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Original article

Problems and challenges in the teaching of journalistic writing

Problemáticas y desafíos en la enseñanza de la redacción periodística

Problemas e desafios no ensino da escrita jornalística

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the problem that journalism students have in writing, in relation to the subjects that have a high hourly load for the realization of practical writing assignments, in order to perfect the different journalistic genres, such as: news, reporting, interview, chronicle and commentary. The article addresses the case

of seventh semester students of the Journalism career of the Universidad Laica "Vicente Rocafuerte" of Guayaquil, in the academic period 2019-2020. A research methodology of mixed, descriptive, explanatory and longitudinal approach was applied, which included the survey and self-evaluation and knowledge tests on the application of spelling rules, punctuation marks, semantics, among other fundamental aspects that a student must know to correctly apply the journalistic writing technique. The results showed that most of the students show deficiencies in writing due to the lack of mastery and knowledge of spelling rules, syntax problems, coherence, clarity and precision in the development of news texts. It was concluded that there are problems of form and content with which teachers have to deal and must find didactic strategies to mitigate this problem.

Keywords: spelling; communication; journalism; writing.

RESUMEN

El presente artículo analiza el problema que tienen los estudiantes de periodismo para redactar, en relación con las asignaturas que tienen una alta carga horaria para la realización de trabajos prácticos de redacción, a fin de perfeccionar los distintos géneros periodísticos, tales como: la noticia, el reportaje, la entrevista, la crónica y el comentario. El artículo aborda el caso de los estudiantes de séptimo semestre de la carrera de Periodismo de la Universidad Laica "Vicente Rocafuerte" de Guayaquil, en el período académico 2019-2020. Se aplicó una metodología de investigación de enfoque mixto, descriptiva, explicativa y longitudinal que incluyó la encuesta y autoevaluación y las pruebas de conocimientos sobre la aplicación de reglas de ortografía, signos de puntuación, semántica, entre otros aspectos fundamentales que un estudiante debe conocer para aplicar correctamente la técnica de redacción periodística. Los resultados

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evidenciaron que la mayoría de los estudiantes registran falencias en la redacción por la falta de dominio y conocimientos de las reglas ortográficas, problemas de sintaxis, coherencia, claridad y precisión en el desarrollo de los textos noticiosos. Se llegó a la conclusión de que existen problemas de forma y contenido con los que los docentes tienen que lidiar y deben encontrar estrategias didácticas que permitan mitigar este problema.

Palabras clave: ortografía; comunicación; periodismo; escritura.

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa o problema que os estudantes de jornalismo têm de escrever, em relação às disciplinas que têm uma carga horária elevada para realizar trabalhos práticos de redação, a fim de aperfeiçoar os diferentes gêneros jornalísticos, tais como: a notícia, a reportagem, a entrevista, a crônica e o comentário. O artigo aborda o caso de estudantes do sétimo semestre da carreira de Jornalismo da Universidade Leiga "Vicente Rocafuerte" de Guayaquil, no período acadêmico 2019-2020. Foi aplicada uma metodologia de pesquisa mista, descritiva, explicativa e longitudinal que incluiu o levantamento e autoavaliação e testes de conhecimento sobre a aplicação de regras ortográficas, sinais de pontuação, semântica, entre outros aspectos fundamentais que um aluno deve saber para aplicar corretamente a técnica de redação jornalística. Os resultados mostraram que a maioria dos alunos registra deficiências na escrita devido à falta de domínio e conhecimento das regras ortográficas, problemas de sintaxe, coerência, clareza e precisão na elaboração de textos jornalísticos. Concluiu-se que existem problemas de forma e conteúdo com os quais os professores têm que lidar e devem encontrar estratégias de ensino para mitigar esse problema.

Palavras-chave: ortografia; comunicação; jornalismo; escrita.

