

Communication and Linguistics: Methodology of Writing Analysis in an Ethical Perspective

Comunicación y lingüística: metodología de análisis redaccional en perspectiva ética

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Abstract:

The aim of this article is to present a model of journalistic or advertising writing analysis, taking into account four linguistic areas: syntax, semantics, orthography and morphology, within an ethical perspective. The foundation is based on what I call the "ethics of the word", which does not apply exclusively to journalism or linguistics; it is transversal. Journalists ought to pay special attention to language so that in the pretense of information they do not fall into the vice of misinformation. Through critical hermeneutics, the linguistic analysis methodology is taken to clothe it with an ethical orientation, either because of the pursuit of excellence in the work instrument by journalists, because of their responsibility with the language or with the creation of public opinion.

Keywords:

Ethics, grammar, applied linguistics, journalism, writing.

Resumen:

El objetivo de este artículo es presentar un modelo de análisis de redacción periodística o publicitaria, tomando en cuenta cuatro elementos lingüísticos: sintaxis, semántica, ortografía y morfología, con una mirada ética. La fundamentación parte de lo que denomino la "ética de la palabra", que no es de aplicación exclusiva en el periodismo o en la lingüística; es transversal. Los periodistas han de poner especial cuidado en el lenguaje de manera que en la pretensión de información no caigan en el vicio de la desinformación. Por la vía de la hermenéutica crítica, se toma la metodología de análisis de lingüístico para arroparlo con una orientación ética, bien

por la búsqueda de la excelencia del instrumento de trabajo por parte de periodistas, por su responsabilidad con el idioma o con la creación de la opinión pública.

Palabras claves:

Ética, gramática, lingüística aplicada, periodismo, redacción.

1. Introduction. Ethical look to reconcile intentionality and linguistics

Journalistic and advertising writing go way beyond properly employing punctuation, grammar agreements and having a minimum of coherence in structuring ideas. It is true that the functionalist approach to language fosters intelligibility in the exchange of messages -what authors such as Franco (2004a) call “communication” and they highly value the cognition that language involved in language-. Nonetheless, word implies and represents much more: it is the mirror of what is in the mind and heart of the communicator’s¹; it reflects their knowledge and values, their prejudices and biases.

A functionalist look (Franco, 2000, 2004a) would guarantee comprehension in writing and reading. In my opinion, it is insufficient. There can be syntactic coherence and equally an inadequate construction or hierarchy of the journalistic message.

Even when there are coincidences with this author in that communicative grammars present language as a communicative system and not just an articulation of signs and that the text is a semantic-pragmatic unit, “as a communicative, intentional, and interactive event” (Franco, 2004a, p. 78), the approach proposed here has journalistic ethics as its cause, as a(n) (regulative) ideal and, therefore, as a north of normative desirability. There is, then, an inversion in the hierarchy of values: the starting point is not linguistics itself, but the *êthos* of the communicator that must be reflected in the text.

The forging of character, journalist’s *êthos*, has a crucial moment: to understand that one’s text ought to go to the exact linguistic sign in order to express what one really means and thus not to falsify facts in the news or promise impossible that a product or service they will be unable to satisfy. We can well speak, then, of a linguistic responsibility (Martínez Albertos, 1998, 2005); which is the “minimum” (Restrepo, 2016, p. 71) that can be offered to readers: a correct use of language. This is not, however, a mere functional courtesy of the reporter or the editor; whether they want it or not, the social communication media has as its internal good -of journalism- the formation of a “mature and responsible public opinion” (Cortina, 2004, p. 20).

Inevitably the entire process of (informative, interpretive or opinion) journalistic writing goes through using the word, the communicator’s work instrument per excellence; it

¹ Here is a first nuance: we understand “communicator” not in its enunciative mood, but in its bidirectional and authentically intersubjective character. Chillón advocates the concept of journalistic communication as opposed to journalistic writing, communication, or journalism. Unlike these three ideas, there is no perspective of “eminently practical profession” (1998, p. 66; 2001, p. 26), of objectivity, of mastery of techniques, exercised by intellectuals, but there is a critical sense, an orientation of cultural mediation, openness to other branches of knowledge (sociology, psychology, philosophy), and there is an awareness of more complex techniques and discursive, stylistic diversity is assumed. And that is why language goes beyond its functionalist dimension and acquires greater depth and profitability in the practice of journalistic communication.

would be naïve to think that writing only must obey grammar rules. There must be correspondence not only with what is true, but with the intention. And intentionality must go hand in hand with ethics and linguistics; it cannot, for instance, to be claimed to ensure the presumption of innocence of a person singled out in a crime news story and refer to that person as "presumed guilty" and later in the text describe how (it is believed that) this person has committed a crime.

Can syntax, semantics, morphology, and orthography reveal ethical incidents in journalistic writing? This is the central question on which this reflection, design and presentation of this writing analysis model will focus on.

I will present the objectives of this article and two conceptual problems that we stumble across, "grammaticalism" and what is meant by journalism, or at least from where I am standing to carry out this ethical-linguistic reflection. The tour will take us through the functional, normative, and educational views of grammar. In point 3, the reason for philosophical methods (critical hermeneutics and repetition) will be explained, as well as the procedure and methodological tools. In the next section, I will detail how the *corpus* for the pilot test was built and the styles of linguists and journalists that inspired this analysis model.

Then the tables and examples of syntactic, morphological, semantic, and orthographic incidents will be presented along with their subcategories throughout point 5. Due to delimitation, it will not be possible to delve into each case, even if the examples are justified; in some cases, more emphasis will be laid than on others to highlight the scope of this proposal. In addition to the conclusions, I will propose some lines of research that can be nourished from this model of textual analysis.

2. Objectives and justification. Revitalize the word: ethical north

The main purpose of this article is to present a textual analysis model, considering four areas of linguistics: syntax, semantics, orthography, and morphology, which allows to improve journalistic writing in its technique and ethics.

The methodology proposed in this text also has a secondary purpose: to serve as an instrument for a linguistic evaluation and as a working methodology to write headlines as well as other elements of a journalistic text, slogans or hierarchize information; help reporters, editors, and grammar professors in schools of Communication, Journalism, even Linguistics.

