyword the frequency of occurrences is written in parenthesis. The data analysis was conducted through the use of the corpus linguistics software *AntConc*²⁶ (Keyness=Log Likelihood, $p < 0.05$ +Bonferroni), and the minimum frequency for each keyword is set at five.²⁷ Since it would be impossible, for sheer lack of space, to analyze in detail all the keywords included in the tables above,²⁸ only what might be considered as the overall most striking feature of these keyword lists will be discussed here. More specifically, the three lists include an impressive number of proper nouns, which normally would not

²⁶ Lawrence Anthony, *AntConc* (version 3.5.8) [Computer Software] (Tokyo: Waseda University, 2019). Available from <https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software>.

²⁷ See Jonathan Culpeper, “Keyness: Words, Parts-of-speech and Semantic Categories in the Character-talk of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*”, *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 14.1 (2009), 29-59.

²⁸ Yet, the keywords in the list are very helpful in order to understand some of the main features of the characters’ storylines and their personalities. For example, the predominance of the word “please” in Sansa Stark’s column in all three versions of Martin’s story reflects her submissive role as a stereotypical princess (the same keyword is also interestingly included in the list of keywords, from the novel, that refers to Daenerys Targaryen), and the predominant role of the word “Robert” in the three keyword lists related to Eddard Stark underlines the latter’s unfaltering sense of duty in defending King Robert Baratheon against all his political enemies.

represent a surprising aspect of any keyword list, except for the fact that the vast majority of these keywords (marked in bold in the tables) refer to male characters, while, on the other hand, only a limited number of them (marked in italics) refer to female characters. This could be considered as a confirmation of what has already been stated above in terms of power and gender relations in Martin’s story, since it demonstrates that all the eight viewpoint characters tend to continuously talk about male characters, while the female characters are clearly relegated to having an ancillary role.²⁹ Other examples of this general tendency can be found in some keywords such as, for example, “sun” and “stars” in Daenerys Targaryen’s column, which are typically used in combination to form an epithet for her husband, Khal Drogo (“my sun and stars”), or in the higher number of common nouns which unequivocally refer to male characters (for example, “prince” or “khal,” the latter being the word used to refer to male leaders in the Dothraki language) compared to those which refer exclusively to female characters (for example, “queen”), or else in the comparatively higher use of the pronoun “he” compared to “she,” as can be noticed in the keyword list tables above.

4. Conclusions and further research

After more than twenty years since the publication of the first volume of George R. R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the role and meaning of the female characters in the fictional world of Westeros is still hotly debated. In the “gritty realism” that the author portrays in his fantasy series, according to Caroline Spector:

Martin has created a brutal world where unspeakable acts are commonplace, where the shares of power allotted to men and women are clearly out of balance, where women must struggle, steal, and fight for every ounce of autonomy ... In the midst of what appears to be a traditional male-power fantasy about war and politics, [Martin] serves up a grim, realistic, and harrowing depiction of what happens when women aren’t fully empowered in a society. In doing so, by creating such diverse and fully rendered female characters and thrusting them into this grim and bitter world, Martin has created a subversively feminist tale.³⁰

Indeed, by looking at different retellings of Martin’s fantasy series in terms of language employed by the characters in the story, the fictional world of *A Game of Thrones* can definitely be considered as dominated by male characters, with the female characters relegated to roles of secondary importance. However, Judith Butler’s idea of the essential performativity of gender, with people speaking in a certain way not because they are male or female, but because they are supposed to adhere to a masculine or a feminine identity which is based on the social conventions that are followed by everyone in relation to the society that people belong to, can be fruitfully applied here.³¹ In fact, this idea of gender performativity can closely be linked to the way gender is portrayed by media in general, and a global phenomenon like George R. R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* can have a strong impact in the way people see themselves through the characters in the fantasy series.

²⁹ While proper nouns in keyword lists are usually considered of secondary importance by corpus linguistics researchers, Culpeper points out that “[i]n fact, in fictional texts, they may be of some interest, as they relate to key aspects of the fictional world.” (Jonathan Culpeper, “Keywords and Characterization: An Analysis of Six Characters in *Romeo and Juliet*”, in David L. Hoover, et al., eds., *Digital Literary Studies: Corpus Approaches to Poetry, Prose, and Drama* (London: Routledge, 2014), 18.

³⁰ Caroline Spector, “Power and Feminism in Westeros,” in Lowder, ed., *Beyond the Wall*, 187.

³¹ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Some organizations are currently on the lookout to find any positive change in the entertainment industry in relation to gender bias, and unfortunately, over the last four decades, things seem not to have changed. See, for example, the research conducted by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (Seejane.org), which focuses on the entertainment production for children until the age of 11, but still offers a rather appalling portrait of the pervasiveness of unconscious bias in terms of gender and race in the media.

It is possible to argue that Martin is developing a fictional world that resembles a medieval context in which gender inequality is rampant (for example, by relying on stereotypical assumptions related to a medieval setting dominated by a male-based military society, perhaps in accordance to the expected background knowledge of the intended audience) and where the female characters in the series fight for their own liberation from gender constraints. On the other hand, it is also important to point out that, since *A Game of Thrones* is a work of fiction, its medieval-looking fantasy world could have been characterized as more egalitarian from a gender perspective, with male and female characters as equally visible and having the same degree of agency.

Nonetheless, as the results from the corpus linguistics analysis show, all the three versions of *A Game of Thrones* are characterized by a gender bias that relegates the female characters to a secondary role, forcing them to be listeners rather than speakers, with a language that betrays their submissive role without offering them an opportunity, at least in that fictional world, to be on par with their male interlocutors. The attempt at keeping the two adaptations as close as possible to the source text, or the fact that G. R. R. Martin was personally involved in the development of both the graphic novel and the TV series adaptations, could have been possible constraints that led to maintaining the gender imbalance found in the original novel.³² Nevertheless, the fact is that, whether the story is told in the graphic novel form, the TV series form or the original novel version, the same kind of linguistic inequality is identifiable, and this can be considered as an example of how easily gender bias can be accepted in the process of transposing a literary work into a different medium, and then performed and shared across some of the most popular contemporary media without paying close attention to the social and cultural implications this act might imply.³³

As already mentioned in the first section, given the complexity of the corpus examined, the present research programmatically focuses on a quantitative analysis of the language employed by the characters in three different media versions of Martin's *A Game of Thrones*, with the goal of understanding how male and female characters are active verbally, and whether the gender imbalance found in the novel changes in terms of intersemiotic translation. It would be of great interest to further expand the research by developing a more thorough analysis of the patriarchal discourse in and around *A Game of Thrones*. Such a study could help understand, for example, in what ways the adaptations might have been conceived, in terms of framing and point of view, in order to primarily satisfy the male gaze; likewise, a paratextual analysis related to the media adaptations, for example in relation to interviews with directors, creators, and actors, but also trailers, sneak peeks, teasers and "making of" documentaries of the adaptations, could be complementary research directions capable of further revealing the importance and visibility of the male and female characters in both the graphic novel adaptation and the TV series adaptation of Martin's *A Game of Thrones*.

³² It would be interesting to investigate whether the same gender imbalance can be found in the last three seasons of the TV series produced by HBO, since they are all based on original content written by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss that is not included in the original book series *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

³³ The analysis here described does not take into consideration the conspicuous absence of diversity among the characters of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which is another very serious issue in terms of bias, this time from a racial perspective. To tell the truth, the almost complete lack of non-white characters among the protagonists of the first volume of the series, *A Game of Thrones*, would make such a corpus linguistics analysis virtually impossible to do.