INTRODUCTION

Current education values the comprehension and expression of texts in young people as part of a priority level of knowledge in the face of the dangers of new technologies. For this reason, it is necessary for students to prove, through practice, that learning the Spanish language makes it easier for them to create texts or discourses, in oral and written form, to communicate with other people. In the context of these problems that are manifested throughout the Latin American region, and according to the Curricular Projection of the Ministry of Education of Ecuador, the linguistic macro-skills are of two types; comprehension: listening, reading and expression: speaking, writing (Ministry of Education, 2016). In today's world, it is necessary for teachers to enhance these essential learning in the academic and human formation of students; in addition, to demand the commitment of parents to reinforce language skills in daily life. As long as there is indifference to the current situation, it is possible that high school graduates will not get a job or be able to continue their university studies (Aguilar, 2013).

In university specialization, writings of various kinds produced by students (academic papers, exams, consultations or *online* tutorials, etc.) are plagued by spelling mistakes that threaten the mastery of linguistic communication skills and introduce one more task for the teachers in charge of their training (Figueredo, 2021). Although this panorama is serious, it is even more so when it is analyzed that it also affects the writing of university students of the Teacher's Degrees (Early Childhood and Primary) who are trained to dedicate

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themselves to teaching and transmitting educational content to children and young people (Suárez Ramírez *et al.*, 2019).

This article addresses the case of seventh semester students of Journalism at the Universidad Laica "Vicente Rocafuerte" of Guayaquil, in the academic period 2019-2020, where errors in spelling can be noticed at the time of writing. The present scientific research is carried out with the purpose of demonstrating the pending task of future communicators with respect to the knowledge of spelling rules as a fundamental basis of journalism. In this article, an entry test and an exit test on basic knowledge of spelling are carried out, the results of which will be presented statistically.

In this sense, in order to understand the problem under study, a survey was applied where the student evaluated, from his perspective, the contribution of the subject in his academic and professional growth in the area of writing and provides options for self-criticism about his responsibility in the problem, linked to shortcomings inherited from high school in secondary education.

It all adds up and attempts to demonstrate the problem faced by quasi-journalists in writing, one step away from obtaining their professional degree.

A person's lexical-orthographic knowledge is demonstrated when writing by means of frequency and lexicality: the more frequent and recognizable a word is, the more correctly it will be spelled (Aguinaga, E.D., 2000). Similarly, vocabulary level is closely linked to orthographic proficiency. Campbell, Yagelski, and Yu (2014) have concluded that educators could reduce their students' error frequency if they focused their attention on the most common errors. Carratalá (2006) has stated that spelling rules should be few, cover a wide number of usage words, be applied without exceptions, and have a

simple and easy to retain formulation (Suárez Ramírez *et al.*, 2019).

Carlino (2005) has commented that compulsory education and high school should provide students with sufficient reading and writing skills to continue further studies or to develop in the social or professional spheres without any difficulty. It is a mistake to assume that spelling has been "learned" in high school and university students. He points out that the treatment of spelling at the non-compulsory and higher education levels should involve an exercise of individual reflection by each student, specifying his or her spelling vocabulary, identifying the causes of the mistakes he or she makes, and choosing the didactic resource that best solves his or her spelling problems. In other words: "an orthography based on the analysis of the errors of the written expressive vocabulary" (Suárez Ramírez *et al.*, 2019, p. 144).

Morales and Hernández (2004) have stated that "the deficient production of texts, from the grammatical point of view, reveals that there has been no learning, that students have not become aware of the orthographic norms of Spanish" (p. 9). They consider that, if students enter university with deficiencies in relation to their communicative competence, the university is in the obligation to create meaningful learning situations so that these students become competent and autonomous users of the written language (Suárez Ramírez *et al.*, 2019).

For Gómez (2008) "spelling at university is, above all, a problem of attitude: the desire to write without mistakes the texts and expressive vocabulary used in real communication exercises" (p. 25). Arrieta and Meza (2000) consider that it is not the task of the Higher Education system to teach students to read and write, although the data obtained in their research show the opposite. Finally, the attitudes adopted by university

teachers about this problem have been analyzed by Dimángano and Delgrosso (2016), who have focused on reflecting on the language and spelling that university students have and on characterizing the teacher's opinion and attitude about their students' spelling from their own spelling experience.

