Ferguson and how it was brought to you. A Linguistic Analysis on how The Mass Media told the story of Michael Brown depending on their political ideology

Ferguson y cómo fue traído a ti. Un análisis lingüístico sobre cómo los medios de comunicación contaron la historia de Michael Brown dependiendo de su ideología política

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Cómo citar este trabajo · How to Cite this Paper

Giar, S. (2018). Ferguson and how it was brought to you. A Linguistic Analysis on how The Mass Media told the story of Michael Brown depending on their political ideology. *Publicaciones, 48*(2), 301–317. doi:10.30827/publicaciones.v48i2.8345

Abstract

This article aims at exposing the specific language that the American mass media uses to portray events, as well as the many differences found in them based on their ideological allegiance, that is to say, whether they are conservative or liberal oriented. This analysis is built on the well-known Ferguson case in which a white police officer shot and killed an unarmed black teenager in the middle of a street. This paper offers an analysis of the first headlines of at least 8 different newspapers, paying special attention to the syntactic structures used, semantic roles as well as the chosen vocabulary.

Key words: Mass media, Ferguson, race, USA, liberalism, conservatism, linguistic analysis.

Introduction

The main purpose of this research project is to give a detailed analysis of how the Ferguson case was portrayed by the mass media in the United States. This paper intends to study how the different media sources bring the story in a different way depending on their ideological placement; conservative and liberal oriented press are expected to tell the story in opposed manners. We will see how the media intentionally plays with language in order to feed a characteristic reaction in the reader by means of the omission of relevant information or the specific use of syntax and voice, among other sources that we will develop later in the paper.

The corpus that has been selected to carry out the linguistic analysis is a number of articles that have been taken from the conservative and liberal press. The former one includes *USA today, Fox News, CBS St. Louis* and *The Blaze*. On the other hand, the latter combines *BuzzFeed, Slate, Huffington Post* and *The New York Times.* The reason why we have included four samples of each ideology is to be as objective as possible and not to fall into stereotypes. The resource that has been used to classify the media has been a research done by the Pew Research Centre, which divided and ideologically placed the different sources of communication based on the consistent thinking of their audiences. We are specifically covering the news that were published right when the episode took place, that is to say, the first headlines from the mass media bringing to the public what happened in the city of Ferguson, in St. Louis county (Missouri). For some journals, it was on the 9th of August, the day that Michael Brown was murdered, and for other press, it was the following day, the 10th.

The theoretical background is divided into three parts. It will start with an objective summary of what actually happened in Ferguson and all its corresponding court proceedings, as it is crucial information that needs to be known in order for the reader to understand the analysis. The main source of information that we will be using here is a document issued by Amnesty International Canada and the report regarding the criminal investigation made by the Department of Justice of the United States. The second part will include a description of what implies to be a sympathizer of liberalism or of conservatism, both understood as political thinking; and eventually, a hint of the political and ideological background of each of the well-known journals with which we are working. This information is relevant in the sense that it will show to what extent the media who share the same ideology also coincide in the use of language in a specific way as compared to those who share a different political allegiance.

The main part of this paper will focus on two types of analysis. The first is a syntactic one, comparing the different structures used in the headlines to bring the event to the

public and the extent to which it affects the information that is being given. The second one will talk about the content of the entire articles, that is to say, the specific data about the shooting that the different broadcasts use and the chosen words to express it. A final part includes some comments to summarize all the information explained in the analysis, as well as one table that makes clear the syntactic and relational processes of part one and another table that organizes all the specific data that each press either mentions or deletes.

The conclusion will include a final reflection of race portrayal in the US media, and also, some observations about the extent to which our expectations meet reality in regards to differences between conservative and liberal press. Finally, a mention to similar cases of police abuse will follow.

One of the reasons to deal with this topic is that it is related to the power of mass media and how it can encourage citizens to relate certain behaviour with a specific kind of people promoting a rejection towards the target group. To be more precise, black people tend to be tagged as a threat just because of their skin colour; they are almost immediately related to violence, illiteracy and slums. A classical experiment on race showed that people tend to think of African Americans as dangerous and armed with guns; and even though when people are asked they answer that they are not racists, they unconsciously make those relations; it is called 'racism without racists' by a sociologist from Duke University. [1] Besides, given the current political situation in the US and the recent election of President Trump, covering topics like this becomes extremely necessary.

