

Semantic Macrostructures: An Analysis Of Violence In Colombian Journalistic Discourse

By

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Abstract

This article presents research advances on the discursive configuration in Colombian online media, starting from a macrostructural analysis and social representations. The objective is to unveil, using the macrostructural analysis according to Teun Van Dijk's theory, how the media discourses on indigenous communities are being constructed. The study focused particularly on analyzing 240 articles in the Colombian digital press, explored from the perspective of critical discourse analysis. The mixed methodology allows us to broaden the various methodologies for discourse analysis. Through macrostructural analysis and social representations, it is possible to build a scheme that allows to expand the various methodologies for discourse analysis, finally revealing how the topic of violence helps to delegitimize policies and opinions in the media.

Keywords: Semantic macrostructures, social representation, discourse, online press.

Resumen

El presente artículo presenta avances de investigación sobre la configuración discursiva en los medios de prensa online colombianos, partiendo desde un análisis macroestructural y de las representaciones sociales. El objetivo es develar por medio del análisis macroestructural según la teoría de Teun Van Dijk el proceso mediante el cual se están construyendo los discursos de los medios sobre las comunidades indígenas. El estudio se centró particularmente en el análisis de 240 artículos en la prensa digital colombiana, explorados desde la perspectiva del análisis crítico del discurso. La metodología mixta permite ampliar las diversas metodologías para hacer análisis del discurso. A través del análisis macroestructural y de las representaciones sociales, es posible construir un esquema que permita ampliar las diversas metodologías para hacer análisis del discurso, develando finalmente como el tópico de violencia, ayuda a deslegitimar políticas y opiniones en los medios.

Palabras clave: Macroestructuras semánticas, representación social, discurso, prensa online.

1. Introduction

The role played by the media and, specifically, the digital press in Colombian society¹ became explicit during 2010-2018. The different media in Colombia sometimes give biased versions of the events they report. By thoroughly analyzing them, the media can become manipulative sources of information given to the public. It is here where it could be stated that the search for sources and news production are intimately linked to the actions and opinions of (usually powerful) social groups (Richardson, 2007).

In this sense, it is worth noting the role played by the digital press, which hypothetically is not indifferent to these dynamics of manipulation, folding to one or another discourse that favors or invisibilizes some social groups in Colombia. This article shows the accuracy and role of the digital press as a means of communication, in addition to demonstrating how the theme of violence predominates in the Colombian journalistic discourse focusing on creating social representations of specific ethnic groups.

Previous studies show that the discursive structures, regarding the indigenous social movements, in the digital press were tinged by criteria of legitimacy and delegitimization and oriented towards both regulative and contractive rules with a specific purpose and end. This is how this research assumes from the problem, the theoretical foundations that allow understanding of the phenomenon from the discourse, the hegemony, the digital press and the indigenous groups in Colombia, likewise through this research, it is possible to experience how power relations are eminently discursive and carry the ideological and historical social dynamics; to which the press, in any of its current formats is not indifferent.

Theoretical Or Conceptual Framework

This article seeks to identify the representations of indigenous peoples generated by digital media. It is important to observe the media's role in forming social thought rather than taking these representations as static. Social representations are constantly changing and are shaped by people's daily lives (Araya, 2001; Mora, 2002; Moscovici, 1984). This paper will use Moscovici's (1961) definition of social representations, which defines them as "a universe of opinions" or "[...] a specific form of knowledge".

In a broader sense, it designates a form of social thought. A system of values, notions and practices that provide individuals with the means to orient themselves in the social and material context, to master it (...) an organized corpus of knowledge and one of the psychic activities thanks to which men are integrated into a group or in a daily relationship of exchanges, release the powers of the imagination (Moscovici, 1979, p.17).

A social representation is presented as a functional unit, strongly organized (Moscovici, 1961) thanks to the existence of three elements that structure it:

- a) Attitude
- b) Information
- c) The field of representation.

¹ Camilia Gómez Cotta, states in her article; "PRENSA decimonónica/poder/subalternidades relatos-otros del bicentenario en Colombia" where she gathers information on how the Colombian elites have maintained 200 years of hegemony making use of different media, among them the press.

