

## A HISTORICAL-PRAGMATIC STUDY OF 17th CENTURY ENGLISH ACCOUNTS OF EVENTS

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### Abstract

This study aims at tracing the sender's linguistic imprint in six accounts of events written in English in the 17th century. These documents have barely been examined from a linguistic perspective, which justifies the need of the current research in order to shed more light on the study of the History of the English language, in accordance with the principles of Sociopragmatics. The sender of these documents will be seen in the text through the use of evaluative nouns and adjectives, which can sometimes be an evidence of a certain orality, intended or not, which could represent a defining feature of the accounts of events. The present analysis does not only look forward to contributing to a better knowledge of these documents that have fallen into oblivion, but it also seeks to achieve a better sociohistorical understanding of England in the 17th century.

*Keywords:* accounts of events, diachrony, pragmatics, sender, modalization.

### ESTUDIO HISTÓRICO-PRAGMÁTICO DE RELACIONES DE SUCESOS EN INGLÉS (SIGLO XVII)

### Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es trazar la huella lingüística del emisor en seis relaciones de sucesos escritas en inglés en el siglo XVII. Dicha documentación apenas se ha contemplado desde el punto de vista lingüístico, aspecto que justifica la necesidad de la actual investigación para arrojar una mayor luz al estudio de la Historia de la lengua inglesa, de acuerdo con los principios de la Sociopragmática. El emisor de estos documentos se dejará entrever en su texto mediante el empleo de sustantivos y adjetivos evaluativos, que en ocasiones pueden ser muestra de una cierta oralidad (pretendida o no), la cual podría erigirse como un potencial rasgo definitorio de las relaciones de sucesos. El presente análisis no solo trata de contribuir a un mejor conocimiento de esta

documentación que ha caído en el olvido, sino también busca alcanzar una mayor comprensión sociohistórica de la Inglaterra del siglo XVII.

*Palabras clave:* relaciones de sucesos, diacronía, pragmática, emisor, modalización.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The *accounts of events* are «occasional texts which relate events in order to inform, entertain and move the receiver»<sup>1</sup>. According to this definition, it is not always the exclusively informative purpose –and therefore, objective– the one that lies underneath these documents. That is the reason why the aim of this work pursues to analyze the author’s linguistic trace<sup>2</sup> in six 17th century English accounts of events<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, due to the scarce attention that has been paid to the (sub)genre<sup>4</sup> of the accounts of events from a linguistic perspective<sup>5</sup>, it is particularly interesting to consider the examination of the writer’s linguistic unfolding, which mainly –although not exclusively– relies on the foundation of evaluative adjectives and nouns.

In short, this study will allow us to follow the trail of those linguistic devices<sup>6</sup> that the author bequeaths throughout his account. In this way, from the study of the conditions of enunciation –where the purpose with which the communicative act is developed becomes crucial–, we aim to respond to an orality<sup>7</sup> potentially present in these texts. This can be deliberate –in order to gain the attention and to persuade the audience according to the writer’s own ideology–, or it can be involuntary –due to the author’s lack of expertise. However, it may represent a defining

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<sup>1</sup> Pena Sueiro (2001: 43): «textos ocasionales en los que se relatan acontecimientos con el fin de informar, entretener y conmover al receptor».

<sup>2</sup> This is, how the author manifests himself/herself in the text according to different linguistic devices such as the use of certain adjectives or nouns.

<sup>3</sup> The list with the titles of the six documents I have selected as the subject of analysis for the final paper can be seen in the References section.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Infantes (1996), who defined the accounts of events as a «género editorial».

<sup>5</sup> They have mostly been studied by the disciplines of Literature, History or Journalism (Pena Sueiro, 2001: 43).

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. Iraceburu Jiménez (2018).

<sup>7</sup> Kabatek (2000: 315-316): «[l]e “langage de proximité” et le “langage de distance”, modes différents du langage humain que l’on rencontré aussi dans les sociétés non-littéraires et qui est donc antérieur à la distinction entre oral et écrit».

characteristic of the accounts of events, a hypothesis that remains to be seen.

Finally, this analysis from a linguistic perspective looks forward to contributing to a better knowledge of the narrative accounts of events, whose study, as García López & Boadas (2015: 9) argue, has often been treated with disdain by Literary Historiography as a ‘minor’ genre and only as partially literary.

## 2. AIM AND CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE STUDY

By analyzing a corpus of six selected documents, the very first objective of this study is to scrutinize the diverse linguistic strategies –especially that of modalization– the author –or authors<sup>8</sup>– of these texts uses in order to manipulate the information that is offered and, therefore, to somehow control and even conduct the receivers’ way of thinking as well as to impose a particular ideology on them, which will be that of the State and the Church, the institutions that used to hold the power during the English Reinassance and Reformation (early modern period).

Consequently, the first question to be answered is: Do accounts of events present common linguistic features regardless of their topic (political, religious, or supernatural<sup>9</sup>)? The hypothesis that represents the basis for this particular work is that these folios do give evidence of similar linguistic traits that evince the author’s presence in the documents, irrespective of the subject matter being dealt with. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen, proved, and verified by linguistic evidence whether this surmise is true or not.

