



Critical Discourse Analysis of “Canción sin Miedo” by Vivir Quintana

Verónica Andrea Escobar Mejía

*University of Guanajuato, MEXICO
Division of Social Sciences and Humanities*

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Abstract

The feminist movement in Mexico has recently gained attention due to the diverse manifestations along with the country. The song *Canción sin miedo* (2020) portrays elements that keep a relationship with the feminist ideology, as well as recent events that are depicted in the lyrics. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is presented as an approach to examining the song, using Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics (SFL) model and parallelism analysis. The outcomes of this study suggest that the song was produced as a claim for social justice, but it involves elements that generate a sense of identity for some women because their roles and struggles are depicted in the lyrics, principally femicide. Additionally, the parallelism analysis shows three syntactical structures that compose the body of the text. This examination is also a call for noticing the emergence of violence against women in Mexico.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, feminist ideology, systemic functional linguistics, parallelism.

1. Introduction

This paper seeks to explore a song titled *Canción sin miedo* (Song without fear, 2020), under a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach. The methodology employed to carry out the analysis was Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and parallelism. This paper begins with a section of literature review, which includes key concepts about CDA and SFL as well as the feminist ideology. In the second section, a description of the methodology followed to analyze the lyrics are included. Then, the main findings are discussed, taking into consideration three levels of analysis proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), and parallelism. In the end, the conclusions are addressed.

- The examined song portrays elements of the feminist ideology.
- The analysis revealed that the narrative of the songs keeps a relationship with the context lived by some Mexican women.
- It also suggests a division between male and female characters, as well as a parallelism with the national anthem

2. Literature review

In this section key elements for the understanding of the topic will be discussed. For instance, critical discourse analysis and SFL, the feminist ideology and feminism in Mexico.

2.1 *Critical discourse analysis*

Critical discourse analysis is a way to examine spoken and written language. It is defined by Van Dijk (2001), as “research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (p. 72). According to this author, CDA does not follow a specific methodology, but it addresses some themes in common such as gender inequality, political discourse, media discourse, ethnocentrism, and racism. CDA is shaped by similar issues and it tries to evidence the disparities found in discourse. Quianbo (2016) establishes that CDA focuses on three aspects, which are language as a social practice, language and ideology, as well as power and discourse. These topics are connected as they explain how language works in society and how it is influenced by specific ways of thinking. In the same way, Fairclough (2013) identifies three essential characteristics in CDA. First, it is shaped by the social context, second, “it includes a systematic analysis of texts” (p. 11), and third, it is normative. This last characteristic means that CDA unveils power relationships. It makes emphasis on the importance of taking an ideological position to use it as a tool to expose disparities in the social structure.

Different critical approaches may be employed to carry out CDA. Todolí et al. (2006) identify four types of models. These are Fairclough’s socio-cultural method, Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive method, Kress and van Leeuwen’s socio-semiotic method, and Halliday’s SFL. Although these models share a critical view, they are unique in the way they approach the analysis of language, and the subjects of study may be variable. For example, Van Dijk works in the field of language and ideology, and the Fairclough model helps explain the relationship between power and society. The present work aligns with Halliday’s framework. In the following section, some of the characteristics of this model will be discussed.

2.1.1 *Halliday’s SFL*

As stated above, one of the frameworks to carry out CDA is Halliday’s SFL (1989). This model contemplates the analysis of four levels of discourse: “context, semantics, lexico-grammar and phonology” (Almurashi, 2016: 72). Almurashi (2016) suggests that incorporating the four levels to an in-depth analysis is useful to have an extensive understanding of how language works in different situations. The level one, which refers to context, considers that language is shaped by the culture and situation. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) use the terms genre and register to identify how language varies according to the context.

The second level of analysis (semantics) examines three functions of language as meaning:

Language is represented paradigmatically in terms of systems of choice related to what is being talked about (i.e. ideational); how those interacting are relating to one another through what they say (i.e. interpersonal); and how ideational and interpersonal meanings are turned into discourse (i.e. textual). (Webster, 2019: 35)

The lexico-grammar level contemplates the same characteristics as in semantics. However, it is focused on examining clauses as a unit of discourse. For Halliday (1989), the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions can be represented in this level of analysis as clause as representation, clause as exchange, as well as clause as a message. The first element can be explained throughout transitivity analysis, which comprises process types, participants, and circumstances. Clause as exchange incorporates the terms of mood and modality, and clause as the message is interpreted using the concepts of theme and rheme.

The last level corresponds to phonology. It is relevant to consider patterns of sounds because “there are some grammatical systems that are realized by prosodic means: for example, by the contrast between falling and rising tone” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 11). In other words, the phonological and the lexical system work together, and a complete analysis requires to consider both.

