

‘An Important Issue’: A Corpus-based Contrastive Study of Evaluation along the Parameter of Relevance in English and Spanish Newspaper Opinion Discourse

‘Un tema importante’: Estudio contrastivo de la dimensión valorativa de la relevancia en el discurso de opinión inglés y español

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This paper approaches the expression of the evaluative parameter of relevance in English and Spanish journalistic opinion discourse. The case-study presented here analyzes adjectives of importance as lexical markers contributing to the construction of writer stance in a persuasive genre. The main aim of the study is to engage in a cross-linguistic analysis which identifies and compares the evaluated entities (Thetela, 1997) in English and Spanish opinion texts. Authorial evaluation along the parameter of relevance may be considered to surpass the idiosyncratic features of individual texts and reflect the underlying value system of the society that has produced those texts (Thompson & Hunston, 2000: 6). Corpus linguistics provides the methodological framework for a contrastive analysis focused on the primary function of evaluation, the expression of the writer’s views, in this case, against a scale of importance.

Keywords: *evaluation; relevance; newspaper opinion discourse; English-Spanish*

Este artículo aborda la expresión lingüística de la relevancia como dimensión evaluativa en textos periodísticos de opinión en inglés y español a través del análisis de los adjetivos de importancia más frecuentes en los mismos y las entidades evaluadas (Thetela, 1997) en una y otra lengua. La presencia de estos elementos léxicos contribuye a determinar el carácter persuasivo del género, al tiempo que deja entrever el sistema de valores de las sociedades que han producido dichos textos (Thompson & Hunston, 2000: 6). La lingüística de corpus proporciona el marco metodológico de este estudio contrastivo de la expresión del posicionamiento del autor, en concreto, de su evaluación de la importancia de entidades o proposiciones.

Palabras clave: *evaluación; relevancia; discurso periodístico de opinión; Inglés-Español*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with the study of the expression of the evaluative dimension of relevance in English and Spanish newspaper opinion articles. Evaluation or authorial stance is a very complex semantic function which encompasses multiple semantic dimensions (Biber et al., 1999; Thompson & Hunston, 2000; Martin & White, 2005).¹ The dimension of relevance has been studied in the literature as one of the main parameters of evaluation (Francis, 1995; Lemke, 1998; Thompson & Hunston, 2000; Bednarek, 2006). Each

¹ Following Thompson and Hunston (2000), this paper takes a “combining approach” using evaluation as a broad term referring to the writer’s stance about entities and propositions (Thompson & Hunston, 2000:5).

evaluative dimension may be realized in discourse by a wide variety of linguistic devices such as affective or evaluative adjectives, verbs or nouns (Biber et al., 1999: 968) among many others.

The present study analyzes the expression of relevance in English and Spanish newspaper opinion discourse as conveyed by the lexical category of evaluative adjectives. A corpus-based methodology is employed to identify the main adjectives expressing 'relevance' and the entities they evaluate in the opinion section of English and Spanish newspapers. The linguistic evidence analyzed has been extracted from a large *ad hoc* comparable corpus of English and Spanish newspaper opinion discourse (C-OPRES).

British journalistic opinion discourse, usually referred to as *Comment* (Bell, 1991; Murphy, 2005), comprehends a variety of texts such as non-bylined leading articles or editorials, which represent the voice of the newspaper; opinion columns, bylined and carrying the columnist's personal opinions; and other editorializing articles written by well-known guest opinion writers and referred to as comment articles or features. Likewise, these three types of text are distinguished in Spanish typologies (Martínez Albertos, 1983; Santamaría, 1990; Armañanzas & Díaz Noci, 1996) as opinion genres, in opposition to informative genres.

Newspaper opinion articles cover a wide variety of current social, political and economic topics and are characterized by their intention to persuade the reader (Biber, 1988). The expression of evaluation along the parameter of relevance clearly contributes to the persuasive aims of journalistic opinion discourse: construction of opinion and ideology, influence on decision making and instigation of social change (Van Dijk, 1996). This study is based upon the underlying conception that the analysis of the evaluative language of a text reveals the value system of the society that has produced that text (Thompson & Hunston, 2000: 6). Thus, the results of the linguistic analysis go beyond the purely linguistic level and bear on the ideological or sociological level of the text.

2. THE PARAMETERS OF EVALUATION

The analysis of relevance or importance as a dimension of attitudinal meaning is found in many studies in the field of research on stance (Biber & Finegan, 1988; Francis, 1995; Lemke, 1998; Thompson & Hunston, 2000; Martin & White, 2005; Bednarek, 2006). Those studies reflect different developments of a theoretical framework of evaluation that takes into account several parameters along which speakers or writers evaluate the world.

Thompson and Hunston's comprehensive definition of evaluation as "the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker's or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about" (Thompson & Hunston, 2000: 5) reflects the distinction between different dimensions of evaluation. Speaker's attitude may relate to different sets of values, such as certainty, desirability or obligation (Thompson & Hunston, 2000: 5). Those sets of values are identified as evaluative parameters (a term adopted from Francis, 1995). Other similar terms used are 'semantic categories' (Biber & Finegan, 1988), 'domains' (Conrad & Biber, 2000) and 'axes' or 'dimensions' (Martin & White, 2005).

Evaluative parameters involve evaluative scales with two poles and also potential intermediate stages between them, thus, reflecting the "scalar nature of evaluation" (Hunston, 1993). The pioneering parameter-based approach to the study of evaluation was proposed by Francis (1995). She distinguished eight main 'parameters of evaluation' for evaluative adjectives: modality (e.g. *impossible*, *possible*, *inconceivable*, *unlikely*), ability (e.g. *easy*, *difficult*, *possible*, *impossible*), importance (*important*, *necessary*, *essential*, *vital*,

imperative), predictability (e.g. *surprising, natural*); obviousness (e.g. *obvious, evident, unclear*), value and appropriacy (e.g. *wonderful, good, right, interesting, appropriate*), rationality (e.g. *reasonable, fair, absurd*) and truth (e.g. *true, untrue, false*).