- a) Attitude. It is the disposition of a subject towards the object of representation; it implies a valuational orientation of the person about the object of representation.
- b) Information. It arises from direct contact with the object and the practices developed around it. That is to say, the information that people have concerning that object.
- c) Scope of representation. It refers to the hierarchy of the elements of representation. It is an organization of the elements that make up the representation. It should be added that social representation is composed of two processes: objectification and anchoring. For his part, Jodelet (1986) establishes that social representations: “They designate a form of practical thinking oriented to communication, understanding and mastery of the social, material and ideal environment. As such, they present specific characteristics at the level of content organization, mental operations and logic” (Jodelet, 1986, p. 473-474)

Complementing this definition is observing in detail the forms of practical thinking that materialize in the news, which determines the understanding of the indigenous communities but which, above all, generate some forms of domination in the Colombian social environment. This great challenge implies a detailed, precise and deep analysis of the discourse and its linguistic, pragmatic and cognitive strategies that determine norms and behaviors in the face of a social fact. Then, as Van Dijk (1980, 1983, 1990, 1998, 1999, 2008) points out, discourse is a social practice that contributes to the creation of social representations and, at the same time, consolidates cultural models, in which reality is expressed and communicated, changes according to how the discourse is constructed.

Discourse Analysis, therefore, has to do with the active questioning of the assumptions that configure a social construction of reality. About the topic of this paper: “Racism provides the fundamental explanatory structure of the undeniable daily experience and observation,” it also mentions “... that more white means”better” and (more) black or (more) indigenous means “worse” whatever the social and experiential context (Van Dijk, 2003).”

Media power is used as a hegemonic strategy to maintain control and power over society (Foucault, 1981). This power is exercised in three ways: first, through its influence on the allocation of resources and the definition of what is legitimate and what is not; second, through the training, it provides to citizens because it legitimizes specific models of behavior and values; and third, through its role as a source of information. Media power can be conceptualized in terms of hegemony (Gramsci, 2013) or terms of governance (Foucault, 1981).

The concept of hegemony refers to a network of diverse relationships between people who share common interests and exist within a social system or state. The interests are related to these groups’ need for mutual recognition or self-recognition. In this sense, a social relationship between different groups is defined as a set of social relations in which each group seeks to maintain its autonomy but expects reciprocity from others (Deleuze, 1987; Foucault, 2003). As a result of the socio-discursive phenomenon of legitimization, these manifestations are feasible since language is how all attempts of authority are made to establish and cultivate ideologies (Weber, 1991).

Media power is configured as a hegemonic strategy exercised in a network to maintain control and power, where its effects are not attributable to appropriation but to operational devices. A class of society will be able to exercise hegemony if it presents itself, as Antonio Gramsci (2011) puts it, “developing the productive force.” The power of the media is exercised in three ways: first, through its influence on the allocation of resources and the definition of what is legitimate and what is not; second, through the training it provides to citizens because

it legitimizes certain models of behavior and values; and third, through its role as a source of information.

Methodology

Critical discourse analysis is immersed in cultural analysis, sociology, semiotics and linguistics. In its linguistic dimension, critical discourse analysis seems to rely on structuralist analysis, characterized by the theory of actants, the distance of consciousness and intertextuality, and the analysis of the structure of linguistic signs. It focuses on studying the relationship between language and social reality and the interpretation of reality based on the analysis of linguistic signs. Critical discourse analysis can be used to analyze the situation of culture and study the relationship between culture, society and power (Wodak, 2003).

Language occupies a central place in the process of cultural construction, and that signs and signifiers are essential for understanding culture Fairclough (1992). Cultural analysis is a form of analysis that takes language as its object of study. It focuses on how language expresses concrete meanings, underlying themes, and the cultural signifier.

This article analyzes press discourses in Colombia about indigenous movements from 2010 to 2018. News items were selected from the newspapers *El Tiempo* and *El Espectador*, as well as the digital newscasts “Noticias Caraco” and “Noticias RC” (among other digital media). The information was obtained from the articles published during these periods, which were chosen based on the facts narrated and the various media analysis about the indigenous issue. The analysis was made through a thematic and chronological classification in which the news was classified by its content, place of publication, and date of publication. When a news item included more than one content, each of them was analyzed. This way, it was possible to determine the discourse on indigenous issues during this period.

According to Teun Van Dijk’s analysis proposal, an analysis of the thematic and macro propositional division is proposed. Each macro proposition is derived from a series of concrete micro propositions in the text (Van Dijk, 2005)². Here, the microanalysis of the main rhetorical-argumentative strategies (such as naturalization) to which the press media resort when referring to the indigenous is made.

This article analyzes the corpus and the data from a mixed perspective (quantitative and qualitative). A total of two hundred and forty (240) articles from the Colombian digital press were initially examined. Twenty-five were selected (for this article), which best reflected the themes and criteria mentioned above. From the latter, the analysis that concerns this study is born.

