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Title: Constructing Experts without Expertise: Fiscal Reporting in the British Press, 2010-2016

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Abstract: Economic news uses fiscal experts to construct discourse about government deficits, debt, spending, and services. Most previous studies have assumed that knowledge and understanding are key to the construction of economic expertise in news. This study undertakes a quantitative analysis to discover how the British press represents three high-profile fiscal experts: the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), the National Audit Office (NAO), and the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR). It analyses 21,515 articles published in the *Financial Times, Independent, Guardian, The Daily Telegraph,* and *Times* between May 2010 and December 2016. Surprisingly, the results show that explicit constructions of knowing, understanding, or even being expert are rarely associated with the experts themselves. Markers of social position – being "independent" or "respected" – are much more prominent than indicators of technical knowledge or deep understanding of government finances. Discourses of economic expertise in news are less technical and more social than one would assume from previous scholarship. Journalists use expert sources in the text not to confront complexity, but rather to invoke the experts' networked positions. Press text constructs expert judgments as superior by representing the experts as properly positioned to judge, not by representing their judgments as being better informed.

Introduction

Citizens learn what they know about the economy primarily from the news (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2015, Van Dalen et al., 2019) and have witnessed a growing reliance on experts across news (Albæk, 2011). When democratically deliberating, citizens must decide whether to heed such experts (Fink and Schudson, 2014, Turner, 2001). For example, citizen support for Austerity as a post-2008 choice relies on how fiscal matters – government spending and taxation – are reported in the press. Studying economic expertise in news uncovers mechanisms by which privileged actors construct such economic knowledge.

Media scholarship has long studied how journalists use expert sources in their practice (Fenton et al., 1997, Steele, 1995). Relationships between scientific and medical experts and journalists are particularly well studied (Boyce, 2007, Briggs and Hallin, 2016, Furlan, 2017, Saikkonen, 2017). But there has been far less investigation of expert sources in economic news, despite economic news being particularly expert-dependent (Manning, 2013, Tambini, 2010). Indeed, where scholars have studied fiscal coverage in news experts have featured often in the analyses (Berry, 2016b, Berry, 2016c, Dellepiane-Avellaneda, 2015, Fitzgerald and O'Rourke, 2016, Schiffrin and Fagan, 2013, Vaara, 2014)

Whilst these studies have illustrated how economic experts create discourse, the characterization of fiscal experts themselves has not been directly investigated. Furthermore, expert studies typically use qualitative methods that are better at interrogating individual instances than assessing experts as a widespread phenomenon. Past research makes many very reasonable assumptions and assertions: that the use of experts is important in fiscal reporting, that such use is widespread and consistent, and that their discourses within text frame fiscal debates. The study here asks more basic questions.

Are fiscal experts indeed widespread and consistently cited in economic news? And what makes a fiscal expert an "expert," by the logic of the text?

This study investigates British three fiscal experts in the British press: the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), the National Audit Office (NAO), and the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS). It finds widespread and consistent use of these three particular experts. But it also finds that explicit constructions of expertise – of knowing or understanding, or simply being called an expert – are rare. Of the three, the OBR is by far the least likely to be characterized as an expert, instead it is explicitly described the "independent watchdog" of government. By contrast – and despite being the only classic "think tank," external to Government – little is made of the IFS's independence. When characterized in the press, what makes these experts expert is not what they know or understand but their social relationship to others with authority.

How do these experts adjudicate on government fiscal management in the text? Despite being explicitly described in the text as an "independent watchdog" of government, the OBR is the least likely of the three to express critical views of government fiscal management. And while the job of criticism falls to the NAO, its association with one of the key fiscal programmes of the period – namely, Austerity – was seven- and eight-fold less than the IFS or OBR. In other words, the NAO criticised the government, but not for Austerity; the OBR was most associated with Austerity but it did not criticise.

This study contributes new understanding about how journalists and their expert sources together construct economic knowledge in the press. It argues that the press is not constructing expertise *per se*, but rather constructing characteristics of socialization in the network of elites: esteem and connectedness. Markers of social position – independence or respectability among peers – are more prominent in press representation than markers of

knowledge or understanding of complex fiscal problems and positions. Relationship markers like independence are used more often than technical ones like expertise, even where independence is not demonstrated with corresponding actions. If the presence of experts in fiscal news is a reaction to the complexity and specialisation of modern state finances, there is no indication here that greater knowledge and understanding is being shared with readers. The fundamental challenge for democratic participation by the non-expert citizen in debates like Austerity remains, then, and would not necessarily be improved by more-of-the-same fiscal news.