For Thompson and Hunston (2000) relevance is one of the four main parameters of evaluation along with goodness/desirability, certainty and expectedness. Bednarek (2006) also proposes a parameter-based framework, distinguishing a set of ‘core evaluative parameters of evaluation’, among which ‘importance’ is listed. The study of relevance as a dimension of evaluation is also present in other studies in the field such as Lemke (1998), who distinguishes seven ‘dimensions of attitudinal meaning’ or ‘evaluative semantic relations’. Values of importance are also studied within Appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005) under different subdomains such as *Appreciation* (‘important news’), *Affect* (a person may ‘feel important’) or *Judgement* (we may judge other people as important).

The conception of the parameter of relevance used in this study is similar to Francis (1995) in the sense that values of importance and necessity are not ascribed to separate dimensions or parameters (Lemke, 1998; Bednarek, 2006), but are considered to be merely different points in the same evaluative scale (important → essential → necessary).²

3. METHOD AND DATA

This paper presents a corpus-based approach to the contrastive analysis of the entities to which evaluation along the parameter of importance is attached in English and Spanish journalistic opinion discourse. Loosely based on Contrastive Analysis as its theoretical framework, the present study unfolds in two phases: (1) description, and (2) juxtaposition and contrast. The first stage focuses on the description of the corpus data in English and Spanish, that is, (a) corpus search of the most frequent evaluative adjectives of importance in newspaper opinion texts in each language and (b) analysis of the nature and distribution of the entities being evaluated. The second stage includes the juxtaposition and contrast of the findings in English and Spanish newspapers.

3.1 Description of the corpora

For the purpose of this study, I have made use of OPRES (or C-OPRES), an *ad hoc* English-Spanish comparable corpus of written opinion discourse (contrast2.unileon.es).³ C-OPRES is composed of two monolingual corpora representative of English and Spanish, respectively, and which have been compiled following comparable parameters. The texts collected represent the three main newspaper opinion genres: editorials, opinion columns and comment articles. The sources are a selection of the three most widely read quality newspapers at the time of compilation in British English and European Spanish varieties, respectively, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian* and *El País*, *ABC* and *El Mundo*.

The representativeness of the corpus and its internal balance is also guaranteed in terms of the ideology or political leaning of the newspapers in both languages. In the case of the British press, *The Guardian* may be defined as liberal and representing a left-wing stance, *The Times* supports centre-right views and *The Daily Telegraph* is politically conservative. As for the Spanish press, the ideology of *El País* is characterized by its support of the centre-left, while *El Mundo* has a liberal centre-right orientation and *ABC* shows conservative

² Instances of *necessary* have been included within the parameter of importance provided that their meaning in context is that of “absolutely essential” and not that of “logically inevitable”.

³ C-OPRES is the acronym for Comparable corpus of Opinion Press English-Spanish. “C” in C-OPRES stands for ‘comparable’ (<http://contrast2.unileon.es/web/en/corpus0.html>).

political views. Likewise, English and Spanish corpora can be said to be comparable regarding their topics, as is guaranteed by the time span and diversity of the texts included.

The texts compiled in C-OPRES were collected on specific dates from January to December 2006. More concretely, the texts were collected on six specific dates each month, which, in order to follow a regular pattern, were days 5, 10, 15, 20, 25 and 30 of each month. Since the corpus compilation process did not aim at a discrimination of topics or contents, any editorial, column or comment article would be suitable for inclusion in the corpus. The only restrictive criterion was to keep an intra-linguistic and cross-linguistic balance in terms of size between the three sub-genres (i.e. editorials, opinion columns and comment articles).⁴ The total volume of the corpus is of approximately 1 million words in each language. Texts are electronically stored, thus allowing for the use of software searching tools. Table 1 shows the total number of words in both languages in C-OPRES and the distribution per genre or type of text.

Table 1: Corpus size and composition of C-OPRES

Opinion genres	English	Spanish	Total
Opinion columns	423,296	413,032	836,328
Comment articles	322,265	338,291	660,556
Editorials (leading articles)	261,823	256,091	517,914
Total	1,007,384	1,007,414	2,014,798

The number of texts in the English sub-corpus amounts to 531 leading articles, 838 opinion columns and 272 comment articles written by important personalities who are usually non-journalists. The figures in the Spanish sub-corpus are 621 editorials (*leading articles* in the British press), 492 columns and 336 comment articles (referred to as *Tribunas* in some print media). The corpus catalogue is available at http://contraste2.unileon.es/web/en/corpus0_OPRES.html.

3.2 Working procedure

The first stage of the analysis was the identification of the most frequent adjectives of importance in C-OPRES in English and Spanish. The process was accomplished combining the Wordlist function of *Wordsmith Tools 5.0*, so as to retrieve a frequency word list, and a manual scrutiny of the results to extract the adjectives expressing importance. Non-attitudinal examples (if any) have been manually removed before the counting of the total number of instances.

