

Media and their world views. The meaning anchored in dialogic discursive strategies

Mirta Clara Echevarría National University of Córdoba (Argentina) - School of Information Sciences / mirta.echevarria@gmail.com

(...) all ironists are harmless, except when they want to use irony to suggest the truth (Fernando Pessoa)

Abstract: This work addresses, conceptually and analytically, the discursive strategies that are based on intertextuality and interdiscursivity (parody, satire, irony and others), in order to gain a better understanding of their meaning. This meaning, which is reflected on significant elements –located, in a first-level, as “texts” (Verón)– is affected by the conditions of production, circulation, reproduction and recognition. The analysis shows how certain digital publications in Argentina set a reading contract through the construction of author and reader images; how they absorb and transform socio-historical situations, and how, at the same time, re(produce) assessments which can become part of the social imaginary. Communication, being a culturally configured process, sets in motion a complex exchange of relationships, differentiations, and combinations of what is said and what is not said. The methodological approach of this article is eclectic and adapts methodologies used in discourse analysis, semiotics, sociology of literature, and literary theory.

Keywords: dialogism; intertextuality; irony; parody; satire; social assessments.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Conceptual basis. Methodology. 2.1. The communication contract. 2.2. Dialogism: the voices in the text. 2.3. Language: translinguistic conception. 3. From concepts to practices. 3.1. Discourse strategies: irony, satire, parody. 3.2. Discursive strategies: Intertextuality. 4. Conclusion: the media and their strategies. 5. Bibliography. 6. Notes.

Translation by **Cruz Alberto Martínez-Arcos**, M.A. (University of London)

1. Introduction

For several years my research has been devoted to establish how the images of author and reader are built in Argentinean online journalistic publications. In some occasions I have focused on humour and in some others on the strategies used to generate interactivity or capture the audience. I have always been interested in exploring the features of writers who, beyond the eminently media aspects, reflect links to underlying social problems, earlier texts, and –fundamentally– discursive strategies that overlap those problems and texts. In all cases it is clear that certain competencies that enable a proper interpretation are taken for granted.

The work presented here is based on those -digital- objects of study of the aforementioned investigations, to which I apply another approach: the theories dedicated to the analysis of the contract between the writer, and its strategies, and the expected audience.

The contractual perspective between the enunciator and its receivers is always present in all productions, not only in the media productions. Authors like Patrick Charaudeau and Eliseo Verón have carried out studies on this contractual positioning. “For Verón, the essential point is the reading contract. (...). For Charaudeau, the basis for the approximation between enunciator and receiver is the communication contract” (Dalmonte, 2009: 22).

2. Conceptual basis. Methodology

2.1. The communication contract

All texts have aspects associated with the circumstances of enunciation. The text builds an “image” for its creator, its author, and at the same time, predicts who the reader/receiver is. The text establishes a reading contract, which indicates that the proposed meaning will be construed in accordance with aspects related to the socio-historical conditions in and by which the text is produced, circulated and consumed.

This can be problematic for the particular communication situation proposed here: a communication that is directed to an audience from around the world but presents reflections conditioned by the socio-historical situation of a given country.

“The communicative situation constitutes the reference framework used by individuals belonging to a social community when they start communicating with someone. (...) The communicative situation is like a theatrical stage, with its limitations of space, time, relations, and words, in which the output of the social exchanges is interpreted and given its symbolic value” (Charaudeau: 2003, 77).

The units of analysis to which I apply certain categories are influenced by social assessments with a strong Argentinean imprint; they were published online in the first decade of the 21st century. They contain assumptions, real holes that can difficultly be filled by those without previous competencies. “We know that authors speak for themselves and for the community and that they indicate their autarchy when they speak with the others, the listeners or readers and, through them, with the society of their time” (Bakhtin, 1979, 1982, in Gómez, 2007: 123).

It is not enough to speak the same language or to have knowledge of the rules of grammar with purely syntactic and semantic basis. The interpretation of a text also depends (although not primarily) on certain pragmatic factors Eco, 1987: 73). While a language sets specifications and frequently serves as anchor to other languages, we need more than that to capture a

text's world view. Interpretation involves linguistic, ideological and cultural competencies; sociological determinants; restrictions of the discursive universe; a production model; and the role of short and long term memory. These competencies are not exclusively linguistic, but are also semiotised data "taken from the set of [specific] social behaviours" (Charaudeau, 2003: 78).