A similar situation happens with Muslims, mass media has played a key role in order to make people relate terrorism and extremism with Muslims. Not only that, an experiment from the University of Chicago demonstrated that applicants for a job with 'Anglo-sounding names'[2] such as 'Brendan' were more likely to be hired than a person called 'Jamal'. They were probably not aware of this as an intentional discrimination, but it is indeed motivated by an unconscious racial bias towards African Americans, Muslims, Asians, Hispanics, etc. which are generally misrepresented and negatively portrayed by the communication industries. This article intends to prove mainly two things: first of all, the strong influence of mass media through a calculated and premeditated use of language and secondly, how the wording and style used varies depending on the political allegiance of a particular press. The focus of the study is race and the source for it is Michael Brown's case.

1. http://edition.cnn.com/2014/11/26/us/ferguson-racism-or-racial-bias/
2. *Ibid.*

Theoretical background

Summary of the events

On the Saturday, 9th of August, at approximately afternoon, Darren Wilson, a white officer from Ferguson Police shot the unarmed black teenager Michael Brown six times, killing him. Right after that, his body lay on the floor for at least four hours.[3] The death of Michael Brown triggered many protests and riots in the city of Ferguson, Mo. that lasted many weeks, people peacefully congregated on the same avenue almost every night in order to make their anger public, and a protester even said that they felt their black lives in danger[4].

Within two days after the shooting, the St. Louis County Prosecutor's office opened a criminal investigation and also, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) launched a civil rights one. With all this, on the 14th of August, the state of emergency is declared in the city of Ferguson, and some measures that go against the right of peaceful assembly are taken. Just to mention some: curfew between midnight and 5 a.m., the obligation to keep moving unless they were in specific areas, only restricted areas were allowed for assembly, the intimidation of protesters and finally, the use of tear gas and rubber bullets, among others[5]. Three months later, the St. Louis County announced that the grand jury would not prosecute Darren Wilson. This decision set off the indignation of people who started to protest again. Eventually, the Department of Justice also released its decision, on the 4th March, which concluded not to indict Wilson for Brown's death.[6]

However, the main question that urges an answer is: What happened between Darren Wilson and Michael Brown before the shooting? According to the police report, Darren Wilson was driving in his police car when he saw Michael Brown and another teenager, Dorian Johnson, walking. It seems that they both fitted into the description that Wilson was given about two suspects that had just stolen some cigarettes from a store. The police stopped the car in front of them to block the path; after an altercation between Michael Brown and Darren Wilson from the window of the vehicle, the officer shot at Michael Brown twice, and one of those bullets reached his thumb. After this, Brown started running and Wilson pursued him on foot. At some point they stopped and Wilson shot Brown, at least six more times, falling dead on the floor. There were many witnesses who declared that Michael Brown was not moving when he was shot dead, others said that he was actually moving towards the officer, and others that he had his hands up.[7]

The official report concluded that Michael Brown had a scuffle with Darren Wilson while he was in the car. Even though many witnesses declared that they never saw Brown's hands inside the car, the DNA found in the vehicle corroborated the officer's account that Brown was trying to get his gun. The autopsy also showed that Brown was shot on his front side: all over his right arm, his forehead and his top head. The official report concluded that the armed Wilson shot in self-defence because he was

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3. Amnesty International Canada, October 14th, 2014, retrieved from http://www.amnesty.ca/sites/default/files/usafergusonreport24october14.pdf
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/03/12/us/ap-us-ferguson-timeline.html
7. http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/08/13/us/ferguson-missouri-town-under-siege-after-police-shooting.html

afraid of the unarmed Brown because of his previous behaviour in the car.[8] Nevertheless, the department of justice admitted that there was racial bias in the law enforcement and that blacks in Ferguson were prone to suffer from abuse of police force.[9]

In relation to the court proceedings, we need to mention that this case had a number of features that are not normally present in a jury. First of all, a jury tends to need one day to reach a decision but, in Wilson's case the grand jurors met for 25 days. Secondly, the grand jury generally hears the testimony of only a few people; in Wilson's case, at least 60 people were asked to declare. To mention one more, Missouri law asks the grand jury to keep their activity in secret, however, the evidence that did not condemn Wilson was released after the decision was made public.[10]

According to Amnesty International, Michael Brown was unarmed, and thus, unlikely to have presented a threat to the life of the officer Wilson. 'International standards provide that law enforcement officers should only use force as a last resort and that the amount of force must be proportionate to the threat encountered and designed to minimize damage and injury'[11]. Nevertheless, the Missouri law allows it in cases like: effecting an arrest, inflicting physical injury or attempting to commit a felony, among others. Amnesty international calls it unconstitutional and urgently asks for a change in the use of lethal force because it is allowed in cases other than the strictly protection of life.[12]