This first phase of the study results in an exhaustive list of the adjectives of importance found in the English and Spanish sub-corpora. In order to narrow down the scope of the analysis, only those adjectives presenting at least 50 tokens in the corpus have been included in the study. Also, due to the large number of instances of most common adjectives, a statistical formula has been applied to reduce populations to smaller representative samples (see Tables 2 and 5 below).⁵

In the second phase of the procedure, the representative samples, made up of randomly selected concordance lines, have been analyzed and classified according to the entity the evaluation is attached to. The interest of the study lies in identifying and analyzing the type and nature of the entities that writers of journalistic opinion discourse in each language evaluate as important and place on a cline of relevance. Thus, following the KWIC (Key

⁴ An exact match is not possible since the daily comment section of each of the selected newspapers includes a different number of texts for each of the subgenres and of different length.

⁵ The statistical formula applied is $n = N / (N-1) E^2 + 1$, where N is the total population and n the corresponding sample. E is the estimated error, in this case 0.05 for a 95% confidence margin.

Word in Context) system, the context is expanded to the right and left of each key word (i.e. importance adjective) for as many words as necessary until the item or proposition being evaluated comes into the scope. Finally, the objects being evaluated are ascribed to *ad hoc* categories, which resulted from the analysis of the corpus data.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The contrastive analysis proceeds in two stages. The first stage focuses on the description of a selection of importance adjectives in each language.⁶ For practical reasons, the qualitative analysis has been restricted to the most frequent adjectives in the corpus; however, I believe that final conclusions about the type of entities evaluation is attached to in each language might be extended to other adjectives within the semantic category of importance.

The second stage of the study deals with the cross-linguistic comparison and contrast of the analyzed data followed by a thorough discussion and interpretation of results.

4.1 Description of importance adjectives in English

The analysis of the frequency list of the English sub-corpus of C-OPRES identified seven adjectival lexemes expressing relevance with a frequency of at least 50 tokens. Table 2 shows the total number of cases in C-OPRES and the size of the representative samples.⁷ Whenever the application of the formula results in a sample smaller than 50 tokens, the number of concordances analyzed was 50.

Table 2: Adjectives of importance in the English sub-corpus of C-OPRES

Evaluative adjective	Cases	Sample
important	283	166
serious	174	121
necessary	135	101
essential	93	76
vital	93	76
significant	92	75
crucial	56	50
Total	926	665

As might be expected, *important* is the most frequent adjective expressing relevance in English opinion articles. More telling for the purpose of this study is the second position occupied by the adjective *serious*. As an evaluative adjective, *serious* encompasses the meanings of ‘important’ or ‘deserving attention’, but it also means ‘involving difficulty or complexity’, thus, reflecting a negative meaning and having negative semantic prosody (Sinclair, 1996).⁸ Equally interesting, though probably less surprising, *necessary* stands in the

⁶ The study will be restricted to adjectives expressing positive relevance, since it is difficult to find discourse evaluated as ‘unimportant’ in C-OPRES.

⁷ The case-study presented here is part of a larger and more comprehensive study of the linguistic expression of evaluation in English and Spanish journalistic opinion discourse as conveyed by the grammatical categories of evaluative adjectives and stance adverbials (Pérez Blanco, 2013). The large bulk of data analyzed in Pérez Blanco (2013) -which included several case-studies- explains the necessity of sampling which, in order to maintain regularity, has been applied to even smaller populations. As far as this study is concerned, I do not consider that the relatively small size of individual samples affects or diminishes the validity of the results since the main aim of the analysis lies in identifying the behaviour of a whole group of adjectives (the whole sample of importance adjectives), rather than each specific lexical item.

⁸ Attending to a different sense of *serious*, previous reference studies in the field such as Lemke (1998) and Bednarek (2006), respectively, classify the adjective under the ‘semantic category’ of humorousness/seriousness (Lemke, 1998) and the ‘core evaluative parameter’ of humorousness (Bednarek, 2006).

third position very close in number to *serious*. Evaluation in this persuasive genre goes beyond stating what is important to pointing out an indisputable need, something that is absolutely essential and requires subsequent action. The next two adjectives in the frequency list, *essential* and *vital* behave as synonyms indicating great importance.⁹ The adjective *significant* has a similar occurrence to *essential* and *vital* in the English subcorpus of C-OPRES, but it seems to convey lower intensity if compared with the former (*significant* = ‘important’ vs *essential* or *vital* = ‘really important’). Finally, the adjective *crucial* occurs in a smaller number of cases probably due to its nature as an implicit superlative (Cruse, 1997: 216) standing for the combinations *extremely/very important* or *extremely/very significant*, which might be more frequent in the corpus in the place of *crucial*.

The adjectives of importance found in C-OPRES prove that degrees of evaluative force apply to the attitudinal meaning of relevance, in the same way that they do to the parameters good-bad or certain-uncertain. Adjectives such as *essential*, *vital* or *crucial* show instances of *infused graduation* (Martin & White, 2005), where intensity is infused in the lexical item itself rather than being conveyed by an isolated grammatical or lexical intensifier. However, the less intense adjective ‘important’ seems to be preferred over those lexical instances of infused graduation, which might eventually lead to a more patronizing or dogmatic style in opinion discourse.

With regard to their position within the clause, adjectives expressing contents of relevance may occur in English as pre-modifiers of a head noun or as predicative adjectives following a linking verb. As verbal complements, adjectives of importance are found in a number of various grammatical patterns whose primary purpose is to evaluate (Hunston & Sinclair, 2000; Pérez Blanco, 2013). Thus, the entity being evaluated may be immediately contiguous to the evaluative adjective or occupy a number of different positions within a sentence or even cross the boundaries of the sentence. The object of the evaluation may be the referent of the adjacent noun, in the case of an attributive adjective (“...bad judgement can have **important** consequences”, EG1502T3) or the noun (phrase) in subject position, when the adjective is the complement of a linking verb (“*effective monitoring of immigration* is **essential**”, ED0511T1). Evaluation may also be aimed at a whole clause (It may be **necessary** to subordinate the rhetoric democracy for the Middle East to the need for a regional solution, EG0506T1).

