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space



# 1

# Content and message analysis of online journalism: some methodological proposals

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*One of the ways of researching online journalism is the analysis of the message. This is one of the first trends, especially when hypertext and journalism was studied. We will talk about the methods and the theoretical approaches used in the last decade and how to adapt some methodological tools to the study of online journalism, for example content analysis, discourse analysis (and its different schools) and narratology.*

**T**he main goal of this paper is to draw some trends and methods to analyse to which extent the message is significantly changing due to the effects of the convergence process, as defined in an ongoing project funded by the Ministry of Educations and Science of Spain (SEJ2006-14828-C06-02), and try to explain how the journalistic discourse is built in these times of convergence. For the immediate future, we propose to carry on a content analysis and a discourse analysis of both textual and paratextual elements, and of hypertext, interactivity, multimodality, memory as characteristics of the digital discourse, from the point of view of disciplines like linguistics, documentation or semiotics. Our proposal is to apply some methodologies related to our aim to describe precisely which are the characteristics that define the (cyber)journalistic products on the Internet, trying so to propose typologies or even an attempt of criteria to define journalistic genres on the Net.

We want to know how the journalistic products, how news are constructed on the Internet. This is our main goal, and, in order to do that, we propose an exhaustive analysis of as much elements of digital news as we can. A group of specialists is therefore formed to answer this important question; most of us are teaching online journalism and newswriting in our universities, so, both for research and for teaching we do need to know precisely which kind of changes are happening in online newswriting. Content analysis and discourse analysis will help us to determine these important questions: how are news presented in the digital environment and what are they informing us about. Which are the conditions of journalistic work and routines is important as well to understand why news are this way on the Internet. Therefore, it is absolutely important to do some research on production condition. We are aware that defining message is not the only way (even if a predominant trend in the last decades) to understand how and why the products we analyse are that way, and that it is very important to know the production context and routines, as proposed for online media by a young generation of researchers (Patterson & Domingo, 2008). Coordinated research in ethnography or documentation will help.

Our main hypothesis is that convergence in production is creating some major changes in newswriting, in the product offered by online media. Due to the application of characteristics like hypertext, multimedia, interactivity, and the use of different information sources (probably predominating news agencies), but also taking into account that production routines and rhythm are very different from those of the other media (as explained in David Domingo's doctoral thesis, *Inventing online journalism. Development of the Internet as a news medium in four Catalan online newsrooms* < <http://www.tesisenxarxa.net/TDX-1219106-153347/index.html> >), the message, the discourse is changing.

## Hypernews

One of our main goals is to explain how hypertextual news are constructed, applying some related methods to the study of discourse and the message. We have done some research on this subject<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, we will take into account the different trends of narratology, beginning from the theories of the most important names of this discipline: Vladimir Propp, Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, Gérard Genette or Claude Bremond, for example, and, most recently, Mieke Bal. We also try to explain which are the structures of the hypertextual news, both considered from the point of view of Teun A. van Dijk's theories and from the point of view of hypertext theories. As professor Van Dijk did in his book *News as discourse*, we will try to explain if the structures (macro and microstructures) of news remain the same after all these years and if hypertextual construction has introduced some kind of changes in this structures. We will try to determine whether this micro- and macrostructures corresponds or not to some typical hypertextual structures,

and if these structures are represented on the interface. If online journalism is to be considered as a database structure and retrieval system, we will need to study the way interfaces interact, the hypertextual structure laying in this database, and the paratextual elements of design used to present the interface to the user. And, after all, whether all these changes are creating a particular rhetoric of online news (on rhetorics, we will follow Heinrich Lausberg, Bice Mortara Garavelli and, as a researcher especially interested in hypertextual rhetorics, Tomás Albadalejo). We continue thus the research line theoretically exposed in Introduction and chapter 2 of our *Manual de redacción ciberperiodística*.

We need to determine not only *how* online news are constructed, ordered and presented; we also need to know *what* are they informing about. We will thus need to apply, firstly, some research on rhetorics to determine the parts of the news discourse, and the resources used by online journalism. We will need to do some research on the mechanism of textual cohesion and coherence, in the way, for example, Irlandé Costa Antunes or Ingeborg Villaça have done in Brazil, applying their methods to online news (as, i.e, Costa Antunes did for editorial stuff). Professor Martin Engebretsen's works on hypertextual news coherence will be encouraging for our research as well (Engebretsen, 2000).

Discourse analysis will be carried out: both Teun A. van Dijk's works and Patrick Charaudeau and Dominique Maingueneau's works have been applied to media, so we will try to apply their methods as well to online news.

Finally, we will try to find out whether we can propose a typology of online news (online cybertext, using Espen Aarseth words) and whether a catalogue of criteria to define online information genres can be offered as well.

Our approach to the subject is multidisciplinary, applying both qualitative and quantitative methods. Due to the training and knowledge of the members of the group, we can apply some related methodologies to the study of the same objects.