Liberalism and Conservatism

In general terms, liberal principles defend that it is the government's responsibility to take care of human rights and individual liberties. The policies should be devoted to solve the problems of society and make sure that people have their basic needs covered. On the other hand, conservative beliefs would propose that the government should have limited responsibilities. It is the individuals who have to solve the problems. Also, they hold strong traditional values and a feeling of national defence.[13]

It is especially important to mention the different thinking that these two ideologies hold in terms of Affirmative Action, Homeland Security and United Nations (UN) because these issues will help the reader build an accurate image of what a liberal and a conservative position would be in the specific case of Michael Brown. In what refers to Affirmative Action, a liberal would defend that due to the strong racism that led the history of United States, the government should now take measures to foster equality of opportunities in order to overcome the still existing racism in society. A conservative would say that it is unfair to use race as a factor, the only criteria should be the abilities of a person because even though some people may individually be racist, the American system is not, and thus, preferential treatment is not an option.[14]

Related to Homeland Security, in what airports' security concerns, liberalism suggests that the selection of people for 'extra security screening'[15] should be random and nev-

8. http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/03/04/doj_report_on_shooting_of_michael_brown_1.pdf
9. http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/03/12/us/ap-us-ferguson-timeline.html
10. http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/08/13/us/ferguson-missouri-town-under-siege-after-police-shooting.html
11. http://www.amnesty.ca/sites/default/files/usafergusonreport24october14.pdf
12. *Ibid.*
13. http://www.studentnewsdaily.com/conservative-vs-liberal-beliefs/
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*

er based on skin colour or nationality; otherwise, it would be discriminatory, as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) stated: "…Arabs, Muslims and South Asians are no more likely than whites to be terrorists."[16] On the opposite side, conservatism proposes that random screening is not effective; people who meet the suspicion criteria should be the ones to be examined further, as Northwestern University Aviation Expert, A. Gellman said "If people are offended (by profiling), that's unfortunate, but I don't think we can afford to take the risk that terrorism brings to us."[17]

Finally, liberalism sees UN as a means to promote peace and so, the United States has the obligation to support it and pursue the good of the global community over its own national benefits. If it was necessary, the troops of USA should submit to the commands of the UN in order to maintain international security. On the contrary position we find conservatism, which states that it is the United States the one who has more successfully worked to spread freedom, tolerance and peace. The US should never put its troops under UN control and neither put anyone's interests before the ones of the US nation.[18]

Information about the press covered

As it was mentioned in the introduction, the conservative oriented press encompasses:

USA Today: This broadcast was created in 1982, and it is nowadays available in many different types of platforms. It aspired to be the nationwide newspaper and be able to cover topics of general interest; in order to achieve this goal, they had to understate foreign news and focus on the national ones. At the beginning it gained the misgivings of minorities and religious groups, as it only included pictures of the everyday white businessmen. Eventually, in 2001, the press gained the respect and admiration of previous critics (Vaughn, 2008).

Fox News: It was founded by the Australian Rupert Murdoch and was launched on 1996. This network has been tagged not only as conservative (since 52% of its audience declare themselves to be so), but also as oriented towards the Republican Political Party. In fact, a research known as 'a Fox News effect' demonstrated that it pushed the population to vote George Bush in the elections of 2000. [19]

CBS St. Louis: Its ideological trajectory has not been constant. In 1937, it established a code of ethics to bring the news to the public as neutral as possible in matters of politics so not to annoy the government. However, when it won an award on the portrayal of civil rights and of the Vietnam War, it was tagged as too liberal and it attracted the attention of a group of conservative investors who aimed to have more control over that newscast. In 1995, the broadcast was sold to the Westinghouse Electric Corporation, changing its owner.[20]

16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*

The Blaze: It is a recently new broadcast. On their information page, they claim themselves to be proud Americans and to put their principles over any political ideology, because they affirm they do not treat their readers as 'idiots'. The organization also claims capitalism to be the real solution to 'sickness and slavery'. They also say to hold strong moral values and the presentation finishes with a mention of God. [21]

On the other side, liberal-directed broadcasts include:

BuzzFeed: This social news company was created in 2006 by Jonah Peretti[22]. It covers both serious and fun news, from entertaining quizzes to long and well-informed articles. They call themselves original when portraying the events and active in reporting breaking news[23], as its co-founder Kazz Lazerow put it: "the defining media company for the social age". Also, it is one of the sites that is growing faster and is planning to expand internationally. [24]