In the same vein, once this first inquiry is solved, the second interrogation posed is: Can accounts of events be considered as an independent genre according to the common linguistic features they present?

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<sup>8</sup> For the issue of the author or authors in the accounts of events, see Pena Sueiro (2017).

<sup>9</sup> This is earthquakes, hurricanes, natural disasters, or strange events.

### 3. ANALYSIS

According to the objective of this study, we will now present all those features within the analyzed documents that might be a mirror of certain orality marked by linguistic means, in agreement with the most recent studies carried out in a parallel research area, that of Romance Studies<sup>10</sup>, where these documents have been mostly studied from a linguistic perspective:

Depuis quelques années, la linguistique romane s'occupe, de façon plus intensive et plus explicite qu'avant, de la dimension oral/écrit. Des colloques, des projets de recherche et grand nombre de publications sont dédiés à ce sujet, et on pourra affirmer sans hésiter que ce « nouveau » paradigme appartient déjà au canon de la linguistique romane, et il ne faudra plus attendre longtemps avant d'assister à son inclusion dans les ouvrages d'introduction (Kabatek, 2000: 305).

In this vein, throughout the six accounts of events which have been examined, the above-mentioned orality is going to be marked by quite a clear intervention of the texts' author, who openly reveals their own personal valuation, as it is next shown.

#### 3.1. *Lexicon*

##### 3.1.1. Adjectives

The adjectival group –as well as the nominal cluster<sup>11</sup>– becomes one of the main foundations on which the discourse rests in order to present the author's viewpoint. Adjectives are present throughout each and every title of the six documents under scrutiny, where the veracity of the narrated events is always claimed<sup>12</sup> (as well as other features of the accounts themselves):

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<sup>10</sup> Cfr. Borreguero & de Toledo (2003, 2006a, 2006b), Tabernero Sala (2014), Mancera Rueda & Galbarro García (2015), Fernández Alcaide & Leal Abad (2016), Sáez de Rivera (2018), Iraceburu Jiménez (2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2021, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> This is, the Noun Phrase (NP).

<sup>12</sup> Redondo (1989: 56): «la page de titre, qui souligne presque toujours la véracité des faits rapportés («Relación verdadera [...]», «Relación cierta y verdadera [...]», «Verísima Relación [...]»), met en avant un intitulé suffisamment développé et attractif [...]».

- (1) A **True**<sup>13</sup> and **Perfect** Relation of Elizabeth Freeman of Bishops-Hatfield in the County of Hertford, Of a **Strange** and **Wonderful** Apparition Which Appeared to her **several** times, and commanded Her to declare a Message to His **Most Sacred** Majesty.
- (2) A **True** RELATION Of the **Extraordinary** Thunder & Lightning, Which lately happened in the NORTH OF IRELAND: As it was sent to Dublin in **several** Letters to Persons of Quality. With the **sad** Effects of the Fall of a CLOUD.
- (3) A Full and **True** Relation of the Death and Slaughter of a Man and his Son at Plough Together With Four Horses, In the Parish of Cookham in the County of Berks, Sept. 2.1680. Slain by the Thunder and Lightning that Then and there happened, as may fully be testified by credible Persons, whose Names are hereunto adjoined. Likewise The same day happened another sad Accident near Norwich, eight Persons being struck dead in a Church Porch by Thunder.
- (4) A **True** Relation Of Four **most Barbarous** and **Cruel** Murders Committed in Leicester-shire by Elizabeth Ridgway; The **like** not known in **any** Age. With the Particulars of Time, Place, (and other Circumstances) how she first Poysoned her own Mother; after that, a **Fellow** Servant; then her Sweet-Heart; and last of all her Husband: for all which **Tragical** Murders she being brought to Justiee, was **Tried**, and found **guilty**, at the late Lent-Assizes held for the **said** County: and for the same, was **Burnt** to Death, on Monday the 24th. of March, 1684.
- (5) A **Brief**, but **most True** Relation Of the **late** Barbarous and **Bloody** Plot of the Negro's in the Island of Barbados On Friday the 21. of October, 1692. To Kill the Governour and **all** the Planters, and to destroy the Government there **Established**, and to set up a **New** Governour and Government of their own. In a Letter to a Friend.

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<sup>13</sup> Emphasis is mine, as the following ones.

As it can be seen, all through the documents the sender specially remarks not only the veracity of what is going to be narrated –«A **True** RELATION», «A Full and **True** Relation», «A Brief but **most True** Relation»–, but he also highlights the uniqueness of his stories, as the following adjectives prove: «[o]f a **Strange** and **Wonderful** Apparition», «[...] Of the **Extraordinary** Thunder & Lightning».