Journalism, Experts, and the Construction of the Economy

How does Journalism Constructs Experts?

Expertise has been studied in academic fields as diverse as: computer science, sociology, education, organisational studies, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and communication. It is some combination of knowledge, experience, socialisation, and authorisation, theorised as a property that actors acquire with practice (Collins and Evans, 2007, Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 2005) or as a performance that they enact within their social networks (Carr, 2010, Eyal, 2013). It is conceived of in terms of practices of knowledge production, the institutional segregation of the expert from the inexpert, and reliance on discourses of professionalism (Evetts et al., 2006). Key amongst its contemporary professional discourses are accountability repertoires such as audits, targets and performance indicators (Evetts, 2003). These repertoires position the source as authoritative and form the basis of claims both within networks and outside them (Gendron et al., 2007).

The presence of experts has been increasing in news for decades, where they offer wider-ranging comment on political and social problems (Albæk et al., 2003). Science and health journalism uses accredited experts to clarify technical details, provide context and speculate about implications (Conrad, 1999). Science and health reporters tend to approach experts and their authority from a relatively non-critical position (Furlan, 2017, Saikkonen, 2017). This tendency has led to journalists failing to sufficiently scrutinise or challenge dubious claims to medical expertise in the name of "balance" (see Boyce, 2007 on the "MMR scare"). In news text experts frame, corroborate, speculate, or explain, but in person journalists also use experts simply to understand the story they are writing (Albæk, 2011).

The relatively smaller body of literature concerning economic journalists and experts mirrors much of the critique of economic news in general. Economic news since the Financial Crash of 2008 has been dominated by experts and their discourses of expertise (Schiffrin and Fagan, 2013, Berry, 2016b). In highest demand immediately following economic turbulence, these expert sources can have ulterior motives for the comment they provide (Manning, 2013). Financial journalists have a high level of dependency on expert sources (Tambini, 2010) as well as low levels of source diversity (Berry, 2019) partly owing to the complexity of this specialised beat (Doyle, 2006). As with medical journalists, economic journalists can fail to be sufficiently critical of their experts (Cawley, 2012). The literature includes interpretations of financial journalists as captured by financial experts (Kollmeyer, 2004, Marron et al., 2010). Expert sources tend to sponsor narrow neoliberal perspectives (Rafter, 2014) by providing 'comment' as well as 'facts' offer legitimacy for neoliberal projects (Vaara, 2014, Maesse, 2018). And Chadwick et al. (2018) have demonstrated that BBC journalists extend robust and consistent constructions of authority to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, one of the expert bodies studied here.

How does News Construct the Economy?

Economic discourses rely on constructions of expertise, just as discourses of expertise help construct economics as a body of knowledge (McCloskey, 1990, Hirschman, 2016). This is not only a matter of authority but also a legitimising strategy offering credentials as a guarantee of quality for whatever news text follows. Economic experts construct their expertise with information, but also by being willing to answer the question 'why,' not only describing, but also interpreting (Pelsmaekers, 2016). Mediated opinions of economic experts contribute to public discourse about the economy and especially fiscal policy (Dellepiane-Avellaneda, 2015, Vaara, 2014).

Like so much news, economic news has a focus on change, an appetite for negativity, a preoccupation with the future, and a neoliberal outlook. · It responds to change in the economy rather than stability (Damstra and Boukes, 2018, Nadeau et al., 1999) and tends to focus on the future rather than the past (Soroka et al., 2015). This certainly makes sense, not only because the same has been found for news in general (Hansen, 2016, Neiger and Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2016), but because of the anxiety inherent in financial markets, where future gains and losses are always uncertain. Van Dalen et al. (2019) have argued that characterisations of uncertainty have increased in economic news as it has become more mainstream. Financial news expresses negativity about the economy more often than a positive tone (Damstra and Boukes, 2018, Fogarty, 2005, van Dalen et al., 2017, Van Dalen et al., 2019). And many studies have argued that financial news is ideologically aligned with the neoliberal views of business (Berry, 2016c, Chakravartty and Schiller, 2011, Berry, 2019).