3.1 Macrostructural analysis

The macrostructures of semantics are the theoretical reconstruction of notions such as the “topic” or the “subject” of discourse, which is the global semantic structure that can be extracted from the sentences that compose it. Thus, the macrostructure of discourse is determined by the microstructure of the sentences that compose it and, in particular, by the semantic structure of those sentences. A discourse is coherent if it is also coherent at a more global level, and this global coherence occurs to the extent that a topic or subject can be assigned to the discourse (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 49).

² Lecture number two. “Semantic macrostructures.”

For this purpose, the analysis was based on the search for macrostructures in the selected articles, taking only 25 of them for a more concrete study; as an example to demonstrate that macrostructures are an important point to analyze the coherence of discourse, it is necessary to examine an example extracted from the corpus:

“The indigenous protest raises social tension, mainly in the south of the country where the Government, under pressure from the United States, is trying to move forward in the concerted or forced elimination of illicit crops in the face of the increase of those in 2016...” (El espectador, 2017).

Thus, in the statement, context is important for interpreting a sentence. The frame of knowledge of the listener/reader about the indigenous protest is important to interpret the event. The topic or subject of the fragment or discourse is the overall semantic structure that can be extracted from the sentences that compose it. The topics of discourse are not necessarily unique but can be multiple and in sequence; thus, it is necessary to understand what the pressure from the United States is based on and everything related to illicit crops in Colombia. The themes of discourse can be expressed on various levels, from the general to the particular.

On the other hand, assuming that macro-rules are also propositions, it can be inferred that the macrostructures of discourse are derived from the microstructures through semantic projection. The latter is reflected in the analysis of macro-rules that lead to macrostructural analysis (Van Dijk, 2005, p.47), the function of which is to transform semantic information. Returning to the previous example, we can see how semantic information tends to be reduced in some way: they reduce a sequence of several propositions to a sequence of a few or even to a single proposition: “*an attempt is made to advance in the concerted or forced elimination of illicit crop.*”

It is necessary to make clear that the suppression macro-rule is applied to a sequence of propositions to suppress all propositions that are not presuppositions of the subsequent propositions in the sequence. The centralization macro-rule is applied to a sequence of propositions to construct a new proposition containing a concept derived from the concepts of the sequence of propositions and replace the original sequence with the new proposition. Finally, the construction macro-rule is applied to a sequence of propositions to construct a new proposition that derives the same fact denoted by the whole sequence of propositions.

For example, applying the first macro rule to one of the propositions in the following fragment: “**Apparently, in Colombia the custom of killing those who exercise the right to deal with sensitive issues has not been discontinued.** Many of these social leaders were assassinated for having made the historic claim to land” (Title: The 38 indigenous people murdered in the post-conflict: what is happening. Newspaper: Semana Magazine. 2017)

The first rule of suppression says that only textually relevant propositions, in the sense that they play a role in the interpretation of other sentences, should appear in the description of the macrostructure. It is then that in the proposition: “It seems that Colombia has not stopped the habit of killing those who exercise the right to deal with sensitive issues” (Title: Los 38 indígenas asesinados en el posconflicto: ¿qué está pasando. Newspaper: Semana Magazine. 2017)

It is possible to delete the expression “apparently” and likewise “to deal with sensitive issues” to infer and interpret the context of the article and its purpose, just as this information is no longer relevant to clarify the underlying violence issue.