Furthermore, the morbid factor is used as a decoy to attract the readers' or audience's attention. This is a journalistic resource which, unfortunately, is nowadays more than ever in vogue. Therefore, here we find one of the foundations of current journalism<sup>14</sup>. Some of these adjectives are even on the verge of hyperbole –«[F]our **most Barbarous** and **Cruel** Murders Committed in Leicester-shire by Elizabeth Ridgway; The **like** not known in **any** Age [...] for all which **Tragical** Murders [...] was **Burnt** to Death [...]; [t]he late **Barbarous** and **Bloody** Plot of the Negro's [...]».

Once the truth of what is going to be told is asserted, the author will make a display of this grammatical category all through his account, where two kinds of adjectives prevail: the evaluative and the superlative forms.

The compendium of evaluative adjectives arises as a grammatical category where valorization is easier to testify as well as it enables the author to show his sensation on the particular event he is telling.

As a result, all through the six documents a double categorization of the adjectives –according to the type of connotation they report– is testified by showing quite an exacerbated dichotomy in order to present a reductionist characterization amongst the participants in the related events<sup>15</sup>. For instance, we find in the *True Relation of a Divilish Designe. By the Papists: To blow up the City of Oxford [...]* quite a clear division

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<sup>14</sup> Tabernero Sala (2014: 460-461): «los investigadores de la Historia del Periodismo se han ocupado de estos documentos por su condición de antecedentes de la prensa actual».

<sup>15</sup> Knowles (1997: 16): «In the aftermath of the revolution of the 1640s, there could be no pretending that the English were a united people. Society was divided, and religion was divided. After 1660 insiders who supported the monarchy and the Church of England enjoyed privileges denied to outsiders».

between the *good* Protestants and the *bad* Catholics<sup>16</sup>. This is quite an interesting fact that should not go unnoticed as it finds its counterpart in a 1626 Spanish account of events<sup>17</sup> which displays the shared religious knowledge both in England and in Spain, where the breach between the Catholics and the Protestants was indeed very deep. In addition, this linguistic coincidence proves how even in two countries that could seem so geographically distanced as England and Spain<sup>18</sup> both authors of different accounts of events resort to the same linguistic resource –that of evaluative adjectives– in order to degrade and defame their ideological adversary: the Protestants for the Spanish readers, and the Catholics, for the English audience. Therefore, the adjectival category seems to become one of the most powerful linguistic resources in the accounts of events in order to condition the reader's opinion and make it closer to the writer's personal beliefs, which in the 16th and 17th centuries used to be at the service of the political and religious powers: those of the State and the Church (whether Catholic in Spain or Church of England.)

The same happens in *A Brief, but most True Relation Of the late Barbarous and Bloody Plot of the Negro's in the Island of Barbados [...]*<sup>19</sup>,

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<sup>16</sup> Referring to the Catholics: «This **hellish** crew, having bin divers times **frustrated** of their **wicked** conspiracies in and about the City of London, not daring any longer to make their abode so neere the **renowned** Authors of their **unresistable** ruine in this Kingdome, thought to try one project more, a little **remote**, in a part, that if all hit, might prove a **great** hazard to the whole, before they made a **final** departure»; «[a]nd then these **poore deluded**, but **mischievous minded** wretches, thinking their Stratagem so neere to be acted, as **good** as done already, began to give **daring** and **presumptuous** words to the inhabitants, saying, they car'd not a (ush for the best in England, let what would happen, they should doe well enough, they made no question»; «Ireland, long complaining and groaning under the yoake of Reblion, by the meanes of those **bloody-thirsty** and **tyrannous** Papists, who must unhumanely have murdred and massacred the Protestants of that Kingdome [...]».

Referring to the Protestants: «So long as our **good** mother (the Church of England) with her **faithfull** Children the **painfull** and **zealous** Teachers therein lay groaning [...]».

<sup>17</sup> «Verissima relacion en qve se da qventa en el estado en qve estan los Catolicos de Inglaterra por parte de los hereges, y con el zelo que la Reyna los favorece. Y la grandiosa presa que las Naos de Vnquerque hizieron, prendiëdo al Duque de Buquingã, y a otros muchos caualleros los mas principales de Londres, q`avian salido a Olanda, y lesquitaron todo quanto llevavan» (1626).

<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the links between Spain and England –which were not so distant at all– were numerous, in terms of culture, politics and trade relations.

<sup>19</sup> Talking about the black Africans: «[T]wo of them that were a talking of this their **wicked** Design»; «They have been contriving of this **Wicked** and **Bloody** design these

where the black slaves are depicted in a derogatory way as *wicked* and full of a ***Wicked and Bloody design*** in order to give a ***Fatal Stroak***. In the same token, *A True Relation Of Four most Barbarous and Cruel Murders Committed in Leicester-shire by Elizabeth Ridgway [...]*<sup>20</sup> presents the evil figure of a female murderer who is portrayed as an instructor in ***wicked Practices***. Moreover, she carries out ***Diabolical Actions*** and ***such barbarous Crimes*** that overtake ***horrid and unnatural Sins*** which make her be found *Guilty* at the end of the narration. This way, the Catholics, the Africans and the female are portrayed in an obvious disparaging way, while Protestants, white people and the woman's victims –who are all male– epitomize the role model every reader should follow. As a result, the adjectival group helps to reinforce the clear-cut dichotomy presented all through the analyzed accounts of events –Catholics vs Protestants, black vs white-skinned people, female vs male–, which is a mirror of the 16th and 17th century English male white and Protestant prevailing ideology.