We propose a stratified sample system to analyse the different stages of the online media studied, to complete a longitudinal study of three years. The minimum level of reliability is 95%. To determine the size of the sample, we will first determine the number of unities we will analyse; for every edition of an online media, we have to check it out three times a day, to measure the changes and renovation of the news. We will apply the codification during periods of three months twice a year (six times all along the research project), except if some major change (i.e., redesign) is noticed in one of the media. For every period of time (three months) this is 92 days and the entries (three times a day), 276 items, the objective public or size of population. As sampling will be stratified by proportional affixation, reliability level 95% and a  $\pm 5\%$  sample error, the following formula will be applied:

$$N = N_p / 1 + (N_p - 1) \cdot E_m^2 / Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q$$

(N= sample size; N<sub>p</sub>: population size; E<sub>m</sub>, sampling error, Z=reliability level (1,96 for 95%), and p.q. proportions, taking into account the worst one, usually 0,25).

## Content analysis

One of the most usual methodologies in social science, and particularly in the study of communication and media (Bruce Berelson was the pioneer), is content analysis. This analysis allows us to “examine scientifically both significance (subject analysis) and significant (procedure analysis) of any text” (Igartua & Humanes, 2004: 76).

In this research, due to the use we will do of some other methods better for style analysis, for example, and due to the lack of pertinence of an ideological or *framing* research (also usual in content analysis) we will use content analysis for just thematic items: how online media makes a map of reality in the front page; which themes appear most commonly and which is the space dedicated to them. Three complementary perspectives will be used:

- a) A generic overview of section structure as proposed by any medium, differences between them and catalogue criteria.
- b) Comparison and thematic adscription of the front-page news, and relevance criteria.

After selecting some relevant items, a comparison of the treatment given to each subject in the different online media analysed.

## Narratology and mediological analysis

The methodology consists on analysing online newspapers trying to determine which kind of narratology and thematic recurrence strategies are being used in nowadays news. Towards this objective, we will try to determine the use of invariable ingredients (Calabrese 1987; Villanueva, 1991) and analyse them in a multidisciplinary perspective, using the mythological comparatism (Lévi-Strauss, 1958; Ginzburg, 1989; Dumézil, 1970, Nagy, 2006), Rastier’s textual analysis and thematology (Brunel, Dabézies, 1992; Guillén, 1985 and 1998), myth in media (Silverstone, 1981);

Identify the homological structural features using semiotics, formalism (Eco, 1984; Calabrese, 1987; Greimas, 1979; Propp, 1928) and narratology (Genette, 1982), in order to distinguish features that are inherent to hypertextual narrative from thematic recurrence in the culture and artistic production;

Distinguish features inherent to online journalism as a media, apart from these other traditional invariants and features.

## Stylistic analysis

This methodology takes as a reference the point of view of stylistics and pragmatics, in order to know how journalist’s point of view is fixed in cybertexts.

A series of pragmatylistic indicators (Hickey (1987, 1989), H. Calsamiglia i A. Tusón (2001), V. Salvador (1995, 2000, 2003), S. Gutiérrez (1997), C. Fuentes (1999), G. Corpas (1996), C. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1986), J. M. Castellà (1992) o L. Núñez Ladevéze (1991) will be used:

- 1) Focal strategies that allow the author of news to underline some elements of the phrase. This part of the study includes a research on the changes on syntagmatic order and emphasis constructions.
- 2) Procedure to keep or transform the semantic representations. This part of the research will use the analysis of such a resource like anaphora of co-reference and value substitutions, argumentative connectors used to establish causality or consequence relationship of the facts.
- 3) Election of words, pre-fabricated discourse –locutions, i.e.– orality and colloquialism.
- 4) Introduction of reported discourse: strategies used by the author to introduce some other voices.
- 5) Metaphor and irony as main rhetorical figures.

## Hypertext

The concept and the implementation of hypertext information systems are in the core of the digital information in general, and in the core of the World Wide Web.

However, the digital journalism has made a weak adoption of the hypertext principles and techniques, since now. Recently, there are new tendencies in the digital journalism towards the more complete implementation of hypertext techniques and concepts in the representation of the news and in the explanation of the reality.

In this sense, a new methodology will be developed to analyse the new concept of the hypertext in the digital newspapers to detect tendencies, patrons and the best practices. Particularly, the methodology will attempt to analyze and discover a new dimension of interactivity: the several ways the citizens can make contributions to the new digital journalism.

To assume this objective, first several of the best international digital journals will be analysed to detect tendencies around the use of hypertext techniques and, in general, the implementation of different kinds of interactivity. Second, an articulated system of evaluation of the hypertext and interactive systems in digital journals will be developed. Third, this methodology of evaluation will applied to a comparative analysis of the best Spanish digital newspapers and to obtain conclusions and, eventually, refine the methodology. The final objective is the development of a standard methodology available to other national and international researchers as one of the contributions of this research.