Table 3 shows the results of the analysis of the entities evaluated by adjectives of importance in the English sub-corpus of C-OPRES. The first left-hand column lists the lexico-semantic groups or categories in which the objects being evaluated have been classified. The most relevant data are highlighted.¹⁰

A considerably large number of importance adjectives in English opinion press (23%) are used to signpost the relevance of particular plans and measures to be implemented. At the same time, adjectives are also largely found in sequences highlighting the significance of current (or even past) situations and states of affairs (17.7%). In fact, the evaluation of PLANS AND MEASURES and the evaluation of SITUATIONS represents a relatively similar proportion of the total in English journalistic opinion articles. However, with the exception of the adjectives *serious* and *significant*, the most frequent adjectives of importance in English, according to C-OPRES, are more commonly found evaluating proposals (see Table 4). This tendency is especially accentuated in the case of *necessary* (52.5%), *essential* (34%) and *crucial* (32%).

⁹ *Vital* also has the meanings of ‘relating to life’, ‘full of life’ or ‘animated’. Those instances of *vital* meaning ‘related to life’ have been removed from the total.

¹⁰ Only terms in italics (such as *factor*, *aspect* or *role*) stand for the actual words they represent. I have tried to make the list of categories as exhaustive as possible, while keeping it manageable.

Table 3: Things evaluated by adjectives of importance in English

Things evaluated	important	serious	necessary	essential	vital	significant	crucial	Total	%
plans and measures	28	4	53	26	15	11	16	153	23.01
situations: events and states	20	53	7	8	7	20	3	118	17.74
actions	20	17	12	3	4	5	3	64	9.62
values, qualities and abilities	11	3	7	8	3	1	2	35	5.26
words and communication	9	6	4	2	9	4	1	35	5.26
factor, aspect	14			6	3	3	8	34	5.11
topic, matter	10	6			5	1	4	26	3.9
physical objects	7		3	9	1		1	21	3.16
intellectual processes	6	12				1		19	2.86
economic resources	1	1	3	1	8	4		18	2.71
government and their duties	6	1		2	5	1	1	16	2.4
laws and rights	7	2	3	3	1			16	2.4
people	5	5	2	1	1	1		15	2.26
part, role	4		1	1	2	3	3	14	2.1
impact, effects, outcomes	1	6				5	1	13	1.95
quantities	1	1	2			9		13	1.95
news and data	7			1	2		2	12	1.8
relationships and alliances	2		1		3	2	2	10	1.5
social welfare and wellbeing	3			4	1			8	1.2
moment, period of time	2		1		1	1	2	7	1.05
emotional reactions		4		1		1		6	0.9
place, area			1			2		3	0.45
deontic nouns: importance					3			3	0.45
differences-similarities	1						1	2	0.3
causes and reasons			1					1	0.15
physical appearance	1							1	0.15
job					1			1	0.15
life					1			1	0.15
Total	166	121	101	76	76	75	50	665	100

Table 4: English: Evaluation of proposals vs evaluation of situations

	Object of evaluation	
	PROPOSALS	SITUATIONS
important	16.9%	12%
serious	3%	44%
necessary	52.5%	7%
essential	34%	10.5%
vital	19.7%	9%
significant	15%	27%
crucial	32%	6%

As seen in Table 4, English newspaper opinion discourse presents more types and tokens of adjectives which assess the importance of proposals, which seem to confer a prescriptive character to the texts. By stating ‘what is essential/necessary to do’, the writer is indirectly suggesting ‘what should be done’ (1); whereas an evaluative comment on a state of affairs seems to have a merely descriptive function (2).

- (1) ...this iliberal plan is **essential** for the fight against terrorism. (ET2009C2)
- (2) One of the most **significant** events in 500 years of Latin American history will take place in Bolivia on Sunday when Evo Morales, an Aymara Indian, is inducted as president. (EG2001T1)

Importance adjectives in English also evaluate the relevance of specific ACTIONS (9.6%). Particularly, the adjectives *serious*, *important* and *necessary* assess the relevance of a past or ongoing actions in a higher proportion (10-15%) than the rest of adjectives analyzed.

- (3) Our relatively small contribution has been **important** to securing what little success there has been in Iraq...(ED1511C1)

VALUES, QUALITIES AND ABILITIES (5.3%), WORDS AND COMMUNICATION (5.3%) and specific FACTORS or ASPECTS of a whole (5.1%) are also relatively frequent targets of evaluation along the parameter of relevance. The author of an opinion article includes adjectives of importance to qualify the skills and abilities of the person being evaluated or the value of an object or entity (4). Adjectives of importance are also employed to assess the relevance or appropriacy of particular messages and verbal interactions (5). Similarly, evaluative adjectives are frequently found as modifiers to single out the relevance of a specific factor or aspect of a proposal or situation (6).

- (4) The **essential quality** in every candidate, at every level, is the capacity for hard work. (ET1505C3)
- (5) His most positive legacy may be nothing more than a theme – that Britain’s priorities are also global ones. It is a vaguer message than “victory”, but **vital** nonetheless. (ET3012E1)
- (6) ... three **crucial factors** explain the bloody situation in Iraq today...(ET0510T1)

The highlighted data in Table 3 also reveal particular instances of *coupling* (Martin, 2000; Zappavigna, 2011) of a category and a specific evaluative adjective. Thus, English writers talk about *essential* values or qualities ($\pm 10.5\%$), *vital* words or messages ($\pm 12\%$) and *crucial* aspects or factors ($\pm 16\%$). Other *couplings* which are worthy of notice are *significant* + QUANTITY ($\pm 12\%$), *vital* + ECONOMIC RESOURCES ($\pm 10.5\%$) or *serious* + MENTAL PROCESSES ($\pm 10\%$), as in ‘serious doubts’ or ‘serious concerns’.

