Parallel Session 13: Lessons on PCST history

SCIENCE, JOURNALISTS AND MASS PRESS IN THE XXTH CENTURY.

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Abstract

We have analyzed all the information about science, medicine and technology in 23 tryings realized between 1888 and 1983 - a whole of 1212 texts - of La Vanguardia and the Diario de Barcelona (two newspapers from Barcelona). We have done a quantitative analysis, and we demonstrate that the communicative link that the journal drow up at the beginning of this century established that the analysis had more importance than the information. From 1943 the information about science has lived through a period of normalization and has begun to be a part of a communicative model of mass.

Key Words: Newspapers, journalist, history

Text

From 1888 to 1918 we can see how the majority of information is produced by the newspaper editing itself. There are mainly two different types of text. Those texts that are clearly impartial and those that have the opinion of the author in it.

In this moment in history, 57% of the texts of our sample are in impartial articles without the author’s signature, 26% don’t have the author’s signature but are analytical, and 17% are signed by the author.

From 1918 and until 1933, the appearance of information agencies and the following modernization of the newspapers shows a change in the author’s implication in scientific news. In fact, during this time the unsigned
information and the information without implication of the author descends to 39%.

The first conclusion we can make about this period of time (1888-1933) is that the articles signed by the author usually have the author’s interpretation and opinion in it. Some 45% of the articles are signed by the author.

In the same period of time mentioned earlier, there are two types of journalists that sign articles about science: correspondents or contributors specialized in scientific themes. In this last case the information is firmly linked to the author’s interpretation and opinion. Certain specialists in the History of Communication (1) believe that the moment of modernization of the press must have been between 1902-1923. This was also the moment of the construction of a system of mass communication in Catalonia. Very important to note, is that in this period of time, the science journalists usually give their own opinion in their articles. Our hypothesis is, that the uniformity in the structure of the media didn’t influence the science journalists until the period of time that is called the Big Science. (2)

From 1953 onwards, the “lateral” information about science and technology is considerably reduced. We can also see new sections in newspapers, exclusively about scientific subjects, and a new usage of language.

In the last part of our sample study (1953-1983) we found out that journalists started naming their information source. As from 1963, this becomes a constant fact.

Furthermore, we observed that during the Spanish transition (1975-1982), journalists wrote less about scientific subjects. But after 1983 the science journalist becomes a mass media worker and takes part of the features of this communicative system.

Conclusions

Historical events, such as the civil war, the World War, Franco’s dictatorship and the transition towards democracy, have marked the relationship between science journalism and the mass media in Catalonia. Also this relationship has been marked by the special relationship between science and mass media.

After the information vacuum between 1933-1953 the articles about science were introduced into the system of mass communication. From this moment on, the number of articles with the author’s interpretation in it descend considerably, giving place to a larger amount of articles in which the author and the information are closely linked. It is in this moment that the journalistic language is applied to science.

References

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