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The texture of ideology: Demonstrating bias in the representation of the internal conflict in the Colombian press

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate how the four major Colombian newspapers covered the news related to both left-wing guerrillas and right wing paramilitaries' actions from 1998 to 2006. Within a Systemic Functional Linguistics framework, it aims to identify linguistic patterns in the construal of violent acts that may highlight or conceal the responsibility of the perpetrators. The findings may provide some insight into the role of the press as a contributing factor in the reproduction of the widespread ideology of the paramilitaries as a minor agent of violence in the conflict despite the statistical evidence to the contrary.

The data for this study consists of a 300,000+ word (over 500 texts) corpus of news reports from the major broadsheet papers from the four largest Colombian cities, *El Tiempo*, from Bogotá; *El País*, from Cali; *El Colombiano*, from Medellín, and *El Heraldo*, from Barranquilla. The news reports are divided according to the perpetrator (guerrillas or paramilitaries), and into two periods of time: August 1998- August 2002 and August 2002- August 2006, corresponding to two presidential periods when negotiations with guerrillas and paramilitaries respectively were carried out. This corpus is analysed from both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective combining the use of computational tools with detailed manual analysis. The analytical tools employed include instantial weight (Butt, 2008), the cline of dynamism and cohesive harmony (Hasan, 1985), the representation of social actors (van Leeuwen, 1996) and transitivity patterns of the construal of death and killing in Spanish. The thesis also explores the registerial variations from the orbital structure typical of hard news stories proposed by Iedema et al (1994), including the frequency of evaluative items as modelled by the appraisal system (Martin, 2000; Martin and White, 2005).

The implications of this study encompass theoretical, methodological and practical issues. Theoretically, it provides a currently unmapped system of choices for Spanish transitivity that allows for the construal of events without the participation of an Agent, which can be recruited by the speaker to conceal responsibility for violent acts, among other things. Methodologically, it approaches discourse analysis of a large corpus from a firmly grounded systemic functional perspective, which provides the analyst with sufficient evidence to support claims of ideological content in texts. And practically, by uncovering the lexicogrammatical mechanisms through which a particular ideology is reproduced, it advocates for the development of critical reading programs in the secondary and tertiary education system.