4.2 Description of importance adjectives in Spanish

The analysis of the Spanish sub-corpus of C-OPRES identified eleven adjectives along the parameter of importance with a frequency of at least 50 tokens. Table 5 shows the total number of cases for each adjective and the corresponding representative samples.

Table 5: Adjectives of importance in the Spanish sub-corpus of C-OPRES

Evaluative adjective	Cases	Sample
necesario	310	175
importante	288	168
grave	213	139
esencial	103	81
imprescindible	83	69
fundamental	82	68
significativo	79	66
relevante	70	60
serio	65	56
notable	58	51
urgente	50	50
Total	1,401	983

The most frequent adjective of importance in Spanish is *necesario*, followed by *importante* with a very similar number of tokens. It seems that writers of opinion articles do not hesitate to underline whatever they perceive as needed. The adjectives *grave*, next in the

frequency list, together with *serio*, much less frequent in the corpus, fit the function of journalistic opinion discourse of making society aware of matters of concern. The following three adjectives in the list (*esencial*, *imprescindible*, *fundamental*) are near-synonyms offering the writer a range of alternative lexical choices to express great importance. The adjectives *significativo*, *relevante* and *notable*, less frequent in C-OPRES, express a lower degree of intensity if compared to the adjectives occupying the top positions. Finally, the adjective *urgente* is used for very strong claims where the writer affirms that something is necessary and requires immediate action without delay. The paucity of instances of *urgente* might reveal caution on the part of the writer against blunt statements.

As in the case of English, adjectives of importance in Spanish opinion press show the scalar nature of evaluation along the parameter of relevance. Adjectives expressing higher intensity (e.g. *imprescindible*, *vital*, *esencial*) may occasionally be chosen by an author to emphasize a claim. However, they might also be deliberately avoided since they may sound too imposing, making the writer's claims more difficult for the reader to accept. On the other hand, adjectives such as *significativo* or *relevante* might be seen as conveying a lower degree of intensity and, thus, be less effective in their persuasive endeavour, which would explain their relatively lower frequency in this type of text.

Table 6 shows the distribution of the different lexico-semantic categories gathering together the entities evaluated by affective adjectives of importance in Spanish newspaper opinion discourse. The highlighted data reveal some specific trends (and *couplings*) for each adjective.

Table 6: Things evaluated by adjectives of importance in Spanish

Things evaluated	necesario	importante	grave	esencial	imprescindible	fundamental	significativo	relevante	serio	notable	urgente	Total	%
situations: events and states	24	33	68	13	9	11	19	13	32	18	4	244	24.82
plans and measures	61	14	1	15	18	12	6	7			32	166	16.89
material actions	11	11	41	5	12	3	9	5	3	3	1	104	10.58
government and their duties	8	9	3	3	5	3		6		3		40	4.07
<i>factor, aspect</i>	1	5		16	1	10	2	3				38	3.87
quantity	3	12			1		12		2	7		37	3.76
intellectual processes	12	4	1	1	2	1	2	4	6		2	35	3.56
news and data	1	10		5	2	3	6	7				34	3.46
emotional reactions	5		10	4	3		1	1	2	4	1	31	3.15
values, qualities and abilities	9	3		5	4				1	9		31	3.15
words and communication	9	5	2		1	2	2	1	6	1	1	30	3.05
economic resources	11	10			2	4	1			1		29	2.95
people	4	11		1	2		1	7				26	2.64
laws and rights	11	7	1	1		1	1	1			3	26	2.64
impact, effects, outcomes		4	11				1		2			18	1.83
relationships and alliances	5	6			1		1			1		14	1.42
<i>topic, matter</i>		4		1		6			1			12	1.22
causes and reasons		1		2		7			1	1		12	1.22
<i>part, role</i>		7		1		1		2				11	1.12
differences-similarities		2		2		1	2			2		9	0.92
physical objects	1		1	2	4	1						9	0.92
places, areas		4				1		2				7	0.71
deontic nouns: <i>deber, necesidad</i>											6	6	0.61
social wellbeing and welfare				3				1				4	0.4
moment, period of time		1			1					1		3	0.3
job	1											1	0.1
Total	175	168	139	81	69	68	66	60	56	51	50	983	100

The study of Spanish opinion articles shows that adjectives of importance are mainly found in textual sequences commenting on the positive (or negative) significance of particular SITUATIONS and states of affairs (24.8%).

- (7) ...el presidente de la Generalitat encargado de dirigir una comunidad autónoma marcada por una **grave crisis política**...(SA3010E1)
 ‘...the president of the Generalitat responsible for leading an autonomous community facing a **serious political crisis**...’

Also, in 16.9% of the instances analyzed, adjectives of importance evaluate the relevance or significance of carrying out specific PLANS AND MEASURES.

- (8) Es **urgente** buscar modos de fortalecer las instituciones ante los embates de la opinión y el oportunismo de los políticos. (SP2011T1)
 ‘It is **crucial** to find ways to strengthen institutions against public opinion attacks and political opportunism.’