Spelling errors in journalism

When a newspaper goes to press, it has been reviewed, in theory, completely and meticulously several times by different people to avoid and correct errors of any kind, "typos" and spelling mistakes that may have occurred in the writing of headlines, news, articles or anything that will be published in the corresponding newspaper (Zavala and Corona, 2010). But the spelling problem does not only affect the written media, as there are often labels accompanying the images of news programs or any other television program, with serious spelling mistakes.

Although these errors are sometimes gross and very serious, in television they can be excused by the speed with which the lines that appear at the bottom of the images have to be written and the fact that there is practically no time for their revision (Aguinaga, 2000). On the other hand, in the press, no matter how hard we try to find a justification, nothing can excuse the huge mistakes that often "illustrate" a headline or the content of a news item. Of course, in the headline, the error is much more glaring and striking and is immediately obvious.

Sometimes, it is not bad spelling that ruins a headline or a text and causes embarrassment to others, but poorly written sentences or expressions that can give rise, for example, to headlines with double meanings, some of them being really grotesque (Parratt *et al.*, 2017; Rodríguez, 2001). Every journalist is assumed to have an excellent command of the spelling, lexicon

and grammar of our language, but it is enough to browse any newspaper or be attentive during television programs to see that this is not the case: linguistic mistakes appear at any time, even in the most prestigious, famous and long-lived newspapers in the country. Nor do those who are in charge of checking the content of the newspaper before it goes to press, as a step prior to its publication, come off well, as they are incapable of detecting these errors.

Unfinished homework on spelling rules for journalism students at the Universidad Laica "Vicente Rocafuerte" of Guayaquil

In the student's trajectory at the university, the student learns to write, but there are still pending deficiencies in spelling, which is an apparently easy problem, which is often not due to lack of knowledge, but to deficient interest and attention on the part of the university students. In many occasions it is up to the decision and disposition of each student to improve, since at the moment of the professional exercise they will be forced to want to learn, since the University cannot make up for these gaps. This represents a social problem, since journalists may have a good focus and approach, but poor spelling damages journalistic work.

This article focuses on the pending task of journalism students at the Universidad Laica "Vicente Rocafuerte" of Guayaquil, regarding the shortcomings in spelling. In the works presented by the students, it can be seen that they are more concerned with aspects of form such as type of journalistic genre, syntax, sentence structure, approaches, etc., but they do not pay attention to basic problems such as spelling rules, which they have probably been carrying over from their studies prior to the University. It should be emphasized that, in the Journalism degree, specifically in the subject of Press Practices and Digital Journalism, aspects related to spelling are addressed, but teachers find it

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difficult to solve the problem, since the subject is technical and focuses more on teaching writing than spelling, making the practice of spelling rules in the journalistic writings of students more complex.

In this sense, the main objective of this article is to analyze the problem that journalism students have in writing, in relation to the subjects that have a high time load for practical writing assignments, in order to perfect the different journalistic genres, such as: news, reporting, interview, chronicle and commentary.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A mixed approach research methodology was applied, which included knowledge tests in the subject of Written and Digital Journalism Practices, through a descriptive, explanatory and longitudinal type of study.

First, an evaluation of basic knowledge on the application and good use of spelling rules, punctuation marks, semantics, etc., contents that a journalism student must master when writing journalistically, was applied. This same evaluation was applied as an input method, and another similar evaluation was used as an output method, to 34 seventh semester journalism students of the Universidad Laica "Vicente Rocafuerte".

The test consisted of 20 items, with a rubric that awarded: outstanding (one error), very good (two errors) and good (three errors); those who had more than four errors were considered as deficient. This application criterion was used in accordance with labor requirements, where errors in writing are not allowed and where censorship is implacable when it comes to writing and the journalist makes a mistake of this type.

Second, a procedural survey on writing techniques was applied where the student

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evaluated, from his perspective, the contribution of the subject in his academic and professional growth in the area of writing and gave options for self-criticism about his responsibility in the problem, linked to shortcomings inherited from high school in secondary education.

Finally, a self-evaluation was carried out to determine the self-criticism about the shortcomings in basic spelling skills, as evidenced in the subject of Written and Digital Journalism Practices.

RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the correct and incorrect answers on spelling and it can be demonstrated that in the entry test there is an acceptance of 67% in correct answers and 33% in incorrect answers, unlike the exit test, where the result was 4% in correct answers and 36% in incorrect answers; that is, the exit test was unfavorable with the entry test by 3%.

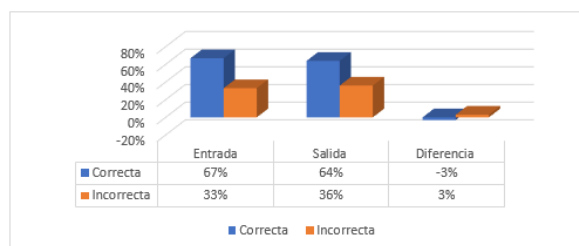


Fig. 1- Correct and incorrect spelling answers

Note: Statistical representation of basic test on entry and exit spelling in journalism students of the seventh semester of the Universidad Laica "Vicente Rocafuerte", Guayaquil. Authors' elaboration.

Figure 2 shows that, in the case of writing procedure, the one with the highest positive response was the easy-to-understand option with 71 %, followed by understanding the

text at first reading with 65 %; then, the text is poorly understandable with 38 % and the text is not understood with 9 %. In contrast to those who had negative responses, the highest in which the text is not understood with 91 %, followed by the text is poorly understandable with 62 %, the text is understood at first reading with 35 % and is easily understood at 29 %. The difference between both measurements statistically emphasizes more in the positive responses than in the negative ones.

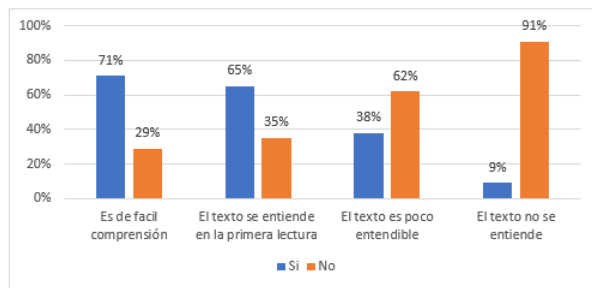


Fig. 2- Types of comments from those who receive journalistic texts
Note: Writing procedure in journalism students of the seventh semester of the Universidad Laica "Vicente Rocafructe", Guayaquil. Authors' elaboration.

Figure 3 shows the level of attention that students pay to their texts. The result was measured in scales between high, medium and low; where the one that had the highest percentage and can be appreciated is the medium level, placing first the punctuation with 62 %, then the spelling mistakes and correct use of verbs with 53 %, then typing errors, sentence construction and use of first and third person with 50 % and, finally, identification of the type of journalistic genre with 47 %.



Fig. 3- Level of attention that students pay to their journalistic texts.

In Figure 4, it is measured by scales of options always, almost always, sometimes, and never; where almost always is the option that prevails in the first place that the paragraphs are not too long 56%, then review the text to verify that it is understood and verify that the text is related to the topic 53%, and make several drafts before the final text, read it aloud and put yourself in the role of the reader with 44% each option.

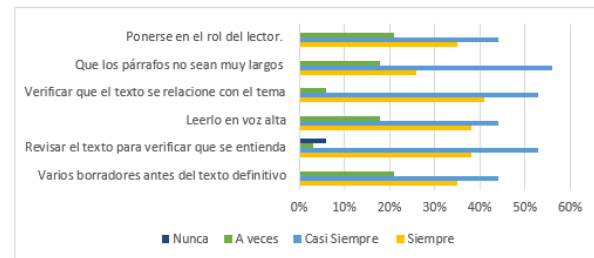


Fig. 4- Actions carried out by students when writing a journalistic text.

Figure 5 shows the weaknesses that students consider about their journalistic writing. It can be observed that the spelling and punctuation option prevails with 29%, followed by vocabulary with 24% and finally writing with 18%; as it can be noticed the most important options such as spelling and punctuation are in first place as weaknesses, the same that are related to each other to generate the background of a journalism writing.

