

Identity and anonymity: victims and perpetrators in human rights reports

In this paper, we look into the construction of identity and anonymity in human rights reports, more concretely in the report by the Rettig Commission on human rights violations under the Pinochet regime. In the preliminaries to this report, the commission formulates its desire to give an account that is as complete as possible yet also its refraining from attributing individual responsibility (Oteíza 2010). We will analyze the consequences of this ambiguous position for the conceptualization of the perpetrators, the victims and the relationship between them. This corpus study draws upon insights from cognitive linguistics (especially conceptualization and windowing of attention) (Talmy 2000) as well as from discourse analysis.

In the first place, we will show that the tension between completeness of information and refraining from attributing responsibility is reflected in the presentation of the victims and the perpetrators: whereas victims are at first being clearly identified, perpetrators are not. Moreover, we will show that, throughout the development of the cases, few extra information concerning the victim is being given, yet the responsibility of the perpetrators is expressed through varying degrees of implicitness, relying on a wide array of syntactic structures (Delbecque in press) and pragmatic-rhetoric phenomena (implicatures, metonymies...).

In the second place, in view of the commission's attitude to individual responsibility, we will show how the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator is described from an external point of view. Thus, neither participants' perspective is adopted, as opposed to more testimonial human rights reports, such as the Peruvian or South-African truth commissions.

We will then demonstrate in this research how the linguistic construction of this report reflects and realizes the political and juridical choices made by the commission.

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