The quantitative difference between both groups, SITUATIONS and PLANS AND MEASURES, can be interpreted as revealing lower intrusiveness on the part of Spanish writers, who focus more on the description of past or current situations rather than on suggesting proposals for future action. This difference is directly related to the types and behaviour of the most frequent adjectives of importance in Spanish journalistic opinion discourse, which is illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7: Spanish: evaluation of proposals vs evaluation of situations

	Object of evaluation	
	SITUATIONS	PROPOSALS
necesario	13.7%	34.9%
importante	19.6%	8.3%
grave	48.9%	0.7%
esencial	16%	18.5%
imprescindible	13%	26%
fundamental	16.2%	17.6%
significativo	28.8%	9%
relevante	21.7%	11.7%
serio	57.1%	-
notable	35.3%	-
urgente	8%	64%

As can be noticed, different adjectives follow different trends. However, on the whole, Spanish newspaper opinion discourse is more abundant regarding instances of adjectives which evaluate the importance of facts or current states of affairs, rather than assessing measures to be taken. Only the adjectives *urgente*, *necesario* and *imprescindible* stand out in the evaluation of proposals and, of them, just *necesario* presents a really significant number of tokens in the corpus (see Table 5).

The next entity in Table 6 is ACTIONS (10.6%). However, once more, some adjectives such as *grave* (29.5%) or *imprescindible* (17.4%) present higher rates of occurrence in the evaluation of this semantic category. As in the example below, *grave* largely exhibits negative semantic prosody; whereas *imprescindible* situates an action in the positive pole by highlighting its desirability.

- (9) Creemos que esta marcha atrás es un **grave error**,... (SM1507E2)
 ‘We believe this climb down is a **serious mistake**,...’

The rest of categories in Table 6 show lower figures ($\leq 4\%$), although some couplings, which show that certain adjectives are conspicuously frequent in the evaluation of specific lexico-semantic groups, can be pointed out: *esencial* (19.8%) / *fundamental* (14.7%) + FACTOR,

ASPECT; *notable* + VALUES, QUALITIES AND ABILITIES (17.6%); *significativo* (18.2%) / *notable* (13.7%) + QUANTITY.

4.3 Juxtaposition and contrast of adjectives of importance in English and Spanish

Adjectives of importance are frequently found both in English and Spanish journalistic opinion discourse as lexical markers of stance. This is to be expected in what is an inherently persuasive genre. Table 8 compares the most frequent adjectives realizing the semantic dimension of relevance in English and Spanish newspaper opinion discourse, as found in the frequency lists of the comparable corpus C-OPRES. The cut-off figure of 50 tokens gives us a total of seven adjectives in English and eleven in Spanish.

Table 8: Juxtaposition of adjectives of importance in English and Spanish (C-OPRES)

English		Spanish	
Evaluative adjective	Cases	Evaluative adjective	Cases
1. important	283	1. necesario	310
2. serious	174	2. importante	288
3. necessary	135	3. grave	213
4. essential	93	4. esencial	103
5. vital	93	5. imprescindible	83
6. significant	92	6. fundamental	82
7. crucial	56	7. significativo	79
		8. relevante	70
		9. serio	65
		10. notable	58
		11. urgente	50

As can be observed, some of the most frequent adjectives expressing relevance or importance in English and Spanish journalistic opinion discourse are cognates (*important-importante*; *necessary-necesario*, *significant-significativo*, *serious-serio*, *essential-esencial*). However, not all cognates present a parallel distribution across languages (e.g. *necessary-necesario* or *serious-serio*).

Table 9 compares the entities signposted as important in journalistic opinion discourse in English and Spanish – a detailed description of the differences between particular adjectives is beyond the scope of this article. Objects representing at least 2% of the total instances of evaluation analyzed (in one or both languages) are also illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Table 9: Juxtaposition of the object of evaluation: English-Spanish

Object of evaluation	English	Spanish
plans and measures	23.01%	16.89%
situations: events and states	17.74%	24.82%
actions	9.62%	10.58%
values, qualities and abilities	5.26%	3.15%
words and communication	5.11%	3.05%
<i>factor, aspect</i> (synonyms)	5.11%	3.87%
issue, subject, topic, matter	3.9%	1.2%
physical objects	3.16%	0.92%
intellectual processes	2.86%	3.56%
economic resources	2.71%	2.95%
government and their duties	2.4%	4.07%
laws and rights	2.4%	2.65%
people	2.25%	2.65%
<i>part, role</i>	2.1%	1.12%
impact, effects, outcomes	1.95%	1.8%
quantity	1.95%	3.76%

news and data	1.8%	3.46%
relationships and alliances	1.5%	1.42%
social welfare and wellbeing	1.2%	0.4%
moment, period of time	1.05%	0.3%
emotional reactions	0.9%	3.15%
place, area	0.45%	0.71%
importance (deontic) nouns	0.45%	0.61%
differences-similarities	0.3%	0.92%
causes and reasons	0.15%	1.2%
physical appearance	0.15%	
job	0.15%	0.1%
life	0.15%	
Total	100%	100%

