The Texture of Ideology:
Demonstrating Bias in the Representation of the Internal Conflict in the Colombian Press

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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To Alfredo and Eudaldo,
Angie Diomedes and Fabio Alexander,
Chorina and Helen,
and the hundreds of thousands of victims of the Colombian conflict.
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This study aims to investigate how the four major Colombian newspapers covered the news related to both left-wing guerrillas and right wing paramilitaries' actions from 1998 to 2006. Within a Systemic Functional Linguistics framework, it aims to identify linguistic patterns at the lexicogrammatical and semantic levels in the construal of violent acts that may highlight or conceal the responsibility of the perpetrators. The findings may provide some insight into the role of the press as a contributing factor in the reproduction of the widespread ideology of the paramilitaries as a minor agent of violence in the conflict despite the statistical evidence to the contrary.

The data for this study consists of a 300,000+ word (over 500 texts) corpus of news reports from the major broadsheet papers from the four largest Colombian cities, El Tiempo, from Bogotá; El País, from Cali; El Colombiano, from Medellín, and El Heraldo, from Barranquilla. The news reports are divided according to the perpetrator (guerrillas or paramilitaries), and into two periods of time: August 1998- August 2002 and August 2002- August 2006, corresponding to two presidential periods when negotiations with guerrillas and paramilitaries respectively were carried out. This corpus is analysed from both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective combining the use of computational tools with detailed manual analysis. The analytical tools employed include instatinal weight (Butt, 2008), the cline of dynamism and cohesive harmony (Hasan, 1985), the representation of social actors (van Leeuwen, 1996), appraisal (Martin and White, 2005), and transitivity patterns of the construal of death and killing in Spanish.

The implications of this study encompass theoretical, methodological and practical issues. Theoretically, it provides a currently unmapped system of choices for Spanish transitivity that allows for the construal of events without the participation of an Agent, which can be recruited by the speaker to conceal responsibility for violent acts, among other things. Methodologically, it approaches discourse analysis of a large corpus from a firmly grounded systemic functional perspective, which provides the analyst with sufficient evidence to support claims of ideological content in texts. And practically, in the field of journalism, it may provide reporters and editors with a guideline on how to cover acts of violence from a perspective that is more favourable to the victims than to the perpetrators,
and in education, by uncovering the lexicogrammatical mechanisms through which a particular ideology is reproduced, it advocates for the development of critical reading programs at the secondary and tertiary levels.
Statement of candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “The texture of Ideology: Demonstrating bias in the representation of the internal conflict in the Colombian press” has not been previously submitted for a degree to any other university nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is a original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of this thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis did not require approval from the Macquarie University Ethics Committee.

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