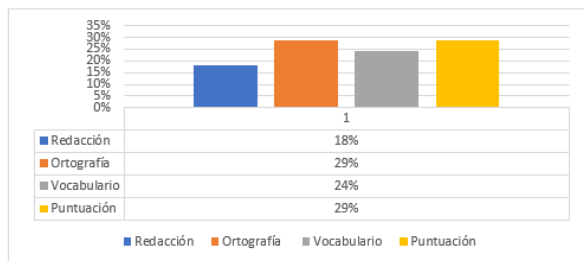


Fig. 5- Weaknesses of student journalistic writing

Figure 6 shows the factors that prevent correct journalistic writing. It can be observed that the shortcomings from school appear with the highest score with 44%, followed by spelling mistakes with 23%, then lack of knowledge of writing techniques with 21% and finally lack of understanding of the subject with 12%. As can be seen, most of the students think that the shortcomings regarding spelling mistakes come from the learning prior to the University (school) and they highlight it as the first factor that prevents a good journalistic writing.

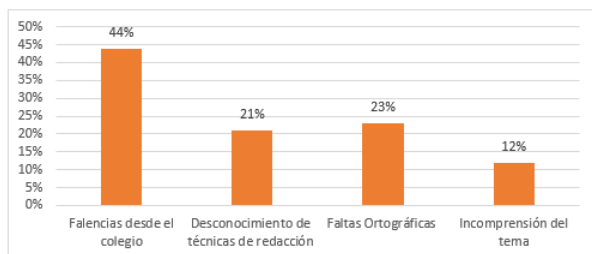


Fig. 6- Factors that impede correct journalistic writing

DISCUSSION

The difficulties presented by the students point to a teaching-learning process that still needs to deepen in strategies, techniques and activities from a more integral pedagogical conception, which allows

changing the problems presented (Castelló, 2002).

The incorrect use of the language, where journalists in training frequently forget the basic rules of both style and grammar, has led to the continued development of manuals that can be useful for teaching processes (Lemos, 2000).

According to recent studies, it is suggested that in order to produce quality texts it is essential to master seven types of knowledge: knowledge of the topic; linguistic knowledge, that is, mastery of lexical, orthographic and grammatical rules; rhetorical knowledge, consisting of determining the purposes of the text, arguments and evidence; discursive knowledge; knowledge of genre; knowledge of the process of planning, textualization and textual revision strategies; and, finally, metacognitive knowledge (Ríos Laborde, 2021).

On the other hand, aligned with what is indicated by other authors such as Velázquez *et al.* (2021) and Cortina (2021), it is considered that students present serious difficulties, taking into account the stages of writing, followed by the identification in their writings of the cases of concordance and the adequate application of textual markers.

Finally, it is understood that a more coordinated work between universities and the different types of actors involved in the phenomenon of scientific publications (editors, indexes, scientists, journal editors) would allow establishing a relationship between argumentative forms, disciplines and the scientific performance of students in terms of writing.

After analyzing the results of the research on the lack of mastery and knowledge of spelling rules as a basis for journalistic writing, a pending task for future communicators, it can be concluded that

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after the execution of the entry and exit tests, the latter was unfavorable in 3%.

Indeed, the analysis of the survey results shows that the journalism students of the seventh semester of the Universidad Laica "Vicente Rocafuerte", only focus on the form of journalistic writing to be easy to understand, to identify the type of journalistic genre, the use of first and third person with objectivity, coherence and syntax.

On the other hand, most of the students consider that their journalistic writing has a self-evaluation between 7 to 8 (Good) on a scale of 1 to 10; in addition, prior to the presentation of a journalistic writing, students focus in greater proportion on reviewing the text to verify that it is related to the topic, that it is understood, read it aloud, make several drafts before the final text.

Finally, the population studied focuses less on the substance of journalistic writing, such as the proper use of spelling rules, punctuation and rarely on typing errors, and almost half of the population agrees that these errors are due to shortcomings that have been carried over from the school stage and that these problems could be solved or improved through effort and self-preparation.

It is recommended to increase reading because it helps to unconsciously memorize words and graphic writing on the other hand, increasing practice, as it helps to visually memorize the spelling of words.

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Conflict of interest:

The authors declare not to have any conflicts of interest.

Authors' Contribution:

The authors have participated in the writing of the work and analysis of the documents.



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