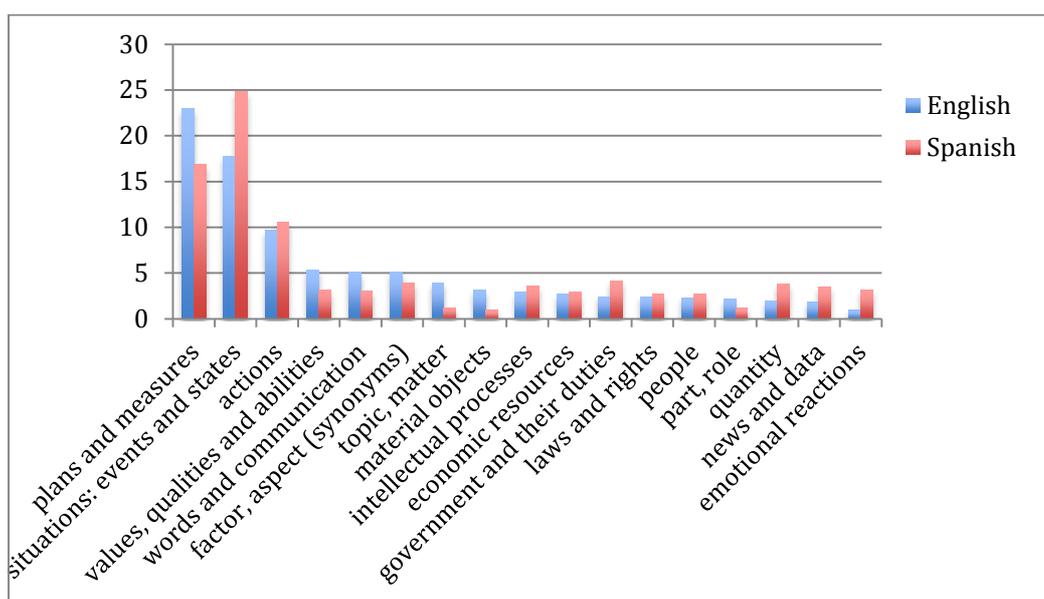


Figure 3: Juxtaposition of the most frequent objects of evaluation: English-Spanish

Figure 3 shows that both in English and Spanish adjectives of importance are mainly found in opinion texts either in sequences where they assess the relevance of specific measures to be taken or in passages describing existing situations. However, English and Spanish present a reverse situation regarding the respective frequency of each category. Importance adjectives in English are slightly more frequent in contexts where they evaluate the positive relevance of a tentative plan of action (23%) than in contexts where the writer subjectively describes the positive or negative significance of a given situation or state of affairs (approximately 17.7%). On the other hand, markers of relevance in Spanish are conspicuously concentrated around the description of situations (24.8%), whereas the evaluation of plans of action occupies second place (16.9%).

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- (10) In planning them, it is essential to work as far as possible with the internal opposition...(ED1005T1)
- (11) Es **necesario** además desvincular la financiación de los ayuntamientos (...) de la recalificación del suelo. (SP2511E1)

‘It is also **necessary** to disassociate the financing of local governments (...) from land reclassification.’

- SITUATIONS

(12) Equally **serious** was the confusion that the November document generated. (EG1006E1)

(13) ...la falta de diversión es uno de los **graves** problemas de la realidad. (SM2508C2)

‘...lack of amusement is one of the **serious** problems of reality.’

The above data might be interpreted as revealing a more prescriptive tendency of newspaper opinion discourse in English. Adjectives of importance usually occur in passages in which a particular course of action is suggested or supported, thus, having the illocutionary force of a directive (indirect directives, Searle, 1975). On the other hand, adjectives of importance in Spanish opinion articles are mainly linked to the description of past or ongoing situations. Generally speaking, Spanish writers sprinkle their narrative with evaluative language, as evidenced by the large and varied range of adjectives of importance found in C-OPRES; however, they seem to refrain more from committing themselves to the recommendation of particular courses of action. In terms of pragmatics, it could be claimed that evaluation along the parameter of relevance has a directive function in English, foregrounding performative aspects of language usage, and a representative function in Spanish. This cross-linguistic difference derives from the type and nature of the most frequent evaluative adjectives in each language and their distribution with regard to the evaluation of proposals and situations (see Table 3 and Table 6 above).

The analysis of Figure 3 above brings out other groups which, if not so salient in the monolingual analysis of English and Spanish data, exhibit cross-linguistic differences that together reflect the nature and role of English and Spanish journalistic opinion discourse. English leading articles and editorials present more cases than Spanish opinion articles of sequences in which evaluation along the parameter of relevance is ascribed to VALUES, QUALITIES AND ABILITIES, WORDS and COMMUNICATION, TOPICS or MATTERS and FACTORS/ASPECTS. On the other hand, more instances are found in Spanish of cases where evaluative adjectives assess the relevance of objects categorized as QUANTITIES, NEWS and DATA and EMOTIONAL REACTIONS.

These cross-linguistic differences show a contrast in the function and focus of evaluative language in newspaper opinion discourse across the two languages being compared: English writers evaluate forthcoming action while Spanish writers evaluate reactions. Evaluation in English journalistic opinion texts seems to play a more active role in the sense of promoting changes, thus, conforming to the social function of opinion genres (Santamaría, 1990: 61; Van Dijk, 1996). The proactive nature of evaluation in English newspaper opinion discourse emanates from, or is built up by, the kind of entities being evaluated along the parameter of relevance. For instance as in example (14), English opinion articles tend to highlight the importance and desirability of values, qualities and abilities ascribed to volitional agents and which would enable them to lead changes in a particular direction.

(14) The **essential** quality in every candidate, at every level, is the capacity for hard work. (ET1505C3)

Similarly, specific verbal messages, either carrying out an action in being uttered or announcing future action, are underlined as important in English editorials and opinion articles:

- (15) Policies, not just personnel, have overloaded the department to the point where yesterday's announcement became **necessary**. (EG2007E3)

In the same way, the higher incidence in English of adjectives of importance as modifiers of general nouns such as *issue* or *matter*, which have a referential function, brings to the foreground matters that need to be addressed urgently.