It is, indeed, all about creating a methodology, and foremost, about bringing grammar closer to communicators from their own reality, without pushing aside from the functional sense (Gil and Gaya, 1976) and transcending the journalistic and advertising planes, based on applied linguistics and, having ethics as a roof, without sacrificing rigor for amenity (Aranguren, 1965).

We come to facing two significant problems: first, "grammaticalism", as a criticism of certain ways of teaching grammar; and second, understanding journalism as a simple exercise of connecting words with an informative and uncritical purpose. A reflection from moral philosophy will help out to unblock these conceptions.

By “grammaticalism”, Vivaldi means the custom and the way of studying grammar “with dead, empty, lifeless rules”² (2000, p. 1). Not that standards or nomenclatures are unnecessary. Far from questioning its validity -on the contrary-, what is reprehensible is to take life and its life away from grammar, by petrifying it with a primary and final normative and rigid purpose, as if the language were not in constant expansion.

Alarcos Llorach (1999b) recognizes this perennial temptation of a normative slant. Being the author of the most recent official grammar of the Real Academia Española (1999b), he warns that "all grammar ends, or begins, by being normative" and his work will not be the exception. This statement in the prologue is accompanied, however, by an "antigrammaticalist" adjective and clarifies that his 10-year work will not have a "dogmatic" spirit (Alarcos Llorach, 1999b, p. 18) and will address normative validity, but conjugated with didactic demands, thus moving away from the purpose of creating a theoretical treatise.

In my viewpoint, Alarcos Llorach (1999b) was aware of the scope of the work of the Real Academia Española and of “grammaticalism” and proposes to soften normativism with a more focused educational vision. Andrés Bello does not define grammar from normativism or structuralism, but as “the art of speaking it correctly, that is, according to good use, which is that of educated people”³ (2016, p. 15). Applied linguistics just needs to take it into muddy terrains such as journalism’s and determine whether the reporter and the editor are educated and whether they are writing to *educate* readers⁴.

Certainly, we cannot renounce the rules and nomenclatures, because every grammar is built on a functional and normative basis; furthermore, a linguistic anarchy is, doubtlessly, a valid option neither for society nor for a journalistic writing. It is no less true that this "systematic study of the relationships that syllables, words and sentences have spun together"⁵, as defines Grijelmo grammar (2017, p. 23), cannot remain in such a universalist rigid ideal ending up being too abstract and distant for ordinary people.

2 “Con reglas muertas, vacías, sin vida”. The translation into English is mine.

3 “El arte de hablarla correctamente, esto es, conforme al buen uso, que es el de la gente educada» (Bello, 2016, p. 15). The translation into English is mine.

4 Bello differentiates "educated people" from the illiterate one. It has no classist shade; it is rather a nuance of formation. To Bello, "educated people" are those who cultivate the language by reading the great writers, because "it serves as an ideal guide and correlate," explains the linguist and academic Amado Alonso in the prologue to the work *Gramática*, by Andrés Bello (2016). My looking - not as exquisite as Bello's, because correctness and simplicity do not exclusively accompany writers, in first place; and, secondly, because I lean forward a balance between an ideal and other realities not as distant as that of classical authors- keeps pointing out, however, to the intellectual and educational exercise of the journalist, more in line with Ortega, which conceives the newspaper -extendable in our times to other formats and platforms- as "an intellectual square" to start a social pedagogy (Blanco Alfonso, 2006) for human betterment.

5 “Estudio sistemático de las relaciones que han tejido entre sí las sílabas, las palabras y las oraciones» (Grijelmo, 2017, p. 23). The translation into English is mine.

Hence the need to revitalize grammar, to "uncomplicate"⁶ it, especially to bring it closer to students and communication professionals.

On this point, that of the education of students in linguistic skills, Estévez-Arias, Medina-Chicaiza and González-Hernández (2016) and Bohórquez-Pereira (2013) highlight the relevance of a training in grammar for the use of the information and communication technologies. Both Carvajal Barrios (2017), López de Zuazo Algar (2002), and Piña and Arribas (2001) warn about poor grammatical training in Social Communication or Journalism students, which has been dragged from high school, and how difficult the axis was language throughout the career program.

There is consensus on the relevance and the urgency of a good linguistic instruction and of having journalists who teach in these very specific areas (Guevara Mendoza & Cedeño Guadamud, 2017; Tabares Higueta, 2014). The question is how grammar knowledge is inherited within a classroom and in a traditional or digital writing. If the vision is normative and functional, there will be no major changes: errors will be reissued, corrected in the rush of time or even worse, in the rush of immediacy.

Carvajal Barrios (2017) understands grammar as a procedural matter, knowing how to locate a punctuation mark, stress rules, etc. This would guarantee a minimum of intelligibility or communicability in the text. To Piña and Arribas (2001), teaching should be functional to "provide the student with instruments of self-correction, expressive security, and linguistic awareness in terms of rules of accentuation and professional ethics, so demanded by employers and recipients of the media"⁷ (Piña & Arribas, 2001, p. 103). The functional approach in which these two authors are inspired starts from an actantial analysis, very useful, without a doubt, to identify the syntactic functions. This actantial model has a very profitable analytical moment.

From my perspective, both the functional model and approach lack from a critical moment, and it is as necessary as the analytical one. Above all, if the premise is that language -taken to the journalistic field- is creative and creator of realities (Franco, 2004b). I speak of a critical judgment not only to give reasons, but also based on a transcendental realism, a critical realism (Conill, 1991). If we take this perspective to grammar, we understand that each linguistic element is neither small nor accidental and is not narrowed down to a rule: each morpheme, each punctuation mark, each complement, etc. transcend their normative functional description and assume a reality interpreted (pauses to breathe, for example) by the reporter.