2.2. Dialogism: the voices in the text

According to Bakhtin, in the communication chain each message is a link that speaks with other messages. It always involves a crossover of voices: of the author, the expected reader, the previous texts, and culture. **Dialogism** is the constitutive principle of discourse; it refers to the deeply interactive dimension of language: it converses with previous texts -refers to them, rebates them, recognises them-; it is intended to get a response - it causes and induces it – (Bakhtin, 1982). Lotman does not rule out the Bakhtinian conception of dialogism but uses the term polyglotism to clarify even more the exchanges between texts and culture (Barei, 2008).

Dialogism and polyphony are concepts that have been used and reformulated by various authors as processes of Intertextuality. Julia Kristeva systematises them as: citation, hybridisation, stylisation, parody and satire. Linda Hutcheon refers to them in her studies on irony, satire and parody.

The enunciator constructs itself through its strategies and, at the same time, outlines the model for the receiver, to whom the text is directed. Textual strategies are not mere expressions of subjectivity (from an author/enunciator); instead they are discourse strategies since, with them, they involve socio-historical determinations that appear as marks or traces. This process of meaning-making reflects the conditions of production, circulation, reproduction and recognition. The meaning only exists in its physical manifestations, in the significant elements that contain the marks that allow its spatial identification. These significant elements, at a first level, can be located as "texts" (as "textual sets" or as "textual packages") (Verón: 1998).

Text comes from the order of what has been created, while the discourse comes from the order of what is possible.

2.3. Language: translinguistic conception

Language, in a translinguistic conception, covers different semiotic systems, and is not limited to verbal systems. According to the position of Lotman and the School of Tartu [5], language is "any system that serves the purposes of communication between two or several individuals" (Lotman, 1970: 17). Language concretises itself in texts that are "coherent signifier sets (...), any communication registered in a particular sign system"; semiotic spaces within which languages interact. They play, at least two basic roles: the proper transmission of meanings and the generation of new meanings (Lotman, 1996: 94).

The production of a text in a given socio-historical situation strongly affects its meaning. “Any text puts in crisis the denotation, since any manifestation of the very existence of language overrides the correspondence between the word and the thing. The inclusion of the discourse in the world is always a *discourse on the world*” (Barei, 2009: 10). Idiomatic expressions of the Spanish language spoken in Argentina cannot be interpreted literally: “*El que se quema con leche cuando ve una vaca, llora*” (literally: “He who scalds himself with milk cries when he sees a cow”), or “*Al que nace barrigón es al ñudo que lo fajen*” (literally: “it is pointless to tuck the shirt in of he who was born fat”). The denotation category neither applies to this Spanish expression from certain parts of Spain: “*Aguantar carretas y carretones*” (literally: “stand roads and wagons”, figuratively: “to put up with the unbearable or the unthinkable”).

The language, in this dimension, is conceived beyond a means of expression or manifestation of thought; it is part of the warp of the social fabric with its baggage of symbols, representations and social imaginaries, which we recognise as culture

3. From concepts to practices

3.1. Discourse strategies: irony, satire, parody

Every language is social and its use brings to the text the assessments of a discursive community at a particular time and place.

Many times the objectivity is linked to journalism, including the journalists of political information. Such objectivity could be a goal to achieve or a value to exercise, since

The political journalists are influential figures, not only in the media system, but also in the social and political system (as mediators of information). (...) they play a central role in the democratic process (Deuze, 2002 quoted by Berganza Conde, Oller Alonso and Meier, 2010).

I acknowledge the crucial influence of these "information intermediaries", but I cannot adjudge objectivity to a profession that constantly selects, categorises and evaluates. This is not the position I take in this work since I inquire into the strategies which, precisely, reveal assessments of the producer of the text and, therefore, are subjective.