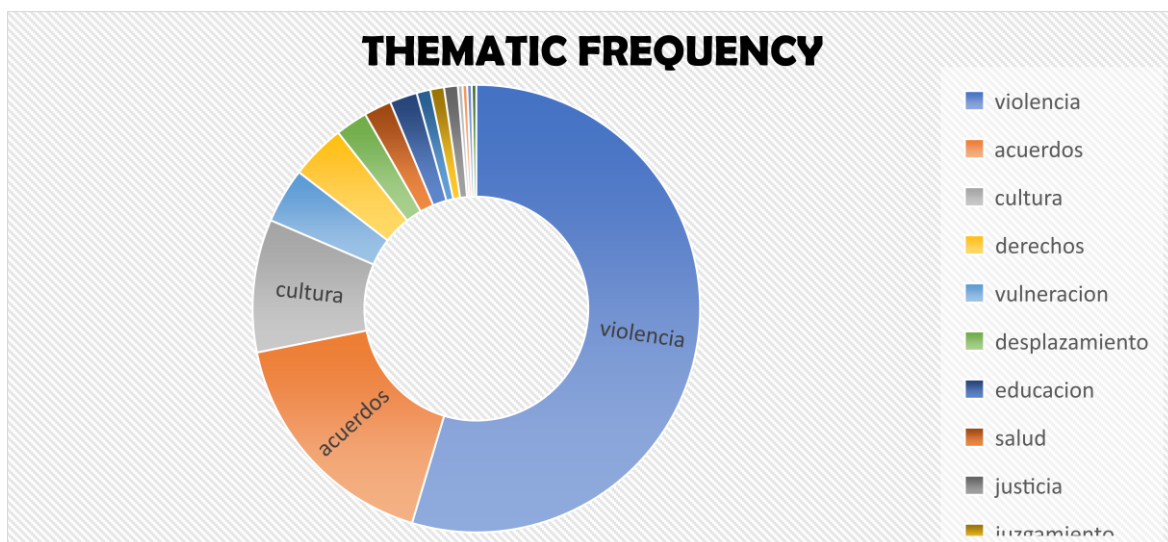
The second linguistic macro-rule is a generalization, which refers to the possibility of using names as supersets of several different concepts. This macro rule signals the probable topic of the rest of the speech fragment. Furthermore, generalization states that it is possible to use names as supersets of several different elements, so it is unnecessary to describe each of them individually. In the example above, this is evident in the expression “to who” since it is clear to the reader that it is a specific group, not an individual, that is being referred to, and “the delicate matter” also refers to life-compromising issues, again referring to violence.

Finally, the macro-rule of construction allows us to suppress details that conventionally belong to the episode of the global action. That is, “with the third rule, from the constraint, we derive a proposition that implicitly contains the information abstracted in the application of the rule” (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 50). The rule allows to suppress only those details that belong conventionally, i.e., based on the knowledge framework, to the episode of the global action.

Therefore, following the sequence of macro-rules, we can reduce the example to a new proposition that focuses on the inferred thematic structure: “*In Colombia, those who practice law are killers, revealing two intrinsic themes such as “death” and at the macro-structural level, “violence.”*”³

The relationship between the meanings of the words in a text is relevant for thematic analysis. Therefore, the theme of the text is the relationship between the meanings of the words in a text and their relevance for thematic analysis and, consequently, for the finding of the macrostructure; this is how the thematic frequency of the corpus is related to the macro-rules mentioned above:

Table 1. *Thematic frequency*



Source: *Own Elaboration*

³ It is inferred that the theme of death at a journalistic level and according to the context in which the article is placed, is related at a macro level to the theme of violence.

The most important digital press topic is violence, which appears in 165 news articles. The subject of agreements is the second most prominent topic in 52 news articles. The final intention is to achieve an illustrative form that shows the relationships between words: nuclei of thought equivalent to what Moscovici calls the figurative nucleus. The advance of this method lies in the fact that it does not fragment the discourse itself, as Banchs (2000) points out the use of logical categories maintains the process of unlocking the structuring of nuclei.

Violence is 52.38% of the total examined (Table 1.), the most highlighted topic in the newspapers: El Tiempo, Semana and El Espectador. Agreements (between the government and indigenous or others) are the second topic that stands out in 16.51% of the news items. It is the first topic in El Tiempo, Caracol and El Espectador etc.

3.2 On social representations

Social representations are built from an objective basis, from the material conditions of existence and the collective imaginary (Durkheim, 1893/1987), which delimits and conditions the “should be.” They are the product of a symbolically mediated interaction. They are constructed through assimilation and accommodation. They are a particular form of knowledge, oriented by the “must be,” expressed through symbols, signs and emblematic images that can be externalized through language.

They are located with the subject, imposing themselves coercively as a determining action structure. They are formed from a central or structuring nucleus (Abric, 1976/2001) and are constituted by peripheral schemes. It is a social construction of reality with an objective basis based on the material conditions of existence and the collective imaginary. The construction of social representations is a cognitive process of a contextualized subject carried out through assimilation and accommodation.

In this sense, this article considers social representation as a theoretical category based on two main perspectives: Moscovici’s proposal (1986) and the Weberian tradition. Both traditions complement each other and allow a better understanding of SR as a socially constructed product.

This article’s objective is to investigate the existing representations of Colombian indigenous groups and to see what variants were produced within the analysis of the selected corpus. From this, it can be inferred that there is a generalized representation of violence as a problem linked to indigenous communities or groups in Colombia. However, it is also possible to identify different variants of this discourse, which are formed in groups with more diverse meanings.