- (16) Terrorism is an **important** issue to Americans... (ET2008C1)

Key factors or aspects playing an important part in the development of a plan of action are also emphasized in journalistic opinion discourse in the English press:

- (17) It has been a **crucial** part of their strategy so far to present the new Tory leader as the youthful, modernising, politically centrist and family orientated successor...(ED2002C1)

On the other hand, the relatively more passive and descriptive (rather than prescriptive) nature of Spanish newspaper opinion texts springs from the type of objects which are the target of evaluative markers of relevance. Adjectives of importance in Spanish journalistic opinion discourse are found describing (emotional) REACTIONS:

- (18) Estas nuevas formulaciones, en contra de lo que se dice, también consiguen el **imprescindible** respaldo ciudadano,... (SP0502T2)
'Contrary to what is said, these new approaches also have the **necessary public support**,...'

Evaluative adjectives also focus on the description of various kinds of objective facts and realities, such as NEWS and DATA, in a way that comes to confirm the passive role of evaluation in Spanish journalistic opinion discourse. Thus, as in example (19) below, evaluation underlines the importance of a message received (NEWS), which contrasts with instances of evaluation in English where the writer stresses the importance of VERBAL MESSAGES from the active role of the sayer.

- (19) ...resultan bastante sorprendentes (...) por lo que revelan acerca de cómo han acogido los ciudadanos el **importante** comunicado de la banda terrorista...(SM2005E1)
'...are quite surprising (...) in terms of what they reveal about how people have taken the **important** announcement of the terrorist group,...

QUANTITIES or AMOUNTS are also part of those objective realities which are qualified as important in newspaper opinion texts in Spanish. The evaluative adjective blends the meaning of significance with the meaning of considerable or large.

- (20) Los malos resultados fueron debidos en parte a los efectos de la pertinaz sequía, que causó un **notable** descenso de la producción hidroeléctrica...(SP2004E1)
'The poor results were due in part to the persistent drought, which caused a **significant** drop in hydroelectric production...'

Finally, another cross-linguistic difference worthy of comment is the lower frequency in English opinion articles of instances appraising the importance of governmental authorities and their managerial roles. This fact is even more revealing if compared with the greater frequency of negative judgements on these institutions in English journalistic opinion discourse (Pérez Blanco, 2013). In contrast with Spanish, English opinion writers are more eager to criticize the government than to acknowledge its importance for society.

- (21) This Congress has been addicted to "pork barrel" spending. But Congress is **important** and Tuesday's mid-term elections are particularly so. (ET0511E1)
- (22) Alemania es la primera potencia europea, a pesar de sus carencias en política de seguridad y de defensa. Su liderazgo es tan evidente como **necesario**. (SA0512C3)
'Germany is the first European power, in spite of its shortcomings in security and defense policy. Its leadership is evident as well as **necessary**.'

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results revealed by the analysis of the expression of relevance in English and Spanish newspaper opinion discourse show interesting cross-linguistic differences which seem to point to differences in the nature and role of journalistic opinion discourse in the case of the most widely read upmarket newspapers in English and Spanish. Thus, the linguistic analysis of evaluation along the parameter of relevance allows us to catch a glimpse of the underlying value systems of the discourse communities which have produced those texts.

Judging by the analyzed data, English journalists and guest opinion writers seem to take a more intrusive and prescriptive stance in general, not only expressing the way they feel about aspects of their society, but also highlighting the importance of specific measures and suggesting particular courses of action with the aim of instigating changes. The role of the writer clearly seems to be that of an agent and initiator of social change. By contrast, in the case of the Spanish opinion articles analyzed, most instances of evaluative language are embedded in descriptive passages in which the writer simply reports and comments on a state of affairs with a very much diluted directive function. The writer comes across as a spectator providing a subjective account of reality, rather than as an actor. Hence, from a functional perspective, evaluation in English opinion discourse counts as action, as a persuasive endeavour to make the audience do something, while evaluation in Spanish opinion articles may be defined as a reaction, that is, a follow-up response to the particular situations currently faced by society.

The type of attitudinal targets concentrating most instances of evaluation in English point to a tendency towards what might be referred to as a priori evaluation. By foregrounding the essential qualities, vital messages and crucial factors to bring about longed-for social changes or provide a way out of difficulties or avoid further trouble, evaluation along the parameter of relevance in English seems to occur mostly in a state previous to the execution of an action or the materialization of circumstances. On the other hand, evaluation in Spanish texts tends to focus more on the resulting facts and a posteriori consequences. Most of the time, the function of journalistic opinion discourse seems to be no more than the function of crying over spilled milk, instead of, continuing with the metaphor, suggesting ways to avoid the mess or providing practical advice on how to 'clean' it up.

As claimed in the introduction of this paper, the analysis of the expression of evaluation in English and Spanish newspaper opinion discourse has proved to be a useful tool so as to gather insights into the respective value systems behind the texts. Of course generalizations based on a small study focusing on just one linguistic resource (i.e. evaluative adjectives) cannot, by themselves, be conclusive; however, the distribution of the evaluated entities and the value judgments attached to them may be interpreted as suggesting different approaches (proactive *vs* reactive) in the way English and Spanish journalistic opinion texts report on important issues which would need further analysis.

The insights provided by this paper regarding the cross-linguistic differences in the expression of evaluative judgements of relevance can be applied to the field of translation practice and cross-cultural communication. Even if most journalistic opinion discourse is not usually translated, the way ideology and cultural issues are manifested through linguistic choices in a particular language may cross the boundaries of a particular genre or text type. This study also highlights the interdisciplinarity of studies in linguistics, depicting a continuum from (lexical) contrastive analysis to discourse analysis by pointing out aspects such as the interaction between writer and reader (persuasion), the sense of self of the writer (authorial stance) and the cultural context of production and reception of a text (English and Spanish societies), which could be exploited in future research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper was partly funded by the grant FFI2013-42994-R awarded by the Spanish Ministry of Education. I would also like to thank the anonymous referees for their valuable comments which helped to improve the paper.

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