News offered relatively consistent characterisations of government economic management in response to the Crash of 2008 and the subsequent Euro Crisis. Vliegenthart

(2018) has found frames consistently aligned with financial interests across Dutch newspapers. Irish newspapers framed the public sector as a cost and a burden domestically and constructed it as a market-economy "reality" (Cawley, 2012). Irish television framed the Euro Crisis as a problem of petulant Mediterranean states refusing to cooperate with European leadership and global markets (Cullinane, 2018). Quiring and Weber (2012) have argued that German television news coverage was influential in legitimating the German government's economic policies. And Vaara (2014) has argued that Finnish media constructed legitimacy during the Eurozone crisis with position-based authorizations, including economic experts.

Post-crisis, frames in European English-language news have contributed to the legitimisation of fiscal consolidation and Austerity programmes. In the Irish press the public sector has been framed as both a cost and a burden, insulated from market reality and in need of reform to bring it closer to private-sector models (Cawley, 2012, Marron, 2019). Mercille (2014) similarly found Irish press editorial in favour of public debt and deficit reduction through expenditure reduction, in lieu of macro-economic alternatives such as increased taxation or Keynesian stimuli. By the 2010 General Election the British press had also settled on an argument for fiscal consolidation, describing an existential threat that the UK would be abandoned by international creditors because of New Labour's profligacy (Berry, 2016c, Pirie, 2012). Coalition Austerity was framed as painful yet necessary, and news constructed citizens as obliged to endure it (Basu, 2017).

What are the IFS, NAO, and OBR?

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) is very frequently cited in the UK news media, where it is broadly regarded as both academically-rigorous and politically-neutral (Lewis and

Cushion, 2017, Chadwick et al., 2018). Legally registered as a charity, the microeconomic think tank undertakes a wide-range of UK public policy analysis with the aim of informing public debate, offering its research to policy makers, practitioners, and other think tanks. IFS funding sources include the UK's Economic and Social Research Council and various UK Government departments (together providing over half of 2017 funding), as well as the European Research Council, some international organisations, and an assortment of foundations and charities (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2018, p.14). The IFS Executive is selected by Council Members, in turn elected by a general membership subscribing via monthly donation. The IFS directly employs an average of 87 staff in London as well as a few dozen scholars based at UK universities, all indirectly and on a part-time basis (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2018, p.18). Based on their research, staff publish frequently on the IFS website: briefing notes, reports, scholarly journal articles, working papers, a peer-reviewed journal, budget analyses, and taxation reviews.

In contrast, the National Audit Office is a government body that scrutinises public spending for Parliament.   It audits the state's finances, conducts value-for-money studies, and sets guidelines for good spending practice for government departments, agencies, and other public bodies. The NAO is very large, with a staff of approximately 800 people. It is led by its Comptroller & Auditor General, who is an Officer of the House of Commons, jointly agreed by the Prime Minister and a cross-party committee, and royally-appointed for a ten-year term. On the NAO website, the C&AG and his staff are described as "independent of government. They are not civil servants and do not report to a minister" (National Audit Office, 2016). According to The Budget Responsibility and National Audit Act 2011, the C&AG "has complete discretion in the carrying out of the functions of that office" (UK Parliament, 2011, p.6). For a task as large, technical, and important and scrutinizing

government accounts, the NAO has been given a stability of leadership tenure, cross-party input into the executive, and a sizeable, dedicated staff.

Like the NAO, the Office for Budget Responsibility is also a public body. It is far smaller, with only 31 permanent staff (Office for Budget Responsibility, 2019), and therefore has a "need to draw on forecasting and analytical resources across Government. The Treasury, DWP and HMRC will allocate appropriate analytical resources" (Office for Budget Responsibility, 2017, pp. 4,5). The OBR undertakes economic and fiscal forecasting, evaluates performance against targets, assesses "long-term stability" of the public finances and evaluates "fiscal risk," and scrutinises the costing of tax and welfare measures at each parliamentary Budget. This work necessitates much projection into an unknowable future based on heterogeneous data sets, so much so that risk assessments regularly accompany OBR projections. The Treasury established the OBR's Charter, and at any time can add whatever material it considers appropriate into that Charter, subsequently subject to Parliamentary approval. The OBR's Chair and two members of the Board require the additional consent of the cross-party Treasury Committee whilst the remaining Board members are appointed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer alone. The standard against which the OBR must judge responsible fiscal behaviour is also set by the Treasury as the "fiscal mandate" – the means by which the Treasury has decided it will meet future fiscal objectives (UK Parliament, 2011).