On the other hand, within the adjectival group, the number of testimonies of superlative adjectives all through these documents is noteworthy:

- (6) A True and Perfect Relation of Elizabeth Freeman of Bishops-Hatfield in the County of Hertford, Of a Strange and Wonderful Apparition Which Appeared to her several times, and commanded Her to declare a Message to His **Most Sacred Majesty**.
- (7) A prodigious accident fell in Monterlon, on Saturday the 26th. of this instant June, a Thunderclap forced the bowels of a great mountain belonging to one Gloud Hamilton, after which a prodigious Cloud, which entring the Cavities of the said mountain made by the Thunder, its weight bore **the greatest** part of the mountain before it [...].

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three years, and had so long kept it **very secret** until the **very** day before it was to have been done».

<sup>20</sup> Talking about the female murderer: «Of which **latter** sort, a **fresher** and **more barbarous** Example, certainly, has not in this Age been heard of [...]».

Talking about her male victims: «[t]he **young**-man died suddenly, took the Admiration of the Family, by reason he was a **healthful, temperate** Fellow [...]».



- (8) A True Relation Of Four **most Barbarous** and Cruel Murders Committed in Leicester-shire by Elizabeth Ridgway [...].
- (9) A Brief, but **most True** Relation Of the late Barbarous and Bloody Plot of the Negro's in the Island of Barbados [...].
- (10) [t]hey car'd not a ()ush for **the best** in England, let what would happen, they should doe well enough, they made no question.
- (11) [a]nd when the word should be given them, to beat up their Drums, and found their Trumpets, in **the most coragious** manner they could [...].
- (12) Whereupon the Protestants issued out of the City of Dublin, and flew them in abundant manner, until such times as they had slaine and dispers'd **the greatest** part of those Rebels, many of them fell upon their knees, shewing some signes of subjection to the Protestants: who durst not spare them, being they were such as were not to be trusted; some of **the chiefest** t() have taken prisoners, yet not very many, for feare t() should be resisted by the rest of the Rebels, which at first were ten to one.

It seems that by resorting to the evaluative adjectives and especially to their superlative grammatical degree, the author tries to emphasize what he is narrating so that he achieves a more vivid account of what already happened –the news that his readers or audience are genuinely eager to know– as well as he highlights what he considers the most important information. Nevertheless, some of these adjectives may be part of fixed linguistic constructions, as it might be the case of *His Most Sacred Majesty*, which was –and which still is– a formulaic expression to refer to the English Sovereign<sup>21</sup>. However, on the other hand, the use of other of these superlative adjectives –*most Barbarous, the most*

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<sup>21</sup> We find 2,298 cases of the nominal syntagm 'His Most Sacred Majesty' between 1810 and 2000 in the *British English Google Books Corpus*. Retrieved from <http://googlebooks.byu.edu/x.asp>. Therefore, the number of previous testimonies of this nominal cluster should be even larger as the cited webpage has been the only online English corpus to which we could have had access, as for the search of this phrase in other Historical English corpora –such as those of Penn State or Michigan Universities– previous registration to the institution is required.

courageous manner– may help to stress the texts’ emotionalism, as García de Enterría (1995: 12) claims: «typical features of the sensationalism that is usually associated to the *popular*, and even the vulgar, such as “morbidity and excess” [...] an appeal to emotivity [...], happy endings, manicheism»<sup>22</sup>.

### 3.1.2. Nouns

In other respects, amongst the whole adjectives which impregnate all the six texts under examination –and, in general, all the accounts of events (Iraceburu Jiménez, 2018)–, the nominal cluster will also help the author to develop his own personal opinion. For instance, if the news told is classified as an *extraordinary event*, the writer will focus on the magnificence of the natural catastrophe as well as on the divine origin of the misfortune, as it happens in the *True Relation Of the Extraordinary Thunder & Lightning, Which lately happened in the North of Ireland As it was sent to Dublin in several Letters to Persons of Quality. With the sad Effects of the Fall of a cloud. (1680)*<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, nouns like *providence* would allude to the non-human and then, both supernatural and divine explanation of the environmental catastrophe, whereas specific or concrete names like *bigness*, *blackness* and *muddiness* –all formed by the addition of the nominal suffix *-ness* to a qualifier adjective– refer to the physical features of the falling of the *Hailstones* and its consequences. Nonetheless, abstract names such as *Dreadfulness* point to the horrible feelings experienced by the victims of that ecological calamity. The author of this relation appeals once more to his readers’ sentiments in order to capture their attention and to warn them that this

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<sup>22</sup> García de Enterría (1995: 11): «rasgos típicos del efectismo que se suele asociar con lo *popular*, y hasta lo *vulgar*, tales como “el morbo y la desmesura” [...], el recurso a la emotividad [...], a los finales felices, al triunfo del maniqueísmo» (bold type added).

