"The sisters did her every imaginable injury": Power and violence in Cinderella

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this article is to discuss the results achieved after investigating the presence of violence in the Grimm brothers' *Cinderella* with the intention of finding out what kind of processes predominate in this tale and whether they can be related to violent actions. The analysis involved firstly, a study of the frequency and concordances of some words belonging to the semantic field 'violence', surveying in detail the context in which they appear and secondly, the analysis of transitivity processes. The method proved to be a good strategy to check whether each character's identity and social position (power) were somehow related to the infliction of violence within this context. As a general conclusion drawn from the analysis of the results, a tentative proposal could be formulated: a corpus-based analysis in conjunction with both, a transitivity analysis and a Critical Discourse Analysis could empirically detect the presence of controversial topics such as violence in different types of texts.

KEYWORDS:
Corpus analysis, transitivity analysis, CDA, violence, Grimm brothers' collection, linguistic intervention.

RESUMEN

El objetivo principal de este artículo es analizar los resultados obtenidos al investigar la presencia de actos violentos en el cuento *Cenicienta,* de los hermanos Grimm. El objetivo era averiguar qué tipo de procesos predominan en esta historia y si pueden estar relacionados con acciones violentas. El análisis consistió, en primer lugar, en un estudio de la frecuencia y concordancias de algunas palabras relacionadas con el campo semántico 'violencia', examinando con detalle el contexto en el que aparecen. En segundo lugar se llevó a cabo un análisis de los procesos de transitividad. El método resultó ser una buena estrategia para comprobar si la identidad de cada personaje y la posición social (el poder) estaban relacionadas de alguna manera con la imposición de la violencia en este contexto. Como conclusión general del análisis de los resultados, podría afirmarse que un análisis basado en la lingüística de corpus junto con un análisis de transitividad y un análisis crítico del discurso podría detectar empíricamente la presencia de temas controvertidos como la violencia en diferentes tipos de textos.

PALABRAS CLAVE:
Análisis de corpus, análisis de transitividad, CDA, violencia, cuentos de los hermanos Grimm, intervención lingüística

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1. INTRODUCTION

This article springs from the observation that language can be seen as a tool to justify an intervention to modify attitudes regarding violence in a changing society. Taking this statement into account, the main reason for the choice of this particular study is that in my opinion, violence and childhood are two terms which should never converge (Alcantud, 2010: 20-25). For this reason, I claim that a revision of literature which comes from oral tradition and which sometimes features a violent medieval society might help, to a certain extent, to lessen some of the most serious effects of general violence and unnecessary fears in children. In other words, I believe that a linguistic intervention in traditional fairy tales collections, like for instance the ones by the Grimm brothers, might be positive in order to equalize the reading criteria according to age which most publishing companies follow. I would like to make clear that the aim of the present article is neither to criticize such a piece of literary work as the Grimm brothers' fairy tales collection nor to carry out any kind of censorship, because the importance of this collection in the history of literature is out of question. What I am trying to demonstrate empirically and thus, objectively, by means of a corpus linguistics analysis (in the first stage of my analysis) is that there are lexical and grammatical manifestations of violence in the text which should be treated coherently with the publishing criteria according to the age of current literary works aimed at children.

Hence, the possible linguistic intervention mentioned previously, a reclassification in terms of age, for example, might be carried out after an in depth linguistic research like the one I describe below composed of Corpus Linguistics, transitivity and Critical Discourse analyses, to localize objectively any