This should not imply –as it has been noted before- a linguistic anomie but starting from an ontological hermeneutic of each element -as we can see, the functional character of

6 Serve this word to graph the vitality and dynamism of language(s). By November 2020, neither the adjective "descomplicado" nor the verb were registered in the Dictionario de Lengua Española. Morphologically it is a valid construction. The Real Academia Española (2013) realizes its meaning as "simple", documented in several American countries. I use the qualifying adjective that Grijelmo uses in the title of one of his works, *La gramática descomplicada* (2017). In English, there is such adjective *uncomplicated* (simple) -but not the verb- gathered in online editions of Merriam Webster (2021), Wordreference (2021), Oxford (2021).

7 "Proveer al estudiante de instrumentos de autocorrección, seguridad expresiva y conciencia lingüística en el plano de la acentuación y de la ética profesional, tan demandadas por empleadores y receptores de los medios" (Piña & Arribas, 2001, p. 103). The translation into English is mine.

grammar is not ruled out- the journalist develops a critical sense, creative, fantastic (Conill, 1991) whose base is in an experiential reason (Conill, 2003). And this is not a cosmetic issue in journalism unless this profession is also understood from an enunciative function. My outlook obeys an interest: journalism be *authentically* functional, whose language is effectively communicative, which means, be an instrument of social interaction. And this goes through caring about a common language. And this education is also journalism's responsibility.

The concept of journalism is no less complex to shape. Although it is not the objective of this article, it is necessary to briefly specify from where I conceive of the profession. Knowing the problem of definition, Kovach and Rosenstiel begin by warning of two tautologies -of American tradition-: Journalism is what journalists say is journalism and letting work speak for itself (2012). It is dangerous to believe that the office will speak for itself -as if it had ontological capacity to do so- in a current context, following Suárez Montoya (2020c), marked by: a) prolonged economic crisis (national or business, within the media), b) the increasingly accelerated technological changes, c) the loss of journalistic credibility, d) the need for new business models in the drafting, the prominence of the citizen (he is not a reader-client or consumer), and e) alliances between organizations to generate information content; we could add other variables such as: (i) that hyper-connectivity allows the multiversity of opinions to fly over simultaneously, (ii) that is more common to publicly point out the contradictions between the particular interests of media owners and journalists with the public interest, (iii) immediacy. Authors such as McChesney (2012) have come to propose the end of journalism, if we do not rethink of profession aiming at strengthening democracy.

Barnhurst and Owens differentiate between the exchange of news and interpersonal communication, which means that journalism is not an exchange of news, as a daily human activity, but rather that it has a social function that distinguishes "intelligence from gossip." (2008, p. 2557)

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2012) propose a defining way out for journalism: to focus on the citizen, that is, the role that information plays in people's lives. This look, as I will reason in the next section on method and methodology, implies an ethical stance, which I line with critical hermeneutics⁸.

At the end, a quality journalistic writing -that is, with accuracy, originality, conciseness, and clarity (Vivaldi, 2000) and to what I must add with an inherent humanistic vision- will make citizens better informed and make better decisions in making society. In terms of Gozávez and Contreras-Pulido (2014), citizens will be "empowered" in their freedom and in their critical autonomy and will be able -as citizens- to participate in social, economic, political, ecological issues, etc. from the proper use of the media and other digital platforms.

⁸ There are certainly a huge number of approaches to a theory of journalism. For me, the thesis by Kovach Rosenstiel, contained in the formulation " The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing" (2012, p. 25), is a starting point, not the point of arrival. Their vision of "truth" is still positivist, unlike a living and liberating "truth", which I collect from existential hermeneutics (Guevara-Riera, 2000, 2016), critical hermeneutics (Conill, 1991, 2003) and the procedural principle of the ethics of discourse (Cortina, 1996).

3. Method and methodology. Multidisciplinarity

"New research contexts are increasingly inclusive"⁹, says Abreu Colombri (2019, p. 80) in the arenas of multidisciplinary research in communication. And that is what I pretend in this paper. Throughout the text, the interdisciplinarity between journalism and linguistics and the transdisciplinarity of moral philosophy can be appreciated. This synergistic dialogue can also be seen in the methods and methodologies I have used.

These conciliations of methods and methodologies are not just circumstantial. They arise from the conviction of the contributions of the science of linguistic work, of information science and of moral philosophy. Jiménez-Gómez and García Ramos (2019) tell us about a dynamism that will allow us to reconstruct methodological tools to work in the different territories of knowledge. Aspiration, in addition to a methodological purity, is to bet on interdisciplinarity as a civic issue: scientific production with moral reflection to promote media education, as a crucial project for the empowerment of citizens in the current communicative context (Gozálvez & Contreras-Pulido, 2014).

Methodologies such as discourse analysis about usage of language, of great tradition in the XX and XXI centuries, also merge qualitative paradigms with quantitative ones. They have reported a lot of benefit in disciplines such as sociology, politics, anthropology, and journalism.

The goal of discourse analysis has responded to: a) to data management, as opposed to oral narratives; b) discursive evolution in time; c) the ephemeral use of language to connote one or another message (Brinton, 2008). The focus has been on the sociopolitical meaning and the consequences of interaction from semiotic practices and how they shape social processes (Parsons Dick & Nightlinger, 2020). Hence, the scrutinized content is mainly seen, according to these authors, on authority and ideology, race, language, nationalism, commercialization.

In journalistic arenas, these issues have been addressed by classic authors such as Van Dijk: racism in journalism (Van Dijk, 1991 and 2000), ideology in the press (Van Dijk, 1998), elites (Van Dijk, 1992), warmongering rhetoric (Van Dijk, 2004). And by contemporary authors who have landed the analysis of journalistic discourse: such as the comparisons between recurrent news in the Peruvian and Chilean press (Browne Sartori, del Valle Rojas, Silva Echeto, Carvajal Rivera & Inzulza Moraga, 2011); argumentation in interpretive journalism (Boscán Sánchez, 2006), coverage of the 2008 world economic crisis in the Mexican press (Contreras, González Chávez & González-Quiñones, 2020), a comparison between Mariano Rajoy and Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba in the debate on the state of the nation in 2014 (Jivkova Semova, Padilla Castillo & Pernía, 2016); or the discursive ideological analysis in the newspapers *The New York Times* and *El Nuevo Herald* on Cuba and the United States' relations (Abreu Gainza, Galañena León & Velázquez, 2017).