<sup>23</sup> «In that part where the Mountain was, one Woman was left alive, who gave an account of the **Dreadfulness** thereof, which she saith was as well by **Hailstones** of an incredible **bigness** as by the Vast Cloud coming down at once, that she by a wonderful **providence** escap’d [...]»; «All Fish for several miles up the River are destroyed by the **blackness** and **muddiness** of the water [...]»; «[w]ithin a few miles of that place 18 persons were found drown in one heap, and several about Newton Stewart, but the **mischief** is not yet all known».

Nature's tragedy is a God's punishment to man's bad behavior, and nobody is free from suffering another similar infelicity.

Conversely, if the topic of the relation is a murder, as it is in *A True Relation Of Four most Barbarous and Cruel Murders Committed in Leicester-shire by Elizabeth Ridgway [...]*, the author may opt for inserting a moral dissertation<sup>24</sup> –even alluding to the Book of *Genesis*<sup>25</sup>– in order to make his readers reflect on the gravity of the committed crime by appointing to the bright and joyful side of God's creation before the original sin –*Innocency, Paradise, Pleasure, Security*– and then by highlighting the terms which signal murders' atrocious characteristics<sup>26</sup> –consequence of Adam and Eve's fault– such as: *Destruction, Depravedness, Sin, Cruelty, Enmity, Premeditation, Violence, Displeasure* and *Murder*; names which undoubtedly carry a clear negative connotation. It is quite remarkable that all of the aforementioned names share a Latin origin –*Destruction, Depravedness, Sin, Cruelty, Enmity, Premeditation, Violence, Displeasure*– except one: *Murder*<sup>27</sup>, which presents a Germanic root. This may bear witness of the

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<sup>24</sup> Knowles (1997: 97): «An important characteristic of the language of the seventeenth-century radicals is the use of the Bible and religious concepts to convey a political and social message».

<sup>25</sup> Knowles (1997: 94): «Among the linguistically important events of the early decades of the century was the new translation of the Bible, increasing access to the biblical text, and the use of the text in political polemic».

<sup>26</sup> «Adam being once fallen from the State of **Innocency** and driven from that **Paradise of Pleasure and Security** wherein **God** had placed him, instead of the sublime Life, to be as **Gods**, which the **Devil** had promised upon Eating the Forbidden Fruit, he put them upon the **Destruction** of one another; and such a **Depravedness** had **Sin** in those early Days brought upon their Nature, that the greatest piece of Manhood we first hear of, was an Endeavour to destroy Humane Kind. [...] But of all **Murders**, none so plainly discovers the inherent **Cruelty** and **Enmity** which **Sin** has lodged in Humane Nature, as those committed by private Persons, upon **Premeditation**; who, though by the Laws of the Land Protected from open **Violence** one against another, yet, will take upon them to revenge every Little Difference, or conceived **Displeasure**, by the private **Murder** of the Dearest Friend they have».

<sup>27</sup> Oxford Dictionaries, s. v. 'destruction': «Middle English: from Latin *destructio(n)-*, from the verb *destruere*»; s. v. 'depravity': «Mid seventeenth century: alteration (influenced by *deprave*) of obsolete *pravity*, from Latin *pravitas*, from *pravu* 'crooked, perverse'»; s. v. 'sin': «Old English *synn* (noun), *syngian* (verb); probably related to Latin *sons, sont* 'guilty'»; s. v. 'cruelty': «Middle English: from *crualte*, based on *crudelitas*, from *crudelis*»; s. v. 'enmity': «Middle English: from Old French *enemi(s)tie*, based on Latin *inimicus*»; s. v. 'meditation': «Middle English: from Old French, from Latin *meditatio(n)-*, from *meditari*»; s. v. 'violence': «Middle English: via Old French from Latin *violentia*, from *violent-*

sender's preference for a more latinized lexicon, as Guarddon Anelo (2015: 30) argues:

The rediscovery of Latin and Greek literature led to new activity in the modern languages and directed attention to them as the medium of literary expression. In this way many foreign words were introduced into English.

By resorting to words of a Romance origins, the writer provides his text with a higher and more formal status than if he mainly relied on English words from a Germanic origin, which might have made the audience believe the text was more popular and even vulgar and therefore, that anyone could have been invented it out of nothing<sup>28</sup>. Nonetheless, if the text is rich in words which may seem literary or too intellectual for the audience, people might have believed the text may have been written by some scholar, doctor or educated person who genuinely knew what he was talking about and who would never dare to lie to his humble and ignorant audience.

The same occurs in *A Brief, but most True Relation Of the late Barbarous and Bloody Plot of the Negro's in the Island of Barbados [...]* where the African slaves are described as *villains*<sup>29</sup> and concocters: «For the **Negro's** in this Island had made a **PLOT** to have distroy'd all the **Christians** therein [...]».