In order to arrive at the above, the macrostructural analysis allowed access to the representations of everyday experience more effectively since it considers the perspective of the social actor. This is important for understanding how beliefs are formed and operate in everyday life.

Consequently, social representation becomes a hermeneutic category focusing on symbolically mediated interactions, considered as “social construction of reality” (Berger & Luckmann, 1986) that occurs phenomenologically in every intersubjective interaction. The representational, then, has repercussions in practice, where the world of life is produced and reproduced and widely disseminated by the media.

As can be seen in Table 2, these representations are widely disseminated in the media, and it is sufficient to analyze only a few samples of the selected corpus to understand the influence of the media in the dissemination of these representations.

Table 2. *Thematic references per article*

TITLE OF ARTICLE	SUBJECT	SOURCES
Indigenous challenge in the Cauca region	VIOLENCE	https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-12031594
Coconuco also resisted	VIOLENCE	https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-717700
24 corpses in the Sinú	VIOLENCE	https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-500681
Urban Indians: are they or are they not	CULTURE	https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-475206
Emberas of upper Baudó, besieged by fear	VIOLENCE	https://www.elespectador.com/nodde/559628
Indigenous people, between hunger, violence and oblivion	VIOLENCE	https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-12986822
March for 44 years of indigenous resistance in the Cauca region	AGREEMENTS	https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-15291814
Cauca indigenous people make sustainable livestock farming and water protection viable	CULTURE	https://noticias.canalrcn.com/tags/indigenas?page=8
Embera Indians to eradicate genital mutilation in their communities	CULTURE-HEALTH	https://noticias.canalrcn.com/tags/indigenas?page=8
The drama of the indigenous people of the guajira to get water	VIOLATION OF RIGHTS: VIOLENCE	https://noticias.canalrcn.com/tags/indigenas?page=8
Displaced Emberá Indians who do not believe in the peace process	VIOLATION OF RIGHTS: VIOLENCE	https://noticias.canalrcn.com/tags/indigenas?page=8
Wayuu Indians get their names back after being registered with mockery	VIOLATION OF RIGHTS: VIOLENCE	https://noticias.canalrcn.com/tags/indigenas?page=8
La guajira, one of the regions with the highest rates of malnutrition and infant deaths	VIOLENCE	https://noticias.canalrcn.com/tags/desnutricion
Another child died of causes associated with malnutrition in Chocó		

	VIOLENCE	https://noticias.canalrcn.com/tags/desnutricion
Ritual U'wa in protest of indigenous people photo legend	CULTURE	https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1252115
U'wa Indians returned to Boyacá strike	AGREEMENTS	https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1237907
The eternal protest of the Chocó	AGREEMENTS	https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1265548
Charqueros paralyze salt mines in Manaure	VIOLENCE	https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1229613
Embera drama continues	VIOLENCE	https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1300090
Agrarian strike in Arauca due to the death of four U'was Indians	VIOLENCE	https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1233141
The talker	CULTURE	https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/el-hablador/46714-3
To U'wa indigenous prison after being tried by members of his community in Arauca.	JUDGMENT	http://caracol.com.co/emisora/2017/07/15/manizales/1500144502_698599.html
medical mission threatened by Nukak indigenous people in Guaviare	VIOLENCE	http://caracol.com.co/radio/2016/05/04/regional/1462362778_934981.html
one indigenous man injured by antipersonnel mine in Guaviare	VIOLENCE	http://caracol.com.co/radio/2018/09/18/regional/1537279400_024056.html
indigenous peoples announce indefinite protests in córdoba and sucre due to EPS liquidation	AGREEMENTS	http://caracol.com.co/radio/2018/09/17/regional/1537192712_785801.html
with Colombia's objection OAS approved declaration on indigenous peoples	AGREEMENTS	http://caracol.com.co/radio/2017/04/03/salud/1491251670_966890.html
Without indigenous peoples we cannot make peace: Minambiente	AGREEMENTS	

		http://caracol.com.co/radio/2016/06/16/nacional/1466035907_839831.html
Peasants and indigenous people in Paez, Cauca, at odds over land issues	VIOLENCE	http://caracol.com.co/radio/2016/06/30/nacional/1467242811_673195.html
Leaders at risk: human rights and indigenous organizations in Cauca	VIOLENCE	http://caracol.com.co/emisora/2017/01/19/popayan/1484851014_839640.html
Elderly man dies in Arauca hospital after being beaten and stoned by Indians	VIOLENCE	http://caracol.com.co/emisora/2018/09/14/popayan/1536930641_77693.html
Indigenous guards in Cauca to demand salary, training and life insurance	VIOLENCE-HEALTH	http://caracol.com.co/radio/2017/06/28/regional/1498664479_877973.html
Indigenous people denounce the humanitarian crisis in Chocó due to armed conflict	VIOLENCE	http://caracol.com.co/emisora/2017/03/03/popayan/1488567880_331555.html