9 "Los nuevos contextos de investigación son cada vez más inclusivos» Abreu Colombri (2019, p. 80). The translation into English is mine.

These analyzes present a sociocognitive (Van Dijk, 2016), semiotic (Van Dijk, 2015), partisan political or ideological approach. Although it also draws on semantic and syntactic analysis, Philo (2007) criticizes the insufficiency of discursive analyzes of the Vandijkian tradition because they focus only on the text in terms of the accuracy of representation and not on what it represents for the audience and proposes to include in variables such as the production process, the content, the reception, and the circulation of the message.

Fürsich (2009) replies to Philo that each media has the right to reflect its intentionality. The reason for this defense of the autonomy of the media outlet -without taking away the logic of responsibility- is to focus on the legitimacy of the textual analysis, by freeing it from a dependency on the perception of the message by the readers or external circumstances in the process informative production.

I am more inclined to this second point of view. I do not see the need to always subordinate the audit of the message to the audience and broadening the evaluation spectrum could incur in reducing the voice of media outlet and losing its authenticity in order to please readers. Like Fürsich (2009), I appeal to a flexible methodology.

Tolochko and Boomgaarden (2018) recognize the complexity of this problem, since depending on how a message is (linguistically) structured, its receptivity will be guaranteed by the readers. In their study, they compare styles between traditional newspapers and political blogs; and they determine that the traditional media have greater syntactic complexity; while the second ones have a higher score in the semantic dimension, because they have greater lexical richness. One of the reasons given by both researchers is that the newspaper information goes through rigorous filters (journalistic routines, standard language, gatekeepers, etc.), whereas an individual writer may not pay so much attention to the tone or aspires to a standardized language, therefore he may appeal to more narrative resources, synonyms, jargon, colloquialism. So, then, the starting point is the intentionality of the journalist or the medium.

This can be also seen clearly in the styles of the platforms as well as in the difference between the journalistic genres: headlining an investigative report is not the same as headlining a news story; a review is not the same for television as it is for a printed newspaper either whose digital editions will also vary. We could even go further and make comparisons based on automated content and information that comes from citizens.

These analyzes are full of linguistics and can be complemented by moral philosophical reflection. Suárez Montoya (2020b) addresses the matter of aporophobia in both social Venezuelan, and the journalistic context, from a professional ethics perspective; although he introduces -by the hands of Aranguren- the foundation for the ethics of the word, his analysis does not go through linguistics.

One of the two key issues that differentiate my proposal from sister or distant experiences in textual analysis is: it starts with the foundations of grammar, instead of starting with the speech itself. The other great differentiator of this analytical model is

the approach from the moral philosophy, since it does not remain in the linguistic dimension, but the aim is always to the critical judgment.

For this reason, in the first place, the choice of the method of critical hermeneutics to approach this study from a perspective other than linguistics, although the methodology is linguistic. As Guevara-Riera (2016) proposes -and I agree with this philosopher-: the choice of a philosophical method is *per se* an ethical stance. In this sense, I neither believe that journalism is a transmission of informative messages with predefined editorial structures (*verbi gratia*, the inverted pyramid) nor that linguistics is limited to the legislation or theoretical construction for safeguarding language; both visions would petrify both professions - and, consequently, citizenship-. From the authentic self-review, both spheres can (and must) constantly renew themselves in the face of the challenges and realities of the new times.

It is not a question of demolishing and erasing the pillars supporting both branches of knowledge, because an ontological desire is not pursued; but of resizing them in a more humanizing north. That is why I turn to critical hermeneutics, which reconciles the Aristotelian proposals -of the moral virtues- and Kant's -with its commitment to critical capacity, the aesthetics of freedom and practical reason (Conill, 2010) -.

This method is enriched by the tradition of discourse ethics in its variant of the School of Valencia, by the hands of the philosophers Adela Cortina, Jesús Conill and Domingo García-Marzá, who have incorporated the value of the validity between every single interlocutor and the symmetrical dialogue; the value of experiential reason, since logical-argumentative intelligibility is not enough, but rather to place ourselves in a historical and vital reality (Conill, 2003). And it is also complemented by Taylor's contributions: the unitary process of understanding, interpretation, and application of an ethical model (Gracia Calandín, 2009).

With this garment, hence, I do not conceive journalism as a rigid flow of news dissemination, but as an agent of social transformation and with a clear commitment to democracy and human dignity (Suárez Montoya, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). Linguistics is not the very end, it certainly contributes enormously with its science and anthropology of language and will do a lot more, if provided with a humanistic compass. Nor is it a question of denying the functionality of journalism or language, but rather, starting from its facticities, it aims to aspire to humanizing transcendence, anchored concretely in: freedom, justice, fraternity, mediated by solidarity, dialogue, non-violence and real and progressive democracy (Conill, 1991).

Secondly, the method of "repetition" used by Aranguren (1965) in his work *Ethics* has also been implemented, in order not to account for a repetition without any purpose, but rather, from the *ana-lysis* (separation and distribution), from the crumbling of textual units, to avoid stagnation of the sciences that have summoned us today: journalism and linguistics, both linked by ethics and to serve as a table to identify, understand and correct linguistic incidents in the writing.

What does this "repetition" consist of? It is teaching in a living way -as Aranguren (1965) suggests- with each critical review in each unit of analysis in which the questions

and analyzes are repeated. Because this "repetition" is synonymous of science. In my opinion, the critical capacity of any teacher, student or researcher who comes across this study is awakened.

In terms of methodology: observation, systematization and grammatical analysis have been used (with the tools provided by syntax, semantics, morphology, and orthography). Both the qualitative and quantitative approaches have been extremely helpful.

As a qualitative study, holistic approaches can be used, because it allows contextualization and is case-oriented; empirically, since it emphasizes observation and documentation, there is no way to intervene in the published text and it is described in natural language; and / or interpretive, because it cannot stop appealing to intuition -to detect intentionality, for example-, the magnifying glass is placed in relevant events (Rodríguez Gómez, Gil Flores and García Jiménez, 1999).