All three organizations provide broad, technical oversight of the government's finances and fiscal management. The NAO does this by auditing financial statements, certifying accounts and passing judgement on whether or not they public funds have been used efficiently and effectively. The OBR by estimating tax and welfare costs, creating economic fore-casts, and interpreting the consequences of government fiscal management

against targets, all over defined time-horizons. And the IFS by costing how government policies affect the finances of individuals, families, generations, communities, firms, and government itself at all levels. As public bodies, both the OBR and NAO respond to specific Freedom-of-Information requests, give evidence to parliamentary committees, share their figures with MPs and civil servants, and release reports for the press. The IFS is essentially public-facing, "with the principal aim of better informing public debate on economics in order to promote the development of effective fiscal policy" (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2019). All three groups act publicly as guarantors, critics, vouchsafes, and quality marks for government policy.

But there are also important differences in mandate, focus, scope and management. Most obviously - and despite universal claims to political independence - markers of independence from the sitting government clearly cover a spectrum. Arguably, size, structure, and staffing make the OBR most vulnerable to political interference, the NAO less so, and the IFS least of all. In terms of incorporation and funding, the IFS is arguably more independent of government than the public-bodies, even appreciating significant ESRC and UK government departmental funding. There are also important differences along the time-dimension. Where the NAO conducts ex-post analyses, the OBR judges budgets ex-ante in terms of pre-defined fiscal targets. The IFS has a broad remit to approach policy analysis from either direction.

Newspapers, Computer-assisted Analysis, and Corpus-Linguistics Measures

The Newspapers

The data set analyzed in this research consists of 21,515 news articles published in the *Financial Times*, *Independent*, *Guardian*, *Telegraph* and *Times* between 17 May 2010

and 31 December 2016. The five newspapers chosen are representative of the quality press in the UK, with wide circulation and significant online presence, and cover a broad spectrum of political opinion on the left and right. All five publications have a readership skewed to the National Readership Survey's demographic classification of ABC1.   The most specialised of these is the *Financial Times*, which targets a business and banking audience and in 2013 claimed a total readership of 235,000 that skewed toward working-age males (BRAD Insight, 2019). Although less oriented toward finance, *The Guardian*, *Independent*, *Daily Telegraph*, and *Times* are more focused than other UK papers on stories about powerful individuals and institutions (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017). On the political right, the *Times* targets "an affluent AB, informed audience with a high net worth." Between them the *Times* and fellow conservative publication *The Daily Telegraph* claimed total readerships of approximately 1.7 million in 2018, with audiences that were approximately gender-balanced but skewed toward post-retirement age. On the political centre-left lie the I*ndependent* and the *Guardian*, which in 2018 claimed a total readership of 532,000 (all data BRAD Insight, 2019).

The texts were collected via Nexis as text files. Included were articles with the following anywhere in the text: "Office for Budget Responsibility," "National Audit Office," and "Institute for Fiscal Studies," and also some common mistakes made by journalists: "Office of Budget Responsibility," Office for Budgetary Responsibility," "Office of Budgetary Responsibility.," and "Institute of Fiscal Studies." A start date of 17 May 2010 because it corresponds to the public announcement of the creation of the OBR. The use of Nexis for data collection means that the focus is on print news, despite the fact that across this time period more and more people were reading online instead of in print. An assumption was made that online audiences would have been offered similar text.

Inspection of the data set showed that articles came primarily from "hard news" sections: 'business,' 'politics,' and 'economy,' but also from sections better described as 'comment,' 'opinion,' or 'editorial,' particularly from the *Financial Times*. Irrespective of section the texts sampled arguably sit on the "hard news" end of the spectrum: articles that use a factual style (Patterson, 2000) and thematic, societal-level framing (Baum, 2002) about a fiscal topic that people arguably should know in order to understand public debates (Reinemann et al., 2011). But in addition to being less time-bound, the commentary-type articles present can be expected to be more personal, present-tense oriented, informal, persuasive, and argumentative (Westin, 2002).

The data set shows similar levels of press coverage for all three bodies. Figure 1 shows the number of articles citing each by newspaper. The OBR was cited in almost ten-thousand articles over the first six-and-a half years of its lifetime, compared to approximately six- and seven-thousand articles for the NAO and IFS. There is some overlap in the reporting, as between 11% (*Independent*) and 19% (*Guardian*) of articles citing the OBR also cite the IFS, but very little overlap with the NAO, with less than 1% across all newspapers citing both. The proportion of articles in the data set from left- versus right-wing papers is comparable: 9780 for the *Guardian* and *Independent* versus 11,735 for the *Financial Times*, *Times* and *Telegraph* combined. Citation practices were remarkably similar across outlets, with all expert bodies well represented across all newspapers. In particular, all newspapers favoured the OBR compared to the other two bodies, with the exception of *the Times*, which cited the three almost equally. Concordance plotting (not shown) indicates that the OBR was typically cited three to four times more often in the months of March and November (corresponding to the Budget and Autumn Statements). The NAO and IFS were cited very evenly throughout the year, in a much less event-driven way.