Slate: This broadcast was founded in 1996 and is nowadays a member of Amazon Associates. They affirm to have a strong voice and to write with wit; those claims are said to be supported by the numerous awards they have received. [25] It is worth mentioning that last year the company wanted to see how biased they were seen by the public and thus, they launched a question to their readers to know their opinions about whether Slate was too liberal and predictable. [26]

Huffington Post: It was founded by Arianna Huffington in 2005. It is a news and commentary web site that was created to offer a liberal correlative to the conservative news web page Drudge Report. Within its short life, the broadcast has already expanded itself internationally, in countries like Spain, UK or India. It belongs to the American Online (AOL) company, one of the largest Internet-access service companies in the United States. [27]

The New York Times: This daily newspaper was established in 1851 and has become one of the most important and most well-known newspapers of the world. This press intended to avoid 'sensationalism and report the news in a restrained and objective fashion'. It enjoyed success from the very beginning of its foundation due to the excellence of its editorial. It pays special focus on the intellectual issues, since it calls for literate and well cultured readers rather than for the mass population. [28]

21. http://www.theblaze.com/about/
22. http://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/jan/06/buzzfeed-social-news-open-uk
23. http://www.buzzfeed.com/about
24. http://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/jan/06/buzzfeed-social-news-open-uk
25. http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/slate_fare/2006/08/about_us.html
26. http://www.slate.com/articles/slate_plus/slate_fare/2014/09/is_slate_magazine_too_liberal_or_conservative_what_members_said_about_the.html
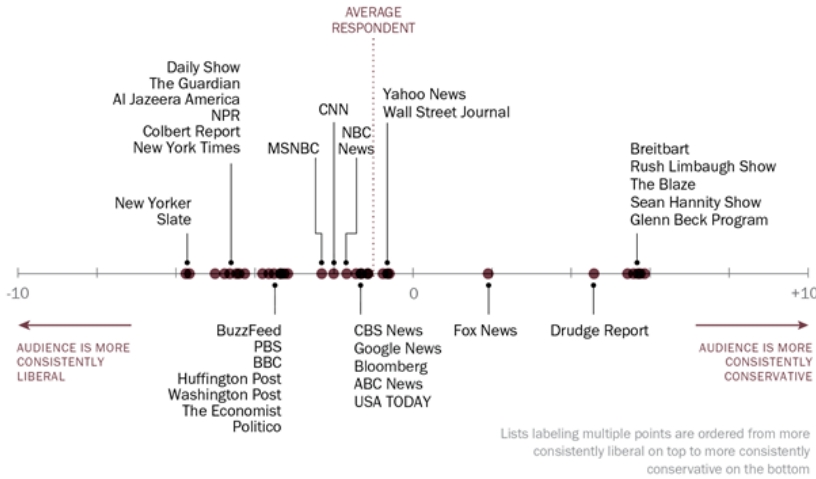27. https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Huffington-Post
28. https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-New-York-Times

Table 1

Ideological placement of each source's audience. Pew Research Centre[29]

Ideological Placement of Each Source's Audience

Average ideological placement on a 10-point scale of ideological consistency of those who got news from each source in the past week...

American Trends Panel (wave 1). Survey conducted March 19-April 29, 2014. Q22. Based on all web respondents. Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see About the Survey for more details.) ThinkProgress, DailyKos, Mother Jones, and The Ed Schultz Show are not included in this graphic because audience sample sizes are too small to analyze.

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Analysis

Some of the media mentioned above already refer to their political placement in their opening pages or either claim themselves to be of no political ideology and to portray the events fairly. Nevertheless, the following analysis will show to what extent what they say meets reality. As follows, we find the very first headlines that several broadcasts have used to tell their readers about the shooting of Michael Brown by the police officer Darren Wilson.

Liberal headlines:

1-BuzzFeed: Police in Missouri reportedly shot and kill an unarmed teenager Saturday. (9-Aug-2014)

2-Slate: Police in St. Louis Suburb shot unarmed black teenager multiple times. (10-Aug-2014)

3-The Huffington Post: Ferguson, Missouri teen shot dead by police prompts community backlash. (9-Aug-2014)

29. http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/pj_14-10-21_mediapolarization-08/

4-The New York Times: Missouri Crowd after Shooting: 'Kill the police'. (9-Aug-2014)

Conservative headlines:

5-USA Today: Anger follows police shooting in St. Louis Suburb. (9-Aug-2014)

6-Fox News: Black teen shot after altercation, Missouri Police say. (10-Aug-2014)