There are dialogic forms where an existing text expresses a view of the world through which an absent text can be read in a resource of intertextuality. As an example, a crossing of the voices of the author, the reader, and the previous texts:

And in a place of Argentina, whose recession I do not want to remember (Nik. LaNación.com. January, 2000).

It is a parodic stylisation that refers to the social, political context, the position of the enunciator, and provides for the evocation of the beginning of "El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de La Mancha" ("The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha"). The parody is an intertextual modality, an ambivalent dual structure because it acts through the overlapping of texts. And it also satirises. It is a type of respectful parody that, just like the pejorative parody, always tends to indicate a difference between two texts, even where the "target" is displaced.

The irony is not anchored only over the satiriser but also over those interpreting it, who are responsible for giving meaning to the presuppositions. At the same time, it is an antiphrastic (contrastive) structure and evaluative strategy. The act of inference is intentional and is based on the information provided by the immediate context and the textual marks (Hutcheon, 1995: 110). Through the investment, the discrepancy and/or the contrast, it transforms the proposed world in its opposite. It is a trope that encloses assumptions and knowledge of a discursive community.

Umberto Eco, in "Reader in Fabula", says that any text is a lazy mechanism that needs to be updated and be set in motion by someone. In late 1999, the media spoke of the "Y2K effect" that could collapse computers and cause disasters around the world.



Mother: We wanted to give our child a name that reflected the new millennium, the effect of 2000, computing...

Female friend: And what's the name?

Mother: Idoska Sanchez

In the previous cartoon, the Sanchez family has received their first baby and have decided to give it a fashionable name: Idoska Sánchez (*I-dos-ka* is the Spanish pronunciation of the English term "Y2K"). This cartoon was made by Fontanarrosa (Clarín Digital), which implicitly captures the identity of Argentinians who always want to be "a la moda" (fashionable).

The more or less proper interpretation depends on the reader's knowledge about the uses and practices, habits and evaluations. The strategies of the author thematise events and caricature characters; demand the reader to play with knowledge and representations. Assumptions and insinuations are linked with journalistic information and evaluations about them, which are present in the social fabric.

The irony is integrated to the satirical and parodic texts but satire and parody differ in their objective. Satire ridicules social behaviour; parody takes a pre-existing text to reveal its lapses, failures, and contradictions. Many times parody and satire are imbricated; they are designed to criticise, by appealing to indirectly presupposed information, conventions or matters.



Parody and satire: this discursive practice -in a process of hybridisation- is included in the photomontage published by "Perfil digital" ("Digital profile"), entitled like the film directed by Clint Eastwood: "Million dollar baby". The composition evokes an advertising poster and appeals to a shared memory; it presupposes the knowledge of the incident that took place at the Argentinean Congress in November 2010. The president of the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies, Graciela Camaño, replied with a slap (or a punch, some say) to the insults of the pro-government MP Carlos Kunkel. So a parodied text is incorporated in a parodying text through synthesis.

"Perfil" (in its digital and printed versions) supplemented the illustration with an editorial that stated: "If it were an animated cartoon, Camaño would shove the speech balloon back into the [MP's] mouth with a punch. She made him swallow the insult he had just delivered".

There is a parody element that marks the difference: parody represents the deviation of a norm and the inclusion of this norm as internalised material. The satirical element is oriented towards a dominant answer that is given by the text; this orientation is negative since it, "like ridiculing cholera", has reforming purposes (Hutcheon, 1981).

3.2 Discursive strategies: Intertextuality

They are all voices, voices that are integrated to the text and drag, with them, the assessment of events or figures. Cartoonists and illustrators exercise the journalistic profession as well as those who only use verbal language. The authors of the aforementioned productions can be located in the dimension of active or interventionist journalists. “The interventionist pole corresponds to ‘lawyer’ journalists who get involved at the emotional level” (Berganza Conde, Oller Alonso, and Meier, 2010).

The admiration for Diego Maradona is reflected in a composition of “La Voz del Interior” (“The Voice of the Interior”) newspaper. He is an internationally well-known (and located) character. He is evaluated positively through the image in a process of relation and combination. It stimulates the memory of the audience (Lotman) about a traditional story (“One Thousand and One Nights”), with his wonderful lamp, transfigured and framed by the colours of the Argentinean flag.