However, we find no evidence of nouns with positive or negative connotations in *the True and Perfect Relation of Elizabeth Freeman [...]*. The only peculiar names that arise in this relation would be *apparition* and *appearance*, the former showing up five times, while the latter only occurs once. In addition, the strange being described in the document is also referred as *voice* once in the text. The absence of connoted names in this relation may be explained because of its topic. As this is an account of events which tells an extraordinary story, the author may try to show

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'vehement, violent'; s. v. 'displeasure': «Late Middle English: from Old French *desplaisir* (see *displease*), influenced by pleasure; s. v. 'murder': «Old English *morthor*, of Germanic origin; related to Dutch *moord* and German *Mord*, from an Indo-European root shared by Sanskrit *mará* 'death' and Latin *mors*; reinforced in Middle English by Old French *murdre*».

<sup>28</sup> To know more about this idea about the more prestigious nature of Latin compared to Anglo-Saxon vernacular languages, Solodow (2010).

<sup>29</sup> «But we hope in a little time to see a Stop fully put to their **Contrivance**, and the **Villains** themselves speedily discovered and detected».

himself more neutral in order to preserve the truth of what he is telling, as if he judged negatively the woman who saw the ghost. Consequently, all the credulity of his account would fade away, threatening, therefore, one of the accounts of events' prevailing features: that of veracity.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

As far as it has been shown throughout the analysis of these six accounts of events, all these documents are marked by the sender's intervention, which might share some features of orality. Nevertheless, this potential orality in the text may be intended or not<sup>30</sup>.

If natural and involuntary, this potential orality may show the speech features of 17th century English, more concretely, those of the years 1641, 1680, 1684 and 1693. For instance, the preference for the use of the adjective *great* –which appears in each of the accounts of events examined<sup>31</sup>– has been attested.

If intentional, this orality would serve as a resource for an intended approach of the author to his readers or audience, so that the very last objective would be to reduce the communicative distance between the writer and the potential addressee of the news. In this vein, it is easier for the writer to persuade his reader that his story is real<sup>32</sup>. This is the purpose

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<sup>30</sup> Knowles (1997: 13): «The relationship between speech and writing is complex and variable. Texts far removed from conversation have been produced since the beginning of writing [...]. On the other hand, some older and more conservative texts are structurally closer to conversation than their modern counterparts. [...] Other texts have special phatic sections at the beginning and end which are concerned with the relationship between writer and reader rather than the main business. [...] It is also true of a letter [...]». For a further study on the links between this kind of texts and orality in the Early Modern period examined, cfr. Salmon (1996), Stavreva (2008) or Gallagher (2019).

<sup>31</sup> «[w]e heard much thunder which 15 miles from hence made **many great** breaches in a Mountain [...]; «On Saturday last happened a **very great** Thunder with Hall and Rain in these parts but especially about 16 or 20 miles from hence [...]; «Of which Number of the Condemn'd persons, Many were Hang'd, and a **great** many Burn'd»; «This hellish crew, [...] thought to try one project more, a little remote, in a part, that if all hit, might prove a **great** hazard to the whole, before they made a final departure».

<sup>32</sup> There are many expressions that insist on the veracity of that which is being told: «A Full and **True** Relation of the Death and Slaughter of a Man and his Son at Plough Together *With Four Horses*, In the Parish of *Cookham* in the County of *Berks*, *Sept.* 2.1680. Slain by the Thunder and Lightning that Then and there happened, **as may fully**

that all the accounts of events<sup>33</sup>, as a general rule, pursue. Therefore, these documents, which represent the press of the 17th century, become a powerful tool at the service of the State, the Church and the ruling power at the time<sup>34</sup>. For this reason, by asserting constantly the truth of the events narrated through meticulous details<sup>35</sup>, the speaker or the writer attempted to manipulate or at least to subtly influence the opinion of those who used to listen or read these documents so that they would eventually share the addresser's viewpoint. This is intended to let the reader perceive as quite a clear and reductionist dichotomy between the *goodies* –those known as «WASP»: White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant, and I would also add *male*–, and the *baddies* –Catholics, African slaves and women.

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**be testified by credible Persons, whose Names are hereunto adjoyned.** Likewise The same day happened another sad Accident near *Norwich*, eight Persons being struck dead in a Church Porch by Thunder»; «We whose Names are here under Written **do testify the Truth of this Relation** [...]»; «If any Reader **question the Truth of this Relation**, or think the Author may have added thereto, **they may be satisfied to the contrary** by William Corbet, the eldest of the said Apprentices (one of them that was attempted to be Poysoned) who upon the Death of his Master being at Liberty, is come up to this Town, and lives now at the Swan in shoee-makers Row in Black-Fryers. As also by George Ridgway, the Brother of the said William Ridgman that was Poysoned, who lives at the Kings-Head in Kings-street near the Queens Garden».