7-CBS St. Louis: Officer-involved Fatal Shooting in Ferguson. (9-Aug-2014)

8-The Blaze: Hundreds Yell 'Kill the Police!' after Officer Fatally Shoots Allegedly Unarmed Teenager. (9-Aug-2014)

The first thing that is going to be studied is the concept of 'causality', which refers to the relationship of cause and effect[30](Fowler, 1986:101), that is to say, who is responsible for what. It is also related to the use of 'nominalization' that consists of turning a word from any word-class into a noun, in this specific case, the attention is put on the nominalization of verbs, which are used to leave the agency unclear. One last thing to cover in relation to the structure is the approach to 'focalization', which consists of changing the structure of a sentence in order to put more attention on one specific part of it. In order to study all that, two types of analysis need to be done, a syntactic and a semantic one. To be more precise, the declarative sentence in English follows the syntactic structure SV, the subject followed by the verb, which may then be followed by an object (O) and/or a complement (C). Nevertheless, the subject is not necessarily the agent and the object is not always the affected element of the sentence, as it will vary on whether the sentence is active or passive.[31] (Fairclough, 1995:110)

A second point to look at is related to diction, that is to say, 'the choice and use of words and phrases in speech or writing'[32]. The choosing of certain words and the specific information that is included or omitted can create a specific context[33] (Fowler, 1986) or atmosphere that may encourage one interpretation or another. Each newspaper may consider some data to be more pertinent than other. Also, the context in which the action is put may affect the mood of the reader. In order to analyse that, not only the headlines will be covered because even though a headline is the most important part, it is not necessarily representative of the entire information that the whole article develops, thus, there is going to be a reference to the entire piece in those cases where it is relevant.

Let us now better look at the examples and try to apply all the linguistic principles mentioned above in them. The first that are going to be studied are the liberal ones.

1-BuzzFeed: Police in Missouri reportedly shot and kill an unarmed teenager Saturday.[34]

In relation to the syntactic structure, the headline seems to be very clear: 'Police in Missouri' is the subject as well as the agent of the action; the verb 'shot and killed' specifies not only that the victim is dead but also the way he was killed; finally, 'an unarmed teenager' is the direct object as well as the affected element. The focus of this

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30. Fowler, Roger, Bob Hodge, Gunther Hess et al. Language and Control. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.
31. Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. Malasya: Longman Group Limited. 1995.
32. http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/diction
33. Fowler, Roger. *Linguistic Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
34. http://www.buzzfeed.com/jimdalrympleii/police-in-missouri-reportedly-shot-and-killed-an-unarmed-tee#.tqKJLz09P

sentence is given to the agent, to emphasize that it was the police officer the one who caused the shooting, as well as to whom.

If the analysis moves towards the entire article, it can be seen that there is not only a mention of Brown being unarmed but it also states that he had his hands up when he received the gunshots. The context given is a very peaceful one: Brown is described as walking with a friend down a street, not doing any violent thing or involved in any scuffle. The article finishes saying that Brown had just finished high school and that was going to start college in two days.

2-Slate: Police in St. Louis Suburb shot unarmed black teenager multiple times.[35]

Example 2 presents the same syntactic structure and semantic relations as example 1; nevertheless, a few differences need to be highlighted. In headline 1, there is no mention of the skin colour of any of the participants, although 2 specifies only that the victim is black; and both of them mention that the teenager was unarmed when he was shot. The context in which Michael Brown was shot is a bit different from example 1, but it is still not related to a violent situation since Brown is said to be running when he was shot. One more thing from this piece that calls our attention is the visual image created by the specific phrase 'Brown's fatal gunshot wounds'. The word 'wound' is defined as 'An injury to living tissue caused by a cut, blow, or other impact, typically one in which the skin is cut or broken'. As the source shows, a wound is related to physical hurt and it can make the reader sympathize with the victim through his pain when he was shot.

3-The Huffington Post: Ferguson, Missouri teen shot dead by police prompts community backlash.[36]

In headline 3, the sentence is written in passive voice. The subject of the sentence 'Missouri teen' is now the affected participant and the agent moves to the final position 'by police', being introduced by the preposition 'by' and fulfilling the function of agent complement. The information that is being given is the same as in the previous examples because both participants appear in the headlines. The difference is that in a passive voice sentence, the focal point is no longer the police officer, but the teenager, as it is moved to the first position. Besides, the headline continues with 'prompts community backlash'. At this point, the important information is not only the shooting but also the reaction it provoked on the people; nevertheless, it is clear that it was the first event that caused the 'backlash'. Finally, the headline does not give information about whether the teenager was unarmed or not, neither about the skin colour of the participants.