The phases have been: a) preparation (reflection and design), b) field work c) analysis and d) informative (Rodríguez Gómez et al., 1999). In the first stage, the experience in journalistic editing of more than 15 years of professional practice has been taken into account and the need to systematize and correct errors has been identified, which, no matter how common or few, at times, are still serious; the three types of tables have been created: i) coding of journalistic texts, to determine the population and the sample (*verbi gratia*, table 1); ii) the register and systematization of errors (*see table 2*); and iii) the quantification of incidents by linguistic dimension and by newspaper (for example, table 3).

In the second phase, the fieldwork has begun with observation (reading) and register of each incident. Due to the nature of this investigation, the third stage has occurred simultaneously with the second. I have considered it more practical in this way. The fourth and final phase, the informative one, has already begun to take shape with the writing of scientific articles to be published in specialized journals.

The priority has never been to quantify with the conviction of hard data, as is sometimes believed in journalism, since the number must go through critical hermeneutics to have value; Instead, to broaden the analysis and leave open research possibilities, the triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative paradigms has been used.

4. Delimitation. Grounds and styles

Although the results have been quantified, the magnifying glass has been placed on each of the incidents and in addition to identifying and categorizing them, this proposal – unlike other linguistic studies- incorporates proposals for better writing. This has led to a couple of problems with the delimitation and for that reason, for each branch some of its categories have been chosen, if not, any research project would be unapproachable by attempting to develop them all.

There are previous experiences that have served as inspiration, as a background and to broaden the critical sense and rigor of the study. On the one hand, Samuel Gil y Gaya with his work *Curso Avanzado de Sintaxis Española* (1969); and, on the other hand, a contemporary author, Álex Grijelmo, journalist and linguist, with books such as *El*

estilo del periodista (2001) and *La gramática decomplicada* (2017), which have accompanied a vital project for more than 15 years.

Beyond this very brief -and unfair- tribute to these two authors, throughout their texts, I have observed mystique, passion and, particularly, in the case of Grijelmo, a pedagogy of linguistics whose common thread is journalistic writing.

I have also noticed certain dangers such as casuistry, of which even Gil and Gaya (1976) himself warns that any explanatory and investigative initiative can eternalize. It would not be practical for this analysis model, when the aim is - following this classic author - to bring grammar closer from its reality, without departing from the functional sense (1976) to which I must add: and transcending the application in the journalistic and advertising spheres.

Therefore, one must begin by building the *corpus*. To do so, we must take into account that, as it is an intentional sample, selection criteria must be established.

In the pilot test, carried out in May and June 2020, the source of Crime reports was chosen in four newspapers in Ciudad Guayana, in southern Venezuela. The month of the sample was April 2020, by own availability. These newspapers are: Correo del Caroní (1977), Nueva Prensa de Guayana (1998), Diario de Guayana (2003), and Diario Primicia (2012). All of four dailies keep their website open to the public without the need for a subscription. There is a fifth Guayanese newspaper, El Guayanés, whose texts were not taken into consideration because their Crime reports section was discontinued in 2019.

254 journalistic texts make up the population. Since the sample is intentional, the selection criteria were set: the stories have occurred in Ciudad Guayana, since as regional newspapers cover stories in other cities in Bolivar state (southeast of Venezuela), as well some national crime reports. There are notable differences in the number of texts from one newspaper to another, but the criteria are the same in both time and geography. The corpus was established in 149 texts.

The second step was to code each unit of analysis, which, in this case, corresponded to the entire published textuality (title, summary, body of text, photo captions, annexes). Four tables were prepared, one for each newspaper with the following elements: publication date, news title, URL, and code.

Each code lists each unit of analysis for each newspaper. Thus, Correo del Caroni will be CC, plus the number indicating the news; Diario de Guayana will be DG; Nueva Prensa de Guayana, NPG; and Primicia, PM.

Table 1

Examples of coding of journalistic texts of Crime news

Fecha	Título	URL	Código
5 de abril de 2020	Cuatro detenidos por homicidio de	http://www.correodelcaroni.com/sucesos/4941-hallan-cuerpo-de-nina-de-10-anos-en-zona-boscosa-de-san-	CC1

	niña de 10 años en San Félix.	felix	
5 de abril	GNB desarticuló GEDO e incautó armas de fuego en Caroní.	https://www.eldiariodeguayana.com.ve/gnb-desarticulo-gedo-e-incauto-armas-de-fuego-en-caroni/	DG1
4 de abril	Patrulleros de Caroní detuvieron a sujetos por robo.	https://soynuevaprensadigital.com/npd/patrulleros-de-caroni-detuvieron-a-sujetos-por-robo/	NPG1
1 de abril	Mujer fue capturada por presunta venta ilegal de medicamentos*.	https://primicia.com.ve/sucesos/mujer-fue-capturada-por-presunta-venta-ilegal-de-medicamentos/	PM1

Note. Source: own elaboration

A population of 254 texts was reached and during the first review. When the text was news from an entity other than Ciudad Guayana, it was marked with an asterisk. In this way, the sample was established, and the corpus remained at 149 units of analysis.

In the hemerographic review for this study, it was noted that the units of analysis were also delimited: for example, to analyze only the titles. It was not a criterion used in this research.

For each newspaper, eight tables were prepared, two for each linguistic area: the first, in which a record of each incidence was left (see Table 2) and the second, with the quantification (Table 3). The first table has the following elements: *code* (of the unit of analysis); *word, phrase or sentence* (the incident is transcribed); *reasons* (explains why there is an error; and suggestion (edited version recommended).

5. Linguistic model

Something very valuable about this methodology, although it has the risk of stopping too much at each incident, is that it is not limited to the tables that present the record and incidents. Before or after each table, the analysis must be deepened. Dimensions such as orthography or morphology may not merit as many lines; but syntax and semantics (and pragmatics) have a lot of potential for discussion.

Table 2 shows the record of syntactic errors in the CC1 news item (Correo del Caroní, whose title is "Cuatro detenidos por homicidio de niña de 10 años en San Félix" and published on April 5, 2020).