<sup>33</sup> About the veracity in accounts of events, Pena Sueiro (1999).

<sup>34</sup> Shaaber (1966: 7): «When the idea of news was still unfixed, it is not surprising that men wrote and published news from many motives [...]. Consequently much news was written by men who were moved by an ulterior purpose –the inculcation of godliness, for example, or the glorification of the English nation– [...] Consequently, also, the ethical standards of the age, [...] may have approved, even demanded, the mixture with news of something meet for edification. It is even possible that the suspicious attitude of the authorities of church and state, who were inclined to think of news as something dangerous and explosive except when they published it themselves, made it wise to justify the printing of news by drawing a moral from it or impressing it into the service of an irreproachable cause».

<sup>35</sup> As those of time and place: «That on **Monday Night, being January 24.** she sitting by her Mothers Fire-side **between Five and Six of the Clock in the Evening**, with a Child in her Lap, she heard a Voice behind her [...]»; «A True and Perfect Relation of Elizabeth Freeman of **Bishops-Hatfield in the County of Hertford** [...]»; «A prodigious accident fell in **Monterlon**, on Saturday the 26th. of this instant June, a Thunderclap forced the bowels of a great mountain belonging to one **Gloud Hamilton** [...]»; «I understand since that the thunder began above **Dongiven** [...]»; «A Full and True Relation of the Death and Slaughter of a Man and his Son at Plough Together *With Four Horses, In the Parish of Cookham in the County of Berks, Sept. 2.1680.* Slain by the Thunder and Lightning that Then and there happened, as may fully be testified by credible Persons, whose Names are hereunto adjoyned. Likewise The same day happened another sad Accident **near Norwich**, eight Persons being struck dead **in a Church Porch** by Thunder».

All the narrated events take place in a tumultuous period of upheaval in Europe, especially in England, where the revolution of the 1640s «had profound consequences for the language, but they are scarcely mentioned in conventional histories» (Knowles, 1997: X). In the same way, according to the studies that have already been carried out in the field of the accounts of events, the six documents examined in this piece of research prove that their furthestmost aim is to work as an ideological instrument at the service, in this case, of the Protestant Church, in the first place, and of the Monarchy, secondly, even if it is a fact that both institutions used to exert a similar control over the 17th century English –and European– population<sup>36</sup>.

Nevertheless, if, in general terms, the prevalent sensation once read the six accounts of events is that of a noteworthy linguistic interference of their writer<sup>37</sup>, a more thorough analysis reveals certain acknowledgement on the part of the author of his own involvement in the text. This is the reason why he sometimes resorts to passive structures<sup>38</sup> or the use of third person voices<sup>39</sup> in order to provide his writing with more objectivity and try to get some distance of his implication in the recounted events.

Nonetheless, even though the topic dealt with is broad enough and needs further exploration, the research undertaken in this article this is a limited research, the small findings here reported may shed some new light to what has already been studied about orality and the sender's presence in a diachronical study of English, at the same time that it can open new lines of investigation in both the fields of the History of the

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<sup>36</sup> Knowles (1997: 4): «Language is an important factor in the maintenance of power, and an understanding of power relations is important in tracing the history of a language».

<sup>37</sup> This is, sometimes the author may get too involved when telling the events. For instance, when he uses adjectives such as *barbarous* or *cruel*.

<sup>38</sup> «However, their Difference **seemed to be composed**, and they went lovingly together to Ashby Delazouch Market to buy some Household-stuff [...]»; «[t]herefore **it's thought** in her eight years time many other, not taken notice of, died by her Malice, by reason she could not, to the very last, be brought to any penitent Behaviour [...]»; «**It is reported**, they design'd to have taken up the Surnames and Offices of the Principal Planters and men in the Island [...]»; «**It is unknowne** as yet for certai() how many of the Rebels were slaine in that skirmish, bu(t) neere **as can be guest**, about the number of seven thousa(nd)».

<sup>39</sup> «[i]n so much that many of them **seem'd to be possess** with cowardly fe()re [...]».

English language<sup>40</sup> and the accounts of events, a research topic which remains to be explored.

For all the above mentioned, the study of the accounts of events will enable us not only to know better, in this case, the English language of the time, but also to apprehend the social, politic, religious, and ideological panorama of the moment, as García López & Boadas specify<sup>41</sup>.

As a matter of fact, despite these last considerations, it still remains to be seen whether this use of the orality in the accounts of events is going to be the same in the rest of languages –French and Italian<sup>42</sup>– in the ample spatio-temporal lapse of time in which the genre of the accounts of events developed. Nevertheless, elucidating to which point a particular text does present or not an oral imprint is a convoluted task, as both Kabatek<sup>43</sup> and Oesterreicher<sup>44</sup> remark.

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<sup>40</sup> Knowles (1997: IX): «In the past, the history of English has typically been studied in the context of English language and literature [...] However, the scope of linguistics has increasingly extended over recent years to include the social role of language, and this raises such issues as languages in contact, the development of literacy and new text types, and the relationship between standard language and dialects. These things need to be reflected in the historical study of the language».