Source: *own elaboration*

From the sociology of everyday life, a form of research that focuses on how people interact and construct meaning in their daily lives, it could be affirmed that the media not only create representations of indigenous Colombians but also disseminate them. This form of research is based on the idea that everyday life is full of meaning and that this meaning is constructed through social interaction and how people interact with their reality.

On the sociology of everyday life, in what Ibáñez (1991) calls second-order research, he recovers the subject, and it is inevitable to emphasize the transferential and counter-transferential mechanisms at play in the interweaving of the texts analyzed.

Results And Discussion

Critical discourse analysis focuses on studying the relationship between language and social reality and the interpretation of reality based on the analysis of linguistic signs. Consequently, language occupies a central place in the process of cultural construction since signs and signifiers are essential for understanding culture, allowing the analysis of the macrostructure of discourse to give us a glimpse of its coherence at a more global level. Critical discourse analysis is immersed in cultural analysis, sociology, semiotics and linguistics. It focuses on studying the relationship between language and social reality and the interpretation of reality based on the analysis of linguistic signs.

The analysis of the press in Colombia about the indigenous movements was carried out through a thematic and chronological classification. However, according to Teun Van Dijk's proposal, a division of the thematic macro propositional analysis is proposed, so it was

necessary to approach it from the analysis of the corpus and the data from a mixed perspective (quantitative and qualitative).

Social representations are constructed from an objective basis, from the material conditions of existence and the collective imaginary. They are constructed through assimilation and accommodation. They are a particular form of knowledge, oriented by the “should be,” expressed through symbols, signs and emblematic images that can be externalized through language. They are located for the subject, coercively imposed as a determining action structure. They are formed from a central or structuring nucleus (Abric, 1976-2001) and are constituted by peripheral schemes.

The press contributes to a social construction of reality with an objective basis based on the material conditions of existence and the collective imaginary. Therefore, the construction of social representations is a cognitive process carried out through the assimilation of contents and information.

Thematic analysis is an effective method that focuses on the relationship between the meanings of words in a text rather than on the meaning or use of a particular word. This approach is best suited to the task of constructing inferential language based on lexical coherence within the discourse and this coherence leads to macrostructural analysis. Thus, it can be elucidated in the research that the topic of greatest importance in the digital press is violence, which appears in 165 news articles. The second topic that stands out in the digital press is the agreements (between the government and indigenous or others), which appears in 52 news articles, showing how the Colombian media manipulate the way of presenting information from its thematic basis to create social representations about the various Colombian indigenous groups.

5. Conclusions

The media in Colombia have focused on the violence that exists in the country, especially in Colombian indigenous groups. On the other hand, another finding to analyze is how the digital press in Colombia offers information on numerous issues related to indigenous communities in different ways depending on the value that each media contributes to talk about them.

Thus, violence is the most important topic in the news of the digital press, appearing in 52.3% of the total number of articles examined; on the other hand, the agreements (between the government and the indigenous or others) are the second topic that stands out in 16.51% of the news. As a result of the above, it can be stated that the objective of examining the process through which the media discourses on indigenous communities and other communities in Colombia are being constructed is achieved through the analysis of the use and coordination by the Colombian media of topics such as violence, (main topic) agreements, culture, rights and violations and thus create social representations according to the convenience or purpose to be followed.

The analysis of articles published in the online press in Colombia on the topic of violence shows the presence of a systematic discourse based on the notion of the responsibility of the media to focus on this topic and relate it to indigenous issues. This discourse could have two components: the media are considered responsible for the diffusion of the discourse on violence, and the second component, where the media are responsible for its diffusion.

Finally, it can be affirmed that through macrostructural analysis and social representations, it is possible to build a mixed analysis scheme that expands the various discourse analysis methodologies. In this sense, this mixed method makes it possible to unveil underlying issues and problems in disseminating information by the media that may influence the opinion about the various social and even ethnic groups in Colombia.

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