The intertextual relationship with the story of Aladdin’s lamp turns Maradona into the genius that emerges, not from a magic lamp, but from a football. Something similar happens with the cover of the showbiz section of the *Clarín* newspaper (on it printed and online versions) of September 2008: Paul Newman has died. He is a famous actor of impressive and attractive eyes; that is what the wording seems to focus on: “his eyes have closed”.

Regardless of the metonymy, the words set in motion a process of associations and combinations with previous texts: a common place to refer to the death (“his eyes have closed”) and, in Argentina, a tango song that condenses feelings and intensifies the sense of

loss (“his eyes have closed, and the world is still spinning. His mouth that was mine, no longer kisses me...”).



The publications examined in this article (part of a broader project) outline and appeal to a certain discursive community, represent and are responses to the social statute. Many times they are very ideologically marked but this is not in all cases. However, they always target a particular reader with specific competencies for their interpretation: an informed Argentinean reader.

Any text sets in motion a complex process of relationships, differentiations, and combinations of what is said and what it is not said because it is a culturally configured process. If we consider culture as text (Lotman, 1994), all texts are dialogical. The production of meaning constitutes an intertextual, inter-discursive and inter-semiotic network.

4. Conclusion: the media and their strategies

The discourse production process is closely linked with extra-textual elements that constitute its conditions of production. Verón says:

(...) a given significant object, a discursive set can never be analysed ‘in itself’: the discursive analysis cannot claim any kind of ‘immanence’. The first condition to be able to produce a discourse analysis is the comparison of a significant group with aspects determined by these productive conditions. Discourse analysis is simply the description of the traces of the production conditions in the discourse, either the traces of their generation or the traces that explain their effects (Verón, 1998: 127).

Texts are also produced within certain institutions and their actions and rules systems. Each institution (each production system, says Verón) generates its classes or types of discourses, like the media discourse, for example. The media strongly influence the social imaginary; if to this we add the difficulty of separating the imaginary and the public opinion it can be concluded that the media are critical devices in the formation of citizens. Regardless of what the media consider to be newsworthy, they thematise and interpret reality. They function as mechanisms of perception of the world, by building representations of that world and offering figures of identification; they are carriers of an ideology that reflects the journalistic medium that publishes it within the society in which it circulates.

There is no doubt that they reflect and are part of the discursive practices and global problems of a socio-historical process of vast proportions that touches the mental and social frameworks of individuals and communities. In this sense, Octavio Ianni says:

(...) the media acquire and expand their influence in the imagination of many of the great majority. They hold vast control over the way in which the important and secondary local, national, regional or global, real or imaginary events are disseminated around the world, and influence minds and hearts (1999: 88).

The agenda of the population is not influenced but set up by the media. They accompany our daily life rebuilding the values circulating in society, by selecting them and fixing them. At the same time, the media are mediators that disseminate representations of the real world and become part of the social imaginary and thus of the social evaluations. These evaluations are carriers of an ideology that reflect the journalistic medium that publishes them and the society in which they circulate. As Charaudeau says:

(...) ‘information’ and ‘communication’ are concepts that refer to social phenomena; the ‘media’ constitute an institutional support that takes control over such concepts and integrates them into their diverse logics: economic, technological and symbolic. (...) Information is essentially a question of language and the language is not transparent; it has its own opacity through which a vision and a particular meaning of the world are built (2003: 11, 15).

5. Bibliography

Alvarado Jiménez, Ramón. (1991): "Géneros y estrategias del discurso" (Genres and discourse strategies). In *Revista Versión*. October. Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Xochimilco. Mexico.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. (1982): *Estética de la creación verbal* (Aesthetics of Verbal creation). Siglo XXI Editores. México.

----- (1992): *Marxismo y filosofía del lenguaje* (Marxism and philosophy of language). Alianza. Madrid.

Barei, Silvia and Molina, Pablo. (2008): *Pensar la cultura I. Perspectivas retóricas* (Defining culture I. Rhetorical perspectives). Grupo de Estudios de Retórica. Ferreyra Editor. Córdoba.