Computer-Assisted Analysis

Corpus linguistics is the empirical investigation of large samples of natural language, in order to discover quantifiable patterns of lexical and grammatical use (Biber et al., 1998, Hyland et al., 2013). The approach uses computer programming or software to count linguistic instances in a representative sample of text, followed by a blend of quantitative and qualitative analysis. This study used open-source concordance software *Antconc 3.5.0* for Windows (Anthony, 2017), developed by Laurence Anthony of Waseda University. The software is well-known in corpus-linguistic scholarship: according to Google Scholar successive versions have been cited in nearly 2,000 publications to-date. McEnery and Hardie (2011) describe *Antconc* as a third-generation concordance programme that can handle very large data sets and go beyond the merely descriptive to produce sophisticated statistics for meaningful comparisons. In addition to measuring word frequencies, clusters, collocates, and concordances, *Antconc* can be used to study particular words of interest. In this study modal verbs (can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would) were explored, to understand expressions of necessity and possibility within the corpus (Palmer, 2014). All articles returned through this search were incorporated into the data set, generating 17,651,046 tokens in *AntConc*.

In order to explore how the newspaper articles in the data set compare to contemporary, formal, written English, a reference corpus was chosen. A wordlist representing Paul Baker's one-million word corpus, the BE06 (Baker, 2009, Baker, 2006) was taken directly from the Waseda University website (Anthony, 2018). The BE06 is composed of text published between 2005 and 2007 by British authors. There texts were categorized by Baker as general prose (41%), fiction (25%), press (18%) and academic writing (16%). The BE06 has been evaluated against several other commonly used reference corpora (up to

twelve billion words in size) by applied linguists. They have found that words in the BE06 appear at comparable rank to other, much larger wordlists (between 81.9% and 83.9%), and that the word classes within were almost identical (50% nouns; 22% verbs; 16% adjectives; 7% adverbs) (Brezina and Gablasova, 2013, p. 10, p. 8). After considering other reference corpora, the BE06 was selected as sound, validated and readily available comparison. Using a reference corpus of similar time, place and style but a different register (i.e. more general) than the fiscal press corpus aims to reveal words that especially reflect its character (Geluso and Hirch, 2019).

Corpus-Linguistics Measures

An initial search for the most common words in the corpus results in a word list of *n-grams* (words or phrases) and their *frequencies*. This allows the corpus to be described in-the-round, for sub-corpora within it to be compared, and comparisons to be made to the reference corpus. In addition, concordance plots indicated where search terms found in sub-corpora, and any spikes in volume of citation of the expert bodies.

Examining the corpus for unusually frequent (or *key*) and infrequent (or *negative - key*) words helps to develop a picture of what might look (un)usual in everyday speech but is (un)common in the articles. The unusual (in)frequency of words was compared to the reference corpora with two complementary measures: (1) A 4-term log-liklihood statistic that indicates that a word's keyness is significant at $p < 0.05$, and (2) an effect size measure of the percent-difference of the word's frequency between the two corpora.   The first measure of a standard statistical test in corpus linguistics, but its results are sensitive to word frequencies and corpus sizes. The second measure is a simpler comparison of

normalized frequencies, but one that it is less sensitive to absolute frequencies or corpora sizes (Gabrielatos, 2018).

Finding the most frequently occurring *clusters* of words around the OBR, NAO, and IFS gives a first indication of what they are most often described as doing, or how they are described as being, or who or what they are associated with. The analysis searched seven words to the left and right, with results reported both as absolute frequencies and as normalized ones (i.e. the absolute frequency divided by the number of words in the corpus or sub-corpora).

But to see listed which clusters occur the most frequently is not the same as understanding how significant this clustering is, which requires further statistical measures, and some comparisons to larger reference corpora. *Collocates* are words that appear near one another often in the articles, and the strength of this association is calculated as a mutual-information (MI) measure, which assesses how likely this pairing is beyond random chance. Discovering such collocations in the articles suggests which adjectives and verbs are often associated with the OBR, NAO, and IFS, and permits discussion of not only their frequency but also their statistical likelihood in language.