Table 2

Example of registration and systematization of syntactic errors in journalistic texts of crime news

Código	Palabra, frase u oración	Razones	Sugerencia
CC1	"(...) desenfundó un arma blanca tipo cuchillo, ocasionándole una herida punzo penetrante en la región del cuello".	Mal uso del gerundio: no hay simultaneidad de acciones.	Desenfundó un cuchillo y la hirió en el cuello.

Note. Source: own elaboration

The following table also shows the syntactic categories that have been taken into account: a) passive voice, b) gerund, c) omission of words, d) Wrong identification of functions, e) abuse of verbal periphrases, f) hierarchy of pronominals on nouns in headlines, g) incorrect constructs, h) grammatical tenses, (i) amphibology.

Table 3

Syntactic incidents in Crime news. Daily XXX

Passive voice	-
Gerund	-
Omission of words	-
Wrong identification of functions	-
Abuse of verbal periphrases	-
Pronominal hierarchy on nouns in headlines	-
Wrong constructions	-
Grammatical tenses	-
Amphibology	-
Total	-

Note. Source: Own elaboration.

The four newspapers were analyzed with the same criteria. During the research, the category *pronominal hierarchy on nouns in headlines* was added in the syntactic analysis. It was not initially contemplated, however during the sample collection, it was striking that there was a style in which the pronominals were used instead of the nouns in the headline and, while they draw attention, they keep omitting key information. For example: "Scientific police arrested *them* for burglaries in residences."¹⁰ Not specifying *who* was arrested by the scientific police is, at the very least, questionable in our view. It would be informative to note that it may refer them to: teenagers, neighbours, etc. The category *uncouthness* was also ruled out since there was no case detected.

In Table 4, we can see some examples of orthography incidents founded in Nueva Prensa de Guayana newspaper:

Table 4

Iconic cases of orthography errors in Crime news from Nueva Prensa de Guayana

Código	Palabra, frase u oración	Razones	Sugerencia
NPG2	Estos individuos son considerados por	Faltan las comillas. Se	Estos individuos son

10 "Policía científica *los* arrestó por hurtos en residencias». The translation into English is mine.

	las autoridades como personas inescrupulosas e irresponsables .	trata de calificaciones que provienen de la fuente, no de la voz del periodista.	considerados por las autoridades como “personas inescrupulosas e irresponsables”.
NPG6	“Briam”, bajo engaño invitó a la menor a su casa a degustar algunas golosinas.	No se justifican las comillas. El detenido por la policía ha sido identificado como Briam Boscan.	Con engaño, Briam invitó a su casa a la niña a degustar algunas golosinas.
NPG6	“Briam”, bajo engaño invitó a la menor a su casa a degustar algunas golosinas.	Falta una coma. Aunque no es la construcción más aconsejable por separar el verbo -innecesariamente del sujeto- con un inciso que puede ubicarse al principio.	Con engaño, Briam invitó a su casa a la niña a degustar algunas golosinas.
NPG15	PNB , está detrás de una red de trabajadores del Hospital Raúl Leoni, Hospital Uyapar, módulos asistenciales y Centros de Diagnósticos Integral.	Coma incorrecta. No hay necesidad de separar el verbo del sujeto con una coma.	PNB está detrás de una red de trabajadores del Hospital Raúl Leoni, Hospital Uyapar, módulos asistenciales y Centros de Diagnósticos Integral.
NPG22	“Luisito”, tenía su domicilio en el sector de Las Batallas, San Félix.	Coma incorrecta. No hay necesidad de separar el verbo del sujeto con una coma.	“Luisito” tenía su domicilio en el sector de Las Batallas, San Félix.

Note. Source: own elaboration

We can observe that a construction may contain multiple orthographic errors (as well as other dimensions), as seen in the NPG6 analysis unit in Table 4; they all have been recorded and detailed in each case.

We should be specially careful upon unifying the language in the *reasons* section, as the study can address large numbers of analysis units, further quantification can be complicated if one details "wrong use of coma", "misusing the coma", or opening the criterion and pointing out "bad punctuation."

Table 5 shows the orthographic categories: a) punctuation, (b) capital letters, c) misspelled words, d) accentuation.

Table 5

Orthographic incidents of Crime news. Daily XXX

Punctuation	-
Capital letters	-
Misspelled words	-
Accentuation	-

Total -

Note. Source: Own elaboration

In both tables 6 and 7, we will see a few some examples of the semantic errors.

Table 6

Emblematic cases of semantic errors in Crime news from Diario de Guayana

Código	Palabra, frase u oración	Razones	Sugerencia
DG2	GNB capturó a presunto homicida de menor en San Félix.	Palabra inapropiada. Llama la atención cómo una noticia se construye a partir de un hecho incierto. En la nota se identifica al señalado. Sin embargo, días después, según la policía, el hombre no tenía vínculo con el crimen. Pese al uso del “presunto” blinde legalmente, ¿quién vela por la reputación del hombre señalado de ser homicida? ¿Por qué asume el periodista que el sujeto es el homicida? ¿Por la fuente policial?	GNB capturó a un hombre por homicidio de un menor en San Félix.
DG2	Responsable del homicidio de una menor desaparecida desde el pasado 04 (sic) de abril.	Obviedad.	Responsable del homicidio de una menor desaparecida desde el 4 de abril.
DG8	Rodríguez Cepeda informó la detención de un ciudadano con un arma de fuego de fabricación casera.	Palabra inapropiada cuyo significado no corresponde precisamente con la delincuencia.	Rodríguez Cepeda informó la detención de un sujeto con un arma de fuego de fabricación casera
DG8	Fue aprehendido un ciudadano por micro tráfico (sic)	Palabra inapropiada cuyo significado no corresponde precisamente con la delincuencia.	Fue aprehendido un sujeto por microtráfico

