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Exploring the Interactive Dimension of Newspaper Editorials: a Corpus (?) Driven Approach

This paper investigates the notion of writer-responsibility in Peninsular Spanish and American English newspaper editorials by combining corporist and discursal approaches. The parameter to assess if and how much the two languages differed in the degree of writer-responsibility has been derived from the proportion between nuclei and satellites.

Various modes of analysis have been used in synergy to serve this purpose, particularly Tirkkonen-Condit's method of textual description (1985), specifically created to unravel the inner workings of argumentative texts, and the Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) by Mann and Thompson (1988), from which the nucleus-satellite dichotomy is borrowed. Rhetorical relations holding between sentences or clauses of each text have been spelled out and then categorised as nuclei and satellites. The former are juxtaposed in coordination (parataxis); while the latter are subordinate to nuclei (hypotaxis) i.e. they exist as accessories to make the text more intelligible by reinforcing the propositional content presented in a hierarchically superior act. The predominance of satellites in the American English sub-corpus is taken as indicative of a writer-responsible tendency: the reader's, comprehension or adherence to the thesis presented is not taken for granted, hence the need, on the part of the writer, to justify, explain, exemplify, reformulate. Conversely, the minor presence of satellites in the Peninsular Spanish one is understood as an illustration of less audience-sensitive writing.

The word 'corpus' is used here to refer to "a collection of texts assumed to be representative of a given language put together so that it can be used for linguistic analysis" (Tognini-Bonelli 2001:3) However, there are methodological, quantitative and qualitative factors which make us question whether the study can be seen as being derived from a corpus-driven approach. Texts, in fact, are examined *in toto* from a functional and not lexical perspective. In addition, units of analysis are long stretches of texts which are observed in their cotextual environment.

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