Fiscal Experts in the UK Press, 2010-2016

Fiscal Analysis Experts across the Press

Between its inception in 2010 and the end of 2016 the OBR was cited in 9979 articles, compared to 6009 for the NAO and 6899 for the IFS   Figure 2 shows several trends for corpus as a whole, most obviously that journalists' citation of these three units is increasing from 2011 through 2016. Whether this demonstrates an increasing use on the units depends on whether the volume of financial news overall is presumed to be steady

over the same period (not a variable measured in this project, nor easily discovered). What is clear is that the OBR is cited in the press more often than the other two.

Table 1 lists those meaningful words (i.e. not showing prepositions, pronouns, possessives or abbreviations) that are unusually frequent in the corpus, compared to the BE06. Table 1 shows top words, ranks their frequencies ranked, compares them to the BE06 rank. Many of the words with large keyness values simply reflect fiscal material: *tax, government, budget, public, spending, cuts, growth, chancellor, national, office, economy, Britain*, and *economic*. But others are less specialist: five are frequently associated with time (*time, year, years*), and especially the future (*will, next*). *Will* and *would* are modal verbs, verbs expressing subjective judgement about the likelihood of an event happening or a state existing, or some level of obligation to carry out a task (Palmer, 2014). *Will* can express inevitability, expectation, probability, capability, or habit; *would* can be simply the past tense of *will,* but *would* can also express conditions, possibilities, desires, habits, hopes, regrets, or inclinations. Table 1 suggests that the corpus as a whole has an orientation towards time and the future, which is expected for news text. The corpus also has an overall orientation towards expressing judgements, possibilities, and obligations.

Table 2 considers conspicuous absences, listing the top interesting negative keywords, compared to the *BE06*. The negative-keyness of *never* and *always* suggests that the absolute certainty is not excessively claimed. Nor is *knowledge* or *understanding* frequently addressed, despite the fact that fiscal management requires significant specialist knowledge and understanding. Whilst these texts appear to have a tendency toward predicting likelihood, they stop short of explicitly asserting ultimate certainty, or trumpeting knowledge. The avoidance of these words – despite experts being used as sources in every single article in the sampled corpus – is intriguing.

Comparing the IFS, NAO, and OBR

To understand if there are differences between fiscal expert bodies, each sub-corpora is investigated with negative keyness measures (see Table 3). Articles citing the OBR claim knowing very infrequently compared to articles citing the NAO, for which the words *information* and *know* are not even negatively key, i.e. they appear there about as often as one would expect in formal written English. Similarly, *knowledge* and *understanding* are somewhat infrequent for NAO articles, but much more infrequent for OBR and IFS articles. Articles citing the OBR are much less likely to convey claims of certainty than those of either the NAO or IFS. The IFS corpus displays an intermediate position, with claims to expertise similar to the OBR, but appear less shy about claiming certainty. While all sub-corpora show some reluctance to claim expertise and certainty, the OBR claims the least of both, the IFS more certainty that the other two, and the NAO the most expertise.

Tables 4 and 5 show adjectives and identities (some noun descriptors, some metaphors) that appear within seven words of the IFS, NAO and OBR. The OBR again shows the most consistency, cited as *independent* 14.8% of the time, and described as a *watchdog* 4.0%. Journalists almost never bother describing the NAO at all, with only a small percentage of citations warranting an adjective or metaphor. That said, it is called a *watchdog* nearly as often as the OBR, but almost never *independent*. Meanwhile, the non-governmental IFS is described as *independent* half as often as the Treasury-appointed OBR, instead readers are reminded often that it is *respected*, an adjective never assigned to either of the two governmental bodies.

Collocation scores between the cited bodies and nearby adjectives and verbs build this picture a bit more. Table 6 lists such words and the statistical likelihood that this pairing is not just random chance. Again, the OBR is strongly characterized as an *independent watchdog* with predictive, forecasting powers. Notably, OBR independence is more strongly characterized according to collocates than is IFS independence. The NAO is similarly often called a *watchdog*, but not an independent one, and it is almost as strongly associated with *warning* (a future-facing activity) as *criticizing*. The IFS is more consistently associated with *analysis* and with being *respected* than the other two.

In fact, searching for words associated with *expertise* yields even fewer results. Table 7 shows collocates of the top-ten variants of analysis, *knowing*, *understanding* and *expertise* for the policy units. Although many MI scores are comparable to those in Table 6, the frequencies are far lower in most cases. By yet another measure, expertise is hard to find in a corpus specifically defined by the citation of experts.