<sup>41</sup> García López & Boadas (2015: 9): «Por fortuna, las investigaciones de los últimos treinta años han puesto de relieve la importancia de unos documentos cuyo estudio riguroso nos describe la opinión pública de la época desde una gran variedad de perspectivas sociológicas, estéticas, políticas, sin olvidar facetas costumbristas y de comportamientos populares. De igual forma que el periodismo actual nos habla mucho mejor de la sociedad en la que vivimos que las excelsas obras literarias, el estudio de las relaciones nos permite captar el nivel medio de la sociedad de la época, la naturaleza, las motivaciones o los cambios de opinión pública. [...] Con el ennoblecimiento científico del estudio de las relaciones de sucesos, estamos, pues, ante un acontecimiento de primera magnitud que arroja luz sobre numerosos aspectos y ángulos de la España y la Europa de los siglos XVI y XVII».

<sup>42</sup> Kabatek (2000: 318): «L'importance des catégories oral / écrit dans un sens ample pour l'histoire et le présent des langues romanes justifie –il n'y a aucun doute– son admission dans le canon de la linguistique romane».

<sup>43</sup> Kabatek (2000: 317): «Dans l'histoire concrète d'une langue particulière, quelques variétés s'écrivent, d'autres pas; (ou s'écrivent avec plus de fréquence que d'autres). Ce qu'on écrit, ce sont plus souvent des textes de distance que des textes de proximité. Cela mène à l'identification de certaines variétés avec la langue écrite et d'autres avec la langue parlée. Il peut même y avoir des techniques qui sont nées dans la langue écrite (our, pour mieux dire, dans la réflexion permise par le processus de l'écriture)».

<sup>44</sup> Oesterreicher (2008: 731): «[e]stas afirmaciones sumarias nos llevan a enfrentarnos con un importantísimo e ineludible problema metodológico: ¿cómo es posible encontrar información sobre formas y variedades lingüísticas que, por definición, son ajenas a la



Finally, the research undertaken in this paper has found the following answers to the research questions put forward:

1) Accounts of events do seem to present common linguistic features –evaluative and superlative adjectives and nouns– regardless of their –political, religious or supernatural– topic.

2) The fact of being a qualitative and not a quantitative study –we have so far analyzed a very small proportion of the whole existing range of accounts of events in English– prevents us from stating categorically that these documents can be considered as an independent genre according to their common linguistic features. More loose sheets of this kind should be examined in order to reach such an exhaustive conclusion.

Nevertheless, if we considered the linguistic information analyzed in this investigation, the partial results, in fact, seem to point to what could be considered an independent historic and even literary and journalistic genre. However, this early foresight should be supported by linguistic evidence in further research.

To sum up, facing a literary History of the English language, the accounts of events, quasi exiled documents until the last century, can cast new light on data still uncertain in the English language diachrony, as Oesterreicher (2008: 731) observes:

[a] History of the language also needs to take into account the linguistic materials that have been pushed to the margin of studies too focused on the literary language and integrate systematically those results of the variationist and sociolinguistic investigations<sup>45</sup>.

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lengua escrita y al medio gráfico? ¿Cómo llegar a conocer usos lingüísticos propios del ámbito de la inmediatez, es decir, que corresponden a las variedades más o menos cercanas a la lengua hablada en sentido amplio? Este problema no es, obviamente, específico de la investigación del español, sino que constituye un reto general para el estudio diacrónico de cualquier lengua. De hecho, es un *viejo* problema del que la filología románica, desde hace mucho tiempo, es plenamente consciente: el concepto del llamado latín vulgar, crucial en la lingüística a comienzos del siglo XIX, presupone precisamente el conocimiento y la determinación del *latín hablado*, espontáneo e informal, que está en la base del romance».

<sup>45</sup> Oesterreicher (2008: 731): «[u]na Historia de la lengua ha de tener en cuenta también los materiales lingüísticos que han venido quedando al margen de unos estudios demasiado centrados en la lengua literaria e integrar sistemáticamente los resultados de las investigaciones variacionistas y sociolingüísticas.»

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#### *Accounts of events*

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- (1684): A True Relation Of Four most Barbarous and Cruel Murders Committed in Leicester-shire by *Elizabeth Ridgway*; The like not known in any Age. With the Particulars of Time, Place, (and other Circumstances) how she first *Poysoned* her own *Mother*; after that, a *Fellow Servant*; then her *Sweet-Heart*; and last of all her *Husband*: for all which *Tragical Murders* she being brought to Justiee, was Tryed, and found guilty, at the late *Lent-Assizes* held for the said County: and for the same, was *Burnt to Death*, on *Monday* the *24th. of March*, 1684 (online: <<https://lib.ugent.be/catalog/eeb02:13804106>>, retrieved: 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022).
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Rebels were slaine in an enterprize to take *Dublin* (online: <<https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/9487674>>, retrieved: 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022).

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