4-The New York Times: Missouri Crowd after Shooting: 'Kill the police'.[37]

The last liberal press headline, as example 4 shows, is a bit different from the rest. To start with, the main participants, the agent and the affected are missing. There is no mention of who did what, as if that information was not relevant. There is a process of nominalization of the verb, that is to say, it becomes a noun: 'Shooting'. It allows the reader to think of it as a very abstract and general event and by not using the Standard English declarative structure SVO, the relation of causality disappears and any responsibility is removed from the doer. The focus is now given to the 'Missouri crowd', who

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35. http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2014/08/10/michael_brown_unarmed_black_teenager_shot_in_ferguson_a_st_louis_suburb.html
36. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/09/ferguson-police-shooting_n_5665274.html
37. http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2014/08/09/us/ap-us-police-shooting-missouri.html

appears to be at the very beginning of the headline; the 'shooting' is indicated as the reason for their reaction but not as the main event. There is no mention of the police officer as the main agent, yet there is a reference to the rallying cry: 'Kill the police', which sounds very violent and also as threat to the police officer's life, without being there any reference to the police being guilty of anything.

Even though the headline does not give clear information about what happened, the entire article does; in fact, in the very first line the reader already knows who killed whom. The articles of newspapers 3 and 4 share certain aspects: the context of the shooting is not given and both finish mentioning other recent cases in which African Americans were killed by the police. Also, both of them include quotes from Brown's grandmother saying that he never got into a fight and was about to start the college.

The following headlines are the conservative ones:

5-USA Today: Anger follows police shooting in St. Louis Suburb[38].

Example 5 gives most of the attention to the 'anger' of the citizens above everything, as it is moved to the front position. Again, any responsibility is removed with the nominalization of the verb 'police shooting'. There is no information about any agent or affected participants of the main action, that is to say, the 'shooting'. It is clear the avoidance of the basic declarative structure SVO that examples 1 and 2 do present. The 'shooting' is left as a very general thing and in fact, the consequent attitude of the citizens is given more importance than the main event. The use of 'police' preceding 'shooting' and modifying it gives at least a bit of knowledge oF who was in possession of guns, but there is no mention of there being voluntary shoots at a specific person or just shoots to put some order in a situation of riots.

Interestingly enough, the uncertainty of the headline finds correspondence with the information given in the article because it is not until the fourth paragraph that the officer is directly said to have shot and killed Michael. Before the fourth paragraph, the references are very vague, as to see 'police opened fire'. Also, contrary to what other press said about the crowd that was protesting, this newspaper suggests that they were armed and that the police were threatened. There is also a mention of huge numbers of people: 'a couple hundred' and that the police had to call for more police support to put the crowd under control. The organization of ideas here makes the reader sympathize more with the police officer in such an overwhelming situation.

6-CBS St. Louis: Officer-involved Fatal Shooting in Ferguson[39].

The same nominalization process that appears in the previous example can be seen here: 'Fatal Shooting'. As it has already been explained, a nominalized verb eliminates the obligation of a subject that agrees with the verb and allows the uncertainty of who the agent is. Interestingly enough, there is a mention of the police officer at the very beginning of the headline, making clear that he has had some participation in the event: 'Officer-involved'. However, at no point is there a clear mention of his precise involvement in the action. It may be that he is the one who shot another person, or it may also be grammatically possible to think of him as the receiver of the shot.

The article makes a huge reference to the crowd, some of them are said to be armed, and to the police having to confront them while listening to 'obscenities'. Since the in-

38. http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/08/09/anger-follows-police-shooting-in-st-louis-suburb/13844477/
39. http://stlouis.cbslocal.com/2014/08/09/police-confronted-by-angry-crowd-in-ferguson/

formation given in the first article published is very poor, some reference will be made to the updated article the following day. It said that Michael Brown struggled with the police officer before he was shot, also, that it was either Brown, or the friend he was with, who first pushed the officer, and it was then when the struggle began[40]. Also, contrary to the four liberal pieces that we have analysed, here, there is no reference to the educational background of the victim, but rather a mention to the impeccable history of the officer, who did not have any similar incident during his six years of service. By mentioning this, the situation created is likely to convey some sympathy towards the police officer and by reporting that it was not him who started the scuffle, but rather Brown or his friend, the victim is tagged as being the guilty for his own death.

7-Fox News: Black teen shot after altercation, Missouri Police say[41].