Finally, one of the words with a very high keyness score in the main corpus was, unsurprisingly, *austerity*. Yet despite its presence in the texts, austerity did not cluster closely to any of the bodies, and thus was not detected in the 7L/7R cluster analysis. The frequency of *austerity* in the articles indicates to what extent each body is being employed within a wider political context of public spending cuts. The normalised frequency of *austerity* shows a massive disparity between sub-corpora. By this measure the IFS articles mentioned *austerity* almost as often (89%) as OBR articles (2820 occurrences vs. 4591), while the NAO's association with the term was only 12% that of the OBR, at 337 instances found. In other words, although the IFS and the OBR both appear nearly equally frequently in articles which also use the term *austerity*, the NAO is seven-to-eight times less likely to do so.

Discussion

More Experts, Less Expertise

The IFS, NAO and OBR are relied upon by all UK papers investigated, and increasingly so over the years. This finding corroborates earlier work on experts in the press, both in the UK and in other national contexts. These articles as a whole concern themselves with the future more than is commonly found in formal English writing, again corroborating earlier studies about news in general (Neiger and Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2016, Hansen, 2016) and financial news in particular (Soroka et al., 2015). Considering that some of the text is from commentary sections and hence more present-tense oriented than "hard news" the future orientation of the dataset is even more striking. Commentary pieces are also likely the reason that the corpus also expresses judgements, possibilities, and obligations more than formal British writing. The results for all three fiscal bodies also indicate a general reluctance to construct ideas with certainties, preferring instead possibilities. The finding that the OBR is cited the most often of the three, and that it was from its very inception was also surprising. This suggests a very high value is placed on promotional strategy and organization inside the OBR itself.

Why did these three experts become increasingly important for journalists? It could simply might be a matter of the expert bodies producing and/or disseminating increasingly press-friendly material, including via social media channels (see Anstead and Chadwick, 2017). It seems unlikely that increasingly de-skilled journalists are using experts' ability to demystify a complex area, because this is not what the experts do for the text. The increased use of experts could be because Austerity received increasing coverage in these years. There is indeed a general tendency for the word *austerity* to occur more frequently

in later years compared to earlier, although this must be tempered with the recognition of the large spike for the word in the (election year) 2015.

Compared to formal written English the corpus avoids of claims to expertise, knowing and understanding around experts, despite experts being used as sources in every single article sampled. Expertise and associated intellectual states – of knowing and understanding – are simply not very common characterizations within press articles citing these fiscal experts. This is probably because journalists take knowledge and understanding for granted and expect their audience to do likewise, i.e that the fiscal analysis unit knows goes without saying. But the comparison is still interesting to explore. There is wide agreement across qualitative journalism studies that economic news regularly employs experts to participate in discourses of expertise (Berry, 2016c, Schiffrin and Fagan, 2013, Fitzgerald and O'Rourke, 2016, Dellepiane-Avellaneda, 2015, Maesse, 2015, Vaara, 2014). The quantitative finding here is that "knowledge," "know," "information," "never," "known," "understanding," and "always" are rare words. Discourses of expertise are certainly at work here but they are not built upon experts having answers. Likely they are built instead on how experts are positioned in the discourse, and the goes-without-saying assumptions are part of that.

Respectability, Independence, and Criticism

The sub-corpora for each expert were quite different. The IFS – the only non-governmental unit - had the most characterizations of respectability. This corroborates similar findings of Chadwick et al. (2018), who have argued that the description of the IFS as *respected* is an overt authority signal deployed by BBC broadcast journalists. Here the IFS is *respected* specifically in comparison to similar (yet governmental) bodies. From a rhetorical perspective, the IFS is the classic "think tank" of the group, external to the UK's notionally

non-partisan civil service. Therefore one possibility is that IFS respectability must be more explicitly defended because as a think tank it can be read as more politically partisan. This is a common rhetorical technique in political life, including UK fiscal debates surrounding Austerity measures (Walsh, 2016). Put another way, the IFS is *respected* to liken it to the NAO and OBR, who are assumed to be so as government bodies.   It is telling in this comparison that the non-governmental IFS is not the one most often classified as "independent" (another overt authority signal according to Chadwick et al.) or a "watchdog." In text the independent watchdog is instead the governmental OBR. Here IFS independence goes without saying (despite its quiet, consistent recourse to public funds), but IFS respectability is named as a "category entitlement" that explicitly communicates authority (see also Potter, 1996).