Berganza Conde, M. R., Oller Alonso, M. and Meier, K. (2010): "Journalistic roles and objectivity in Swiss and Spanish written political journalism. An applied model of journalistic culture analysis), In *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 65. La Laguna (Tenerife): University of La Laguna, pp. 488-502 retrieved on 1 December 2010, from: http://www.revistalatinacs.org/10/art3/914_Fuenlabrada/36_Berganza.html
DOI: 10.4185/RLCS-65-2010-914-488-502

Charaudeau, Patrick (2003): *El discurso de la información. La construcción del espejo social* (The discourse of information. The construction of the social mirror). Gedisa. Barcelona.

Dalmonte, Edson Fernando. (2009): *Pensar o discurso no webjornalismo: temporalidade, paratexto e comunidades de experiencia*. EDUFBA. Salvador de Bahia.

Eco, Umberto. (1987): *Lector in fabula* (Reader in fabula). Editorial Lumen. Barcelona.

Echevarría, Mirta Clara. (2003) "Humor de argen-nautas en la red" (Humour of Argentinean internet users) in *La Argentina Humorística. Cultura y discurso en el 2000* (Humorous Argentine. Culture and discourse in 2000). Ferreyra Editor. Córdoba.

Gómez, Susana. (2007): *Julio Cortázar y la Revolución cubana. La legibilidad política del ensayo* (Julio Cortázar and the Cuban revolution. Political readability of the essay). Alción. Córdoba.

Gonzaga Motta, Luiz (2004): "Jogos de linguagem e efectos de sentido da comunicação jornalística" en *Estudos em Jornalismo e Mídia*. V.1, Nº 2. Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Editora Insular. November 2004 Florianópolis.

Hutcheon, Linda. (1995): *Irony's edge. The theory and politics of irony*. Routledge. London.

Kristeva, Julia (1981). *Semiótica 2* (Semiotics 2). Edit. Fundamentos, Colección Espiral. Madrid.

Lago, Claudia and Benetti, Marcia (organisers) (2007). *Metodología de Pesquisa em Jornalismo*. Editora Vozes. Sao Paulo.

Lotman, Iuri M. (1996): *La semiosfera I. Semiótica de la cultura y del texto* (Semio-sphere I. Semiotics of culture and text). Translated by Desiderio Navarro. Ediciones Cátedra. Madrid.

----- (2000): *La semiosfera III. Semiótica de las artes y de la cultura* (Semio-sphere III. Semiotics of arts and culture). Translated by Desiderio Navarro. Ediciones Cátedra. Madrid.

----- (1994): “El texto y la estructura del auditorio” (Text and audience structure) in *Criterios* N° 31. La Habana, Cuba.

Mosquera, Alexander. (2009): “La semiótica de Lotman como teoría del conocimiento” (The semiotics of Lotman as theory of knowledge) in *Enl@ce: Revista Venezolana de Información, Tecnología y Conocimiento*. 6 (3). University of Zulia. PDF consulted in January 2010.

Verón, Eliseo. (1998): *La Semiosis Social. Fragmentos de una teoría de la discursividad* (Social Semiosis. Fragments of the theory of discursivity). Translation by Emilio Lloveras. Gedisa. Barcelona.

Note: the article reworks conclusions from research projects endorsed and subsidised by the Department of Science and Technology of the National University of Cordoba (SECyT), Argentina: “Internet communication: online newspapers. Strategies for the acquisition and maintenance of digital users” (Code 05/D454. 2010/2011) and “Digital journalism: models of production used by Argentine newspapers in relation to the potential of the Internet”. (Code: 05/D330. 2006/2007).

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE IN BIBLIOGRAPHIES / REFERENCES:

Echevarría, M. C. (2011): "Media and their world. The meaning anchored in dialogic discursive strategies ", at *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 66, pages 314 to 325. La Laguna (Tenerife, Canary Islands): La Laguna University, retrieved on ___th of ____ of 2_____, from DOI: 10.4185/RLCS-66-2011-935-314-325-EN

Note: the DOI number is part of the bibliographic references and it must be cited if you cited this article.