Continúa

Note. Source: own elaboration

Table 7

Emblematic cases of semantic errors in Crime news from Diario de Guayana

Código	Palabra, frase u oración	Razones	Sugerencia
DG8	Capturaron al ciudadano Enzo David Morales de 28 años,	No hay necesidad de la palabra, cuyo significado es, además, inapropiado.	Capturaron a Enzo David Morales, de 28 años,
DG15	En horas de la madrugada de este martes una comisión de efectivos militares .	Pleonasmo.	El martes en la madrugada, una comisión de militares.
DG15	Frustraron el hurto de combustible en las instalaciones de la planta de distribución Sisor perteneciente a Petróleos de Venezuela (Pdvsa) ubicada en la ciudad de Puerto Ordaz estado Bolívar.	Redundancias. Significado impropio. Puerto Ordaz no es una ciudad, es una de las tres zonas que componen Ciudad Guayana.	Frustraron el hurto de combustible en la planta de distribución Sisor, de Petróleos de Venezuela (Pdvsa), en Puerto Ordaz, estado Bolívar.
DG16	Dos ciudadanos con 800 kilogramos de material estratégico (guayas de cobre), (<i>sic</i>) fueron aprehendidos por efectivos militares (<i>sic</i>) del comando de zona N° 62 en el estado Bolívar.	Significado impropio. Pleonasmo.	Un comando de la zona N° 62 en el estado Bolívar detuvo a dos sujetos con 800 kilogramos de material estratégico.
DG17	Detenido ciudadano con arma de fuego.	Significado impropio.	Detenido sujeto con arma de fuego.
DG20	Serán sometidos a investigaciones por parte de los organismos competentes .	Obviedad. Organismos sin competencia jurídica no puede investigar casos que no les corresponda. Hay que indicar cuáles instituciones son.	

Note. Source: own elaboration

This methodology allows to identify errors that go beyond what is evident in each linguistic error record. Although I will not dwell now on a substantive and much-needed reflection on the impacts of the (devaluation of) the presumption of innocence in *the corpus*, with great concern I note the lightness in the use of the concepts 'citizen' or 'presumption' (of innocence). In these (and in the other documented) examples, "citizenship" is directly and explicitly linked to criminality, far from what the Diccionario de la Lengua Española (2020)¹¹ outlines. In order not to digress from the purpose of this article, I will address this issue in a separate investigation.

In some of the examples shown in the tables, I have suggested changing "citizen" to "person". The discussion is extensive and more specific nouns could also be used. In any case, far from pretending *motu proprio* to withdraw the normative status of citizenship from a person accused of a crime, there is a concern about the conditioning what is seen in the newspapers to associate "citizen" with "criminal."

11 Far from definitions provided by Merriam Webster, and Oxford dictionaries, as well (2021).

There might be those who will question - and not without reasons - the impertinence of this association between "citizen" and "criminal." Nor is it reprehensible that this debate begins from moral philosophy, which arises from a semantic analysis. Quintero Velásquez (2019) recalls that the media and ICT are moral actors, beyond the instrumental reason with which many of them have been conceived and assumed. Its evolution has also been marked by the replacement of the old agora and the public square, in which they have been reconfigured to receive political dynamics, have generated political transformations, and intervene in the configuration of public opinion (Habermas, 1997).

And this proposed methodology, based on moral philosophy, cannot help ringing the alarms about a concept so vital to democracy as that of "citizen." Hence, the first step is to recognize the vice of passivity so that the members of a plural society have an active and autonomous attitude through the cultivation of good habits (Cortina, 1994) ... not criminal habits, as has been observed in the writing of crime reports.

This ethicolinguistic analysis methodology opens the field for moral philosophy to reflect precisely on concepts such as "citizen", either from the perspective of civil leadership in society, in which the "citizen" is not a vassal, but the key element of democracy (Cortina, 1994, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2017; Camps, 2003; Gracia Calandín, 2020), or of any theory of moral and political philosophy. In any case, it is not a question, therefore, of evaluating only the lack of semantic correspondence as proposed by the Diccionario de la Lengua Española, Merriam Webster, or Oxford dictionaries.

Upon speaking of the "presumption" in these analyzed crime news, journalists and editors do not presume innocence, but believe that the person pointed out is a criminal. Or if they assume his innocence, there is no correspondence between reporter's intentionality and the wording. I note in the journalistic writing analyzed what Barata (2009) has called a "devaluation" of the presumption of innocence. In his analysis, he presents the conflict between freedom of information and procedural safeguards.

It is not a small matter for journalists to presume that a person is guilty. Innocence must be presumed, not guilt whatsoever. Journalism's *praxis teleia* is the formation of a mature, responsible, and reasoning public opinion (Cortina, 2004) and therefore its activity is based on freedom of expression, although it does not entail that people are deprived of their right of honor (Camps, 2004), or that badly constructed information -in a linguistic sense and, therefore, badly hierarchized journalistically- and ends up violating the due process (García Yépez, 2019). This violation - typical of inquisitive systems, warns Nieva Fenoll (2016) - is not only against a new victim, the one pointed out by the journalist, who, echoing or not the police source, accuses and opens a trial, but against the entire society, since it is devoid of information guarantees for the exercise of their freedom. My focus in a future article will be from the ethic-linguistic perspective.

It is evident that, whilst there may be adherence to a legal wording formula (using the qualifying adjective before the crime), the idea, not of innocence, but of guilt, is still quite manifest.

On the other hand, this methodology reveals the contradictions between the headlines, in which some of the grammatical categories of the idea of presumption are used, but in the body of the text, the reporter also assumed the person pointed out is guilty. In addition to the linguistic responsibility, once again, it is clear the great responsibility that journalism must protect the public opinion. There are cases in the spotlight that have an impact on the public sphere that can lead to media trials (Vázquez Sande, 2014).

Based on these units of analysis, one does not stop thinking: what does the journalist really presume? Is there cognitive dissonance between what he believes, the information he receives from police sources, and what he writes? What are the copy editors, and editors who miss out on these accusations, who end up shaping public opinion?

Table 8 shows the semantic categories: a) obviousness, b) redundancies, c) pleonasm, d) improper meanings, e) contradictions, f) unnecessary assessments, g) inaccuracies, h) foreign words, i) amphibologies, j) barbarisms, and k) misused acronyms.