The NAO – the government's auditor of past accounts - is characterized as most certain, and the one most likely to be reporting, warning, criticizing, and passing judgment. The certainty is unsurprising as the NAO is an auditor of past accounts, and passing judgement makes sense in terms of the value-for-money remit. But the negativity of its warnings and criticisms is worth remarking upon. The NAO is by far the least politicised of the three bodies, with seven and eight times fewer mentions of the word *austerity* in articles that cite the NAO compared to the IFS and OBR respectively. What is NAO criticising and warning? Not austerity. The NAO may be explicitly characterized in news texts as a critic, but this criticism does not extend to the time period's most high-profile and contentious fiscal debate.

The OBR has a comparatively strong presence in the press, where it is characterised as an independent watchdog that forecasts and predicts future events. Partly this is the news value of uncertainty (Jaworski et al., 2003, Neiger, 2007). Yet whilst the OBR is the

least likely to be characterised as expert, knowing, understanding, criticizing, or passing

judging, it most benefits from press construction as a "watchdog." There is an inherent

contradiction here: it is a watchdog reluctant to undertake the actual work of judgement or

criticism (as the NAO does). If the OBR is a watchdog, it rarely barks, let alone bites.

Judging and especially criticizing are evidence of political independence, but this kind of

independence is rarely demonstrated.

Overall, markers of social position – being "independent" or "respected" or in a

position to criticise – stand in place of indicators of technical knowledge or deep

understanding of government finances. The IFS is most respected, while the NAO judges

and criticizes, and the OBR is described as an independent watchdog. But the social

markers for these are not entirely consistent within themselves, let alone with in a

normative sense. The explicit respectability constructed for the IFS suggests that ill-repute

must be rebuffed quite actively. For all its criticising the NAO has little to say about the

period's most contentious fiscal issue. And while the OBR "watchdog" is most strongly

associated it does not criticise – it does not bark. The social markers that stand in place of

knowledge are themselves less certain, more conflicted, and more ambiguous than credible

claims to knowledge would permit.

Economic Expertise: Less Technical, More Social

Discourses of economic expertise in the press are less technical and more social than

one would assume from previous scholarship. The construction of economic expertise in

press discourse has little in common with practices of knowledge production or even other

discourses of economic professionalism (Evetts et al., 2006). It is a performance enacted

within the social network (Carr, 2010, Eyal, 2013). The accountability repertoires of

auditing (Evetts, 2003) may form the basis of claims to authority (Gendron et al., 2007), but not because such repertoires clarify technical detail. They are the basis for signalling respectability, independence, and a critical position.

Many scholars have found that journalists are insufficiently critical of their experts (Schiffrin and Fagan, 2013, Berry, 2016a, Chadwick et al., 2018, Marron et al., 2010). The findings here suggest that this lack of criticality is not based on a failure to challenge the technical findings of experts but on a focus on social relationships. Journalists may engage with expert sources as a strategy for managing economic complexity, but once engaged they retreat into social cues. They create a text in which experts are credible because of authorization, socialization and mutual recognition, not because they bring knowledge and understanding that better informs the non-expert citizen. There are reasons, of course, to be sceptical of economic experts, and whether they necessarily have superior judgment (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). But the press justified experts' judgements with the social positions of the experts rather than the soundness (i.e. reasons for) the judgements.

The most significant democratic debate about the economy in this time and place was about Austerity, which featured in many sampled news articles. What did UK news readers learn about Austerity from economic experts? Very little it seems. Journalists implied an association by citing Austerity and quoting these experts, but the experts were not in the habit of commenting on Austerity directly. The NAO criticised the government, but not for Austerity, and while the "independent watchdog" OBR was more often associated with Austerity it did not criticise.

Economic news uses experts to enhance credibility, and it frames stories with important, current, contentious issues, but the two processes are here operating in parallel. Austerity, was purely political, not the business of even fiscal experts in a direct sense, yet

the connection was routinely implied.   Alongside debates in the news about Austerity,

reporting about economic experts helped maintain a neoliberal orthodoxy unselfconsciously

and unobtrusively. Some of the best persuasive writing marches the reader right up to the

conclusion but then lets him or her make the final leap alone, creating an impression of this

new knowledge as self-generated. As a matter of hegemony, such journalism was part of

the taken-for-grantedness of economic life, in which experts told citizens what they could

and could not afford as a nation and then left them to draw their own conclusions.

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