## Paratextual elements (design)

Linguists like Argyle (1978) or Benavides (1999) have clearly appointed that to a great extent the communication process is non-verbal or more than verbal; how things are said is at least as important as what is said. Due to the lack of such researches, some authors have criticized it (Gray, 2004). This perspective justifies a research on the paralinguistic discourse as practised in the latest form of journalism: online journalism, to complete the other approaches mentioned in this memory.

Analysing content representation (Riffe [et al.], 1998; Creer and Mensing, 2003; Li, 2004) allows us to discover the influence of established hierarchies (Knox, 2007) or how content is as important as typographical choices, location of the textual and paratextual elements, use of design marks (titles, summaries, etc.), selective application of colour and, in general, all the elements displayed to enhance the reader's interest and guide the reading act as well as necessary resources to obtain a global interpretation of discourse (Mealing, 2003).

This part of our research will we completed designing concrete tools and methods to analyse the iconic element, and especially multimedia applications (Wang, 2006).

## Notes

1. Javier Díaz Noci, teaching currently at the Pompeu Fabra University (Barcelona, Spain), has done some research on hypertext and newswriting. He was the main researcher of a coordinated project funded by the Ministry of Technology of Spain (BSO2002-04206-C04-01, -02, -03 and -04) and he has been the main researcher of a sub group of the ongoing project funded by the Ministry of Education of Spain SEJ2006-14828-C06-02. His first book on the subject (the first one to be published in Spain about online journalism) was written in 1996: *El periodismo electrónico*. Barcelona: Ariel. From then onwards, he has published many books and articles on this subject: *La escritura digital*. *Hipertexto y construcción del discurso informativo en el periodismo electrónico* (Bilbao, 2002); *Manual de redacción ciberperiodística* (2003), as a coordinator with Ramón Salaverría; and articles like "Hypertext and newswriting: a methodological approach" (2004), "El juego de la información. Tecnología del hipertexto, teoría de juegos y su aplicación en el Periodismo" (2002), "El discurso periodístico digital: hacia

el hipertexto informativo" (2001), "Hipertexto y redacción periodística ¿un nuevo campo de investigación?" (2005), etc. Javier Díaz Noci has been the coordinator of an international project, "Journalism on the Internet. A comparative study Spain-Brazil", funded by the Ministry of Science and Education of Spain (2006-2008), and published as coordinator the book *Metodología para o estudo dos cibermeios: estudo da arte e perspectivas* (Salvador de Bahia, 2008) [*Methodology for the study of online media: state of the art and perspectives*]. An abridged version of this book to be published in English by the University of the Basque Country.

2. Lluís Codina, expert in documentation, hypertext and digital publishing and information retrieval. One of his main research lines is the World Wide Web, the digital media and the semantic Web. Author of a couple of books about the e-books (1996) and the e-books and the Web (2000), and of some many books and articles on digital documentation and the Web. Expert in hypertext theory and in journalistic databases as well, he has written many articles and contributions on this subject. He is the creator of [hipertext.net](http://hipertext.net), an online site and jour-



nal dedicated to discuss all kind of papers on hypertext. He has directed an online master on digital edition, and taken part and coordinated as a main researcher so many projects on these subjects.

3. Lia Da Fonseca Seixas is the author of a recent doctoral thesis defended in 2008 in the Federal University of Bahia (Brazil), entitled *Por uma outra classificação. Uma proposição de critérios de definição de gêneros jornalísticos por impressos e digitais*. Author of some articles and chapters on genres and e-media, her curriculum vitae is at <http://lattes.cnpq.br/6178587093376509>. She maintains an active blog at <http://generos-journalisticos.blogspot.com/>.

4. Guillermo López García teaches at the University of Valencia (Spain). He works on public opinion and journalism on the Web. Author of six books and thirty articles and chapters. Two of his books are electronic and for free on the Internet: the last one is *Los cibermedios valencianos: cartografía, características y contenidos* [*Valencian cybermedia: cartography, characteristics and contents*] (<http://www.cibermediosvalencianos.es/cibermedios.pdf>).

5. Dolors Palau is the author of a doctoral thesis defended in 2008 in the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, entitled *Estudi pragmaestilístic*

*de la premsa escrita diària. Trets i usos estilístics en les distintes modalitats genèriques dels diaris d'informació general. [Pragmastylistic study of daily newspapers]*.

6. Bella Palomo has focused her line of research on digital journalism. Author of *The online journalist: from revolution to evolution* (2004), she has written several articles about cybermedia's design; the relationship between the Internet and the journalists, and more recently, the citizen journalism. Member of national research programs about these topics, she has been visiting scholar at the University of Washington and Rutgers.

7. Anna Tous Roviroa doctor in journalism, author of a thesis strongly based on narratology, mediology and thematic recurrence: *El text audiovisual: anàlisi des d'una perspectiva mediològica* [*The audiovisual text: analysis from a mediological perspective*] 2008, applied to fiction but equally applicable to non-fiction, which is the case. During the last year, she has published some articles on this subject. Her doctoral thesis can be consulted: <http://www.tesisenxarxa.net/TDX-0129109-151302/>

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