In this section, the main concepts of SFL were briefly discussed. The following paragraphs give contextual information about the main topic of this paper.

2.2 *The feminist ideology*

Feminism is the ideology that circumscribes this work. Van Dijk (2006) explains that ideologies are “a social representation that defines the social identity of a group” (p. 116). According to his view, it encompasses specific elements, such as the relationship between social cognitions, personal cognitions, and discourse” (p. 138). This implies that the principles of an ideology need to be examined considering discourses emitted by the social group but also the one produced as individuals. In this instance, the feminism has its roots in the last century; it raised having as the main concern “understanding fundamental inequalities between women and men and with analysis of male power over women. Its basic premise is that male dominance derives from the social, economic, and political arrangements specific to particular societies” (Jackson, 1998: 12) For feminists, the social order must be questioned and changed to give women access to rights and opportunities they have not to achieve yet. Feminism has a broad history, and it has been studied from different angles. However, four periods define what women have fought for. These periods are summarized by Rampton (2008) as follows:

- (a) The first wave of feminism. Its origins can be established before the 1960’ and the topics discussed consisted of women’s participation in politics as well as their right for suffrage.
- (b) The second wave of feminism. It can be placed from 1960 to 1990. This period focused on minorities as well as sexuality and reproductive rights.
- (c) The third wave of feminism. The period that defined this wave started in 1990. Some of the prevalent topics of discussion were women and social media and technology, as well as the right for deciding over their bodies.
- (d) The fourth wave of feminism. The last wave of feminism is blurred because it combines the appropriation of diverse fights. As stated by Rampton (2008).

They [feminists] speak in terms of intersectionality whereby women’s suppression can only fully be understood in a context of the marginalization of other groups and genders. Feminism is part of a larger consciousness of oppression along with racism, ageism, classism, ableism, and sexual orientation (*Ibid.*: 7).

Each period on the feminism movement are a watershed that allows us to understand some of the principles of the movement. Therefore, it is considered that the most recent phase is related to both, local and global interests. For this reason, feminism in the Mexican context will be discussed.

2.2.1 *Feminism in Mexico*

Having established some of the key elements of the feminist movement, it is relevant to emphasize that it has its agenda in Mexico. It depends on specific events that have been taken place in the context of the country. Although other nations have achieved access to fundamental human rights, in Mexico some goals still need to be accomplished. For instance, there is a need for the government to take action against femicides and gender violence, the fight for recognizing the reproductive rights of women, including legal abortion, and the acknowledgment of indigenous women's rights (Marcos, 1999).

One of the main concerns in the country is the femicides because they have been a noteworthy issue that has affected multiple women in the country. Michel, 2020 argues that:

Since human rights activists first denounced it as a systemic problem in 1993, femicide continues to be a crime that occurs far too often and that is rarely punished in Mexico. Between 1990 and 2016 more than 45,500 women were killed in the country. Femicides are easily forgotten in the Public Prosecutor's Office... The criminal justice system has been harshly criticized for its inefficiency. From all crimes reported to the authorities, it is estimated that on average about 95% are never punished. (pp. 27-28)

This argument is relevant because the fight for justice against femicides is part of the agenda in the Mexican feminist movement. Furthermore, this data reveals the context in which Mexican women live which is linked with violence and injustice. The importance of addressing this issue has a relationship with the topic of the song to be analyzed.

3. Methodology

The text examined is a song titled *Canción sin miedo*, interpreted by the musician Vivir Quintana. This song was released on 5 March 2020 to commemorate the international women's day. This work argues that this song is imbued with the feminist ideology. Nonetheless, analyzing the elements that compose it, will give more details about its context. As it was previously mentioned, Halliday's SFL was chosen to approach this text because it promotes a complete textual framework. The analysis of this song will be based on the lexico-grammar level, which includes textual, interpersonal, and experiential meanings. These elements correspond to three levels of a clause, namely clause as representation, clause as exchange, and clause as message (Halliday, 1989). This is supported by an analysis of parallelism, which reflects specific aspects of the structure of the song (to see the lyrics consult Appendix 1).

4. Discussion of findings

In this section, the main findings will be discussed regarding the three levels of analysis mentioned previously.

4.1 The textual function

The first level of analysis is the textual function, it studies “the use of language to signify discourse” (Bustam, 2011: 2). It refers to what is being communicated. For Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) “Theme is the element which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that which locates and orients the clause within its context” (p. 64). The authors refer to the rheme as what is included after the theme. In the case of the *Canción sin miedo* (2020), there are two worth discussing elements. The first theme in the song is *Que tiemble el estado, los cielos, las calles*. This start helps to draw the listeners’ attention to the topic. However, after the first two lines, another theme is presented: *Hoy a las mujeres nos quitan la calma*. This can be considered the main thematical position because the complete song centers in *las mujeres* as actors. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) also mention that the topical theme: “ends with the first constituent that is either participant, circumstance or process” (p. 79). In this case, women are the participants in the complete text. The song focuses on describing how they live, as well as the obstacles that they face due to their position in the social structure of Mexico. That is a representation of what the author wants to communicate. In other words, the clause as a message.