This headline is the clearest example of the power of a passive voice sentence. The affected participant, 'the black teen' is given all of the attention as it appears in the first position. However, a passive sentence tends to also include the agent complement (although it is not obligatory), which should be the agent of the action specified by the verb. This example perfectly shows the omission of the agent responsible for the action, which could have perfectly been 'by police' as it was seen in example 3. One thing that calls our attention is that the 'Missouri Police' is in fact mentioned in the headline as the reporters of the story, but never as having any relation with the event, and even less, as having any direct responsibility for it.

The headline gives more information about Michael Brown; it says that the shots happened during an altercation. There is a huge difference between a person who is shot when doing nothing violent and between a person being shot while having a quarrel; obviously when readers hear about a death in the middle of a scuffle they see it as a normal thing, and besides, as the person being guilty of his own death for putting himself in such a violent situation. So, this headline does not only remove any guilt of the action from the police officer by omitting the complement agent, but manages to make the victim in charge of his own shooting by placing the shooting in a context of 'altercation'. Finally, the skin colour of the shot person is given, one more time black people are put in a context of violence and involved with guns, as explained in the introduction of this paper.

In the whole article there is an explanation of how the struggle began, as in the previous example, one of the two men started pushing the officer, in other words, it is not the police who starts the confrontation. There is also a mention of the clean background of the officer in the Police Department for six years. Not only that, the article also says that Brown never got into a fight and that he had expectations for a future. It is the only case of all the analysed press in which the impeccable background of both participants is mentioned. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that Brown's one does not appear until the very end of the article.

8-The Blaze: Hundreds Yell 'Kill the Police!' after Officer Fatally Shoots Allegedly Unarmed Teenager.[42]

Just a few points need to be said about this headline because it uses similar linguistic structures to the ones we have explained in the previous examples. At the very end

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40. http://stlouis.cbslocal.com/2014/08/10/police-michael-brown-had-struggled-with-officer-before-shooting/
41. http://www.foxnews.com/us/2014/08/10/black-teen-fatal-shooting-by-police-in-missouri-prompts-calls-for-federal/
42. http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2014/08/09/hundreds-yell-kill-the-police-after-officer-fatally-shoots-allegedly-unarmed-teenager/

of the sentence there is a declarative SVO construction which makes it very clear who the responsible for the shooting and the afflicted one are; the subject finds correspondence with the agent and the direct object is the affected participant. The beginning of the headline refers to one of the rallying cries of the crowd, which is the same as the liberal newspaper from example 4 decided to use: 'Kill the Police!'. The interesting thing about this headline is the fact that the rallying cry occupies a focal position, being given even more importance than the main event. This headline mentions the shouts against the police officer before even mentioning the reason why it happened, that is to say, the consequent reaction against the police is prioritized over the act of shooting that provoked it.

Final comments

Just a few comments need to be said to put together the ideas explained above; to compare in general terms what patterns liberal pieces shared as compared to the conservative ones and vice versa, and what features do not vary regardless of the ideological placement of the press.

In terms of the syntactic structure, three out of four liberal headlines include all the participants, either with passive or active voice. However, only one conservative headline uses the SVO structure, the other three use nominalization to refer to the event. In reference to the content, at least two conservative articles talk about the clean background of the police officer who shot Michael Brown; and only one of them mentions the educational trajectory of Brown. On the other hand, none of the four liberal articles analyzed mentioned the officer's past, but all mentioned Brown's. Also, only one conservative piece affirms that Michael Brown was unarmed, whereas the four liberal do. In relation to the rallying cries of the crowd, the majority of them use 'Kill the police' regardless of whether the press is liberal or conservative. A final point is about who started the struggle; at least two conservative articles report that it was one of the teens who started pushing the officer while two liberal pieces claim that Brown either had his hands up or was running when he was shot.

Conclusion

This paper was developed based on the idea that broadcasts with different ideological placements were going to tell the story in opposed manners. After having done the analysis it is fair to say that even though liberal and conservative press were not completely different, they were neither completely similar. The common features between the broadcasts who shared the same ideology were pretty consistent, as tables two and three summarized, although some exceptions were found, as it has been explained in the analysis. The fact that the information that each press pays attention to and considers relevant vary depending on their ideological allegiance supports a statement made by Christy La Pierre:

Television confers status on those individuals and groups it selects for placement in the public eye, telling the viewer who and what is important to know about, think about, and have feelings about. Hence, those who are made visible through television become worthy of attention and concern; those who television ignores remain invisible.[43]

43. La Pierre, Christy. 'Mass Media in the white Man's world'. Poverty and Prejudice: Media and Race. Stanford University (1999). Retrieved from https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/poverty_prejudice/mediarace/mass.htm