Table 8

Semantic incidents. Daily XXX

Obviousness	-
Redundancies	-
Pleonasm	-
Improper meanings	-
Contradictions	-
Unnecessary appraisal	-
Inaccuracies	-
Foreign words	-
Amphibologies	-
Barbarisms	-
Misused acronyms	-
Total	-

Note. Source: Own elaboration

In Table 9, you will notice a small sample of morphological mistakes.

Table 9

Emblematic cases of morphological errors in Crime news from Primicia

Código	Palabra, frase u oración	Razones	Sugerencia
PM26	Los vehículo serán entregados después.	Error de concordancia de número.	Los vehículos serán entregados después.
PM70	Por el crimen de José Luis Campos Salazar, de 25 años, registrada este domingo.	Error de concordancia de género.	Por el crimen de José Luis Campos Salazar, de 25 años, registrado este domingo.
PM85	Los testimonios indica que los hombres	Error de concordancia	Los testimonios indican

	lo sorprendieron.	de número.	que los hombres lo sorprendieron.
PM122	En el caso de los reclusos que se encuentra en el comando de la GNB ubicado en Sidor.	Error de concordancia de número. El sujeto está en plural, el verbo debería también.	En el caso de los reclusos que se encuentran en el comando de la GNB en Sidor.

Note. Source: Own elaboration

According to table 9, the errors of agreement in grammatical number are reflected, some of them could be assumed to be syntactic. In these examples, it has not been considered this way, since it is not believed that the problem is the identification of the subject or its verb. There are specialists who could contemplate the possibility of categorizing them as spelling incidents; we have opted for the morphological view as they are cases of number.

There have been two categories in the morphological dimension: agreements in grammatical gender and grammatical number, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10

Morphological incidents. Daily XXX

Agreement in gender	-
Agreement in number	-
Total	-

Note. Source: Own elaboration

6. Final discussion and conclusions

Quantification is not an end itself. Although it is used, it is not intended at any time to achieve validity in this way. Systematizing and listing the incidents will yield other results that will open the doors to other investigations and conclusions such as comparison, elaboration of improvement and quality indicators.

The basis of its interpretation and, above all, its justification, will determine whether there is adherence to journalistic ethics. With frequency tables, incidents can be quantified, which will allow further analysis (comparisons between sources, between newspapers, establishing discursive lines). In addition to the quantitative methodology, the significant goal about this model is that one can put the magnifying glass on each case of linguistic error and suggest corrections.

As extensive as this study may seem, as indeed it is, the objective of the pilot test was to apply it broadly. It is not recommended to analyze all these categories at the same time; The collection instruments of incidents may well be way more discriminated to the point of focusing on a single concept. For example, the analysis of the concept "presumption" and its variants "assumption" or conditional tenses deserve an exclusive dedication.

This methodology of analysis with an ethical approach fits into other lines of research. To mention a few: a) psychology of language (counting the use of positive words, revictimization, violent language) b) feminism (showing revictimization or small displays of machism, etc.), c) moral and political philosophy (evaluating the correspondence of the citizen concept), d) human rights (analyze the use of presumption of innocence), e) journalistic style (use of conditional tense in headlines); f) misinformation and "fake news."

What purpose is it reported for? Is it reported to account for the truth? Or from the fake? Can you report misinforming? Future analyzes should devote substantial consideration to these issues, because when it is said "alleged murderer", readers understand that it has been meant "that his innocence is presumed", even when the opposite of the truth and the law is said. Could it be considered fake news?¹²

Better efforts must be invested in communication schools and in newsrooms to insist on the need and obligation of the correspondence (adequacy) of the word, of an attachment to reality, without this be detrimental to the interpretation or the potentiality of reality with a view to human flourishing; as well as in the responsibility of the word towards each citizen and with society, with which the word, in order to do justice to this accountability, cannot be drawn at random and must be especially careful. These braveries cannot be separated from grammar, which is not to be understood as courtesy or procedural rule. And for this, students must be approached with rigor, amenity, and critical judgment.

The journalist ought to forge a character, an *êthos* leading to understand that practice of communication compels him (Cortina, 2007) to others, because others are valid interlocutors, due to the fact of being people and having communicative competence.

These reflections, on the notions of truth and true in journalism and a compassionate approach from the ethics of cordial reason, certainly deserve time and space apart. It would also merit to retake the "linguistic turn" and bring it into the world of journalistic writing, as Chillón (1998 and 2001) proposes it, and to analyze the writing of Crime news, for instance, with the sieve of moral language (from reasonableness: self-obligation, universality and unconditionality, according to Cortina 2008).

Throughout this article, either through foundation or application, we have reasoned that, in journalistic writing, form (understand *linguistics*) is not only form, but also substance. Grammar is not a cosmetic matter; its attachment or detachment reveals the *êthos* of the journalist and the media company. When we speak of the ethics of the word, our moral disposition and character are revealed.

The ethics of the word does not only have an enunciative value, but also a communicative stamp, because it is in dialogue with all those involved in the informative work and with society; it looks out for the true in the precise word so that the reader can get hold of useful information and exercise its freedom. The ethics of the

12 A study by Guallar, Codina Freixa and Perez-Montoro (2020) clarifies among fake news, hoaxes, and information disorders. Although these concepts are sometimes used interchangeably, only the first one is devoid - according to these authors - of the intention to harm manipulate public opinion.

word does not remain anchored in rigid structures in the name of adequation. The communicative value of the ethics of the word in journalism transcends from the true to a living and liberating truth, because it has a critical spirit. Hence, a good writing is not only a (technical) tool for communicability, but also for the *êthos* of the journalist.

For the time being, the last conclusion is that efforts from academic training must awake or refine the linguistic feelings about Alarcos Llorach (1999a) speaks of, which allow us to identify, for example, the differences between the simple past and past perfect. Along these lines, we also find a similar notion, *sensitivity* (Restrepo, 2018) in reference to otherness to present the idea of ethics in the journalist. Both linguistic sentiments and sensitivity will revitalize journalism and linguistics.

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