4.2 The interpersonal function

This level of analysis addresses the clause as exchange. Bustam (2011) considers that “The interpersonal function is the use of language to establish and maintain social relations” (p. 23). It refers to the choices that the speaker makes to show her position in what she wants to transmit. It is explained as: “In the act of speaking, the speaker adopts for himself a particular speech role, and in so doing assigns to the listener a complementary role which he wishes him to adopt in his turn” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 106). Although the song is not a regular exchange because it is not based in a turn-taking model, it can be interpreted the author positions herself and she talks in the name of the women who are mentioned in the song. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) distinguish between two main roles in communicative exchanges, which are giving and demanding. These are determined by the position of the speaker. In this case, some of the clauses reflect a demand, for instance, *No olvide sus nombres por favor, señor presidente*. This clause refers to have present the names of the women who have been victims of femicide in the country. Moreover, the ones who are disappeared, and it claims to take action to solve this problem. Taking into consideration the concept of modality this is the only sentence in the song which can be categorized as an imperative. The other clauses fall into the classification of declaratives. Table 1 illustrates this type of clauses.

Table 1. Declarative and imperative mood examples

Declarative mood	Imperative mood
Pedimos justicia	No olvide sus nombres por favor
Gritamos por cada desaparecida	
Nos queremos vivas	
Que caiga con fuerza el feminicida	
Si tocan a una respondemos todas	

Although these are declarative sentences, they are understood as claims for social justice. An examination of the meaning of the phrases allows us to identify that the author seeks fairness as well as for other women’s right to live.

4.3 *The ideational function*

The last level of analysis is the ideational function, which can also be considered as a clause as representation. To examine this, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) proposed the concept of transitivity, which will be explained below.

4.3.1 *Transitivity*

Bustam (2011) mentions that a regular definition of transitivity normally considers the position of the verbs. However, “whether a verb takes or does not take a direct object is not a prime consideration. There are three components of what Halliday calls [transitivity process], namely: (a) the process itself, (b) participants in the process; and (c) process types” (p. 23). Those elements are included in the analysis of the ideational function. The outcomes of this level are described in the subsequent section.

4.3.2 *Process types*

Table 2. Process types

Process type	Number	Percentage	Example
Material processes	23	60%	Hoy a las mujeres nos quitan la calma
Existential processes	6	16%	Soy Claudia
Mental processes	3	7.9%	Nos queremos vivas
Verbal processes	3	7.9%	Pedimos justicia
Relational processes	2	5.3%	Soy la niña que subiste por la fuerza
Behavioral processes	1	2.6%	La madre que ahora llora por sus muertas
Total processes	38	100%	

In Table 2, the main process types are shown. The most prominent are material processes (60%) followed by existential processes (16%). They cover in total 76% of the verbs. The material processes refer to actions caused by the women or by other agents, whether existential processes refer to the recognition that something exists. Hence. The percentages give relevant information. For instance, the material processes reflect real actions, which are not detached from women's reality, for example: *A cada minuto de cada semana, nos roban amigas, nos matan hermanas*. On the other hand, the existential processes in the lyrics reveal names of women such as *soy Claudia, soy Esther y soy Teresa*. This choice in the language is linked to the practice of naming women who are dead or disappeared. The purpose is to keep them in the collective memory, under the logic that if they are named, they are not forgotten. It can also have another purpose, which is making the listener feel identified, meaning that women are not immune to violence.

4.3.3 *Participants*

Regarding the material process, it is important to define that “The two main participants associated with this process are: the Actor (the doer of the process) and the Goal (the entity affected by the process)” (Ezzina, 2015: 287). The author means that not only the actions

are important, but also who take part in it. Table 3 shows the characters who are mentioned in the song.

Table 3. Participants

Male participants	Female participants	
Estado	Mujeres	Claudia
Jueces	Amigas	Ester
Judiciales	Hermanas	Teresa
President	Compas	Ingrid
El feminicide	Morras	Fabiola
Algún fulano	Comandantes	Valeria
	Madres	La niña
	Todas	

The division between male and female participants give relevant details of the types of processes related to each actor. For instance, the song is a response to structural elements caused by the social condition, in which the government has not guaranteed respect to women's rights. The male characters can be divided into two groups. The first group refers to agents who belong to the government: the president, judges, and police officers. However, the second group refers to other agents, but they are not named. For instance, *algún fulano* refers to any man, and *el feminicida* to a criminal. The types of actions that they perform are negative. Conversely, the nouns that refer to women are expressed in plurals such as *morras*, *madres*, *mujeres*, *amigas*, and *hermanas*. The use of plural involves different women, it is used by the author to express and generate a sense of belonging to the audience. Additionally, the types of actions performed by women are a response to the violence against them, meaning that they have to defend themselves and to demand justice. It also relevant that they do not take the role of victims, but also as actors who can change and question the social order.