Could it be said then, that media is manipulative? In other words, is the use of language influential and pervasive in order to intentionally position the reader? It could be said that in some ways it is, and in others it is not. The hidden discourse may not only be for the readers but also for the average workers of the broadcast[44]. Language is especially powerful because it is not necessarily direct, it can be implicit and very subtle. US Media confers more importance to events that are interesting for the 'white public', and the problems that concern African Americans do not attract the attention of the public, only the consequences of those problems, such as 'freedom rides and social disturbances'[45] that only foster stereotypes against the black community. Racism can be so deep in a society that it is not necessarily intentional, it can be influenced by anyone's personal ideology and be unconscious, as Doreen E. Loury, director of the Pan African Studies program at Arcadia University says "The first thing we must stop doing is making racism a personal thing and understand that it is a system of advantage based on race"[46].

This paper intends to provide the reader with a deeper knowledge of the language and how powerful it can be, the extent to which the choice of a syntactic structure or the information that is considered relevant can affect the reader's assumption of what has happened. This knowledge allows the reader to look at an article with a more responsible attitude and to pay attention to every single line, also, that the best way to find the complete information about something is to read the information given from newspapers with different ideologies, so that the readers can objectively build their own version. The most important thing that should be learn is that language is hardly impartial because it is affected not only by an (un)intentional political orientation of the journalist, but also by the reader's ideology and most of all, the society and culture we live in.

As isolated seen in the analysis, certain articles included a mention to recent cases of police abuse. That was very striking because it makes the reader understand that there is a strong problem in relation to racial discrimination, and that Michael Brown's case was not an occasional event. Because of that, this conclusion will include a mention to two more African American guys who were killed by police in the months following Brown's case. In case the reader is interested and wants to know more information about it, their names are Walter Scott and Freddie Grey. Freddie Grey's incident provoked a number of riots in Baltimore that lasted a few weeks. Hopefully, the analysis offered in this paper will help the reader to be suspicious as well as doubtful, and to look at the news with a bit more attention, especially in terms of race portrayal. Because of that, there is no better way to finish this article but with a quotation from Mark D. Naison, an African-American Studies professor at Fordham University in New York City, which states the following "The 'new racism' is subtle, institutionalized and seemingly nonracial."

44. Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. Malasya: Longman Group Limited. 1995. Print.
45. Balkaran, Stephen. *Mass Media and Racism.* Volume 21, number 1. October 1999.
46. http://edition.cnn.com/2014/11/26/us/ferguson-racism-or-racial-bias/

Table 2

Organization of syntactic and relational structures

	AGENT POLICE OFFICER	PROCESS SHOT AND KILLED	AFFECTED TEENAGER	
BuzzFeed:	Police *(Agent)* [...]	shot and kill *(process)*	[...] teenager *(affected)* [...]. (1)	This headline includes all the syntactic elements and the transitive verb. The causal process is very clear.
Slate:	Police (Agent) [...]	shot *(process)*	[...] teenager *(affected)* [...]. (2)	"
The Blaze:	[...] Officer *(Agent)* [...]	Shoots *(process)*	[...] Teenager *(affected)*. (8)	"
The Huffington Post:	Missouri teen *(Affected)*	shot dead *(process)*	by police *(agent)* [...]. (3)	Passivization. The affected element moves to focal position. Still, the causal relation is clear.
Fox News:	Black teen *(Affected)*	shot *(process)*	[...]. (6)	Passivization allows the deletion of the agent. At this point, the cause is not identified.
The New York Times:	[...]	shooting *(process)*	[...]. (4)	Nominalization of the verb. This process allows the deletion of the agent and the participant, and the causal relation completely disappears.
USA Today:	[...]	police shooting *(process)*	[...]. (5)	"
CBS St. Louis:		Officer-involved Fatal Shooting *(process)*	[...]. (7)	"

Table 3

Organization of relevant information

	'Causality' is clear	Nominalization	Mention 'unarmed'	Mention Brown's background	Mention officer's background	Say: Brown's behavior is not violent	Say: Brown struggled with the officer	Crowd: 'Kill the police'	Other rallying cries	Mention recent cases of police abuse
BuzzFeed	X		X	X		X				
Slate	X		X	X		X			X	X
The Huffington Post	X		X	X				X		X
The New York Times		X	X	X				X		X
USA Today		X						X		
Fox News				X	X		X		X	X
CBS St. Louis		X			X		X	X		
The Blaze	X		X					X		

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