4.4 Parallelism in the song

Parallelism is another device used to analyze this song. It refers to: "Elements in a sentence that have the same function or express similar ideas should be grammatically parallel or grammatically matched" (Vu, 2011: 7). The author also makes the distinction between three types of stylistic devices, namely phonetic, lexical, and syntactic (p. 9). For this paper, the syntactic feature was considered. Regarding the syntactic analysis, three main structures compose the song, and they are represented in Table 4.

Table 4. Examples of parallelism

Structure	Example	
Verb + noun	Que tiemble el estado, los cielos las calles	Que teman los jueces y los judiciales
Be + noun+ verb	Soy la niña que subiste por la fuerza	Soy la madre que ahora llora por sus muertas
Verb inf. + noun	Pedimos justicia	Gritamos por cada desaparecida

The examples reflect that the song was elaborated simple structures. However, this makes the song simple to remember and to repeat. Also, most of the verbs are written in the present tense, which suggests a link to recent activities, located in the woman’s context.

4.4.1 *Parallel with the national anthem*

This section has as an objective to show how the end of the song keeps a parallel with the Mexican national anthem. The last verse of the anthem is:

Y retiemble en sus centros la tierra al sonoro rugir del cañón

The autor of *canción sin miedo* (2020) uses the same structure and changes two words:

Y retiemble en sus centros la tierra al sororo rugir del amor

These modifications are worth considering because they involve a concept in the feminist movement. For instance, the word *sorora* is the adjective of the noun *sororidad*. Its name in English is sisterhood and it is defined by Lugones (1995) as “a metaphor for the reality of relationships among women” (p. 95), and it involves the idea of a pact between women to enhance their relationships and to help each other, over any other relationship the masculine world. Additionally, the writer of the song substitutes the word *cañón* for the word *amor*, which can be attributed to a quality of the word sisterhood. This small change has made some women consider *canción sin miedo* (2020) as an anthem for the feminist movement.

5. Conclusion

This paper analyzed the song *Canción sin miedo* (2020) with SFL and with parallelism. Each level showed that the feminist ideology shaped the way in which the song was written. The textual function revealed that the women are the thematic unit of the song because it describes the issues they face in the national context. With the interpersonal function, and the category of mood, it was possible to identify that the majority of the clauses were declaratives and written in present, meaning that it reflects the recent events in women’s lives. The ideational function allowed to distinguish the prevalent process types which were material and existential, as well as the participants in the song. The characters can be divided into masculine and feminine and they have different attributes. The analysis of parallelism reflected that there are three main syntactical structures that are repeated. Also, the last part of the song keeps parallelism with the Mexican national anthem.

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Appendix 1. Lyrics

Que tiemble el Estado
los cielos, las calles,
que teman los jueces y los judiciales
Hoy a las mujeres nos quitan la calma
Nos sembraron miedo, nos crecieron alas

A cada minuto, de cada semana,
nos roban amigas, nos matan hermanas
destrozan sus cuerpos, los desaparecen
No olviden sus nombres, por favor, señor presidente.

Por todas las compas marchando en Reforma
Por todas las morras peleando en Sonora
Por las comandantas luchando por Chiapas
Por todas las madres buscando en Tijuana
Cantamos sin miedo, pedimos justicia
gritamos por cada desaparecida
Que resuene fuerte: ¡Nos queremos vivas!
Que caiga con fuerza, el feminicida

Yo todo lo incendio, yo todo lo rompo
Si un día algún fulano te apaga los ojos

Ya nada me calla, ya todo me sobra
Si tocan a una, respondemos todas
Soy Claudia, soy Esther y soy Teresa
Soy Ingrid, soy Fabiola y soy Valeria
Soy la niña que subiste por la fuerza
Soy la madre que ahora llora por sus muertas
Y soy esta que te hará pagar las cuentas
¡Justicia!

Por todas las compas marchando en Reforma
Por todas las morras peleando en Sonora
Por las comandantas luchando por Chiapas
Por todas las madres buscando en Tijuana
Cantamos sin miedo, pedimos justicia
gritamos por cada desaparecida
Que resuene fuerte: ¡Nos queremos vivas!
Que caiga con fuerza, el feminicida

Y retiemble en sus centros la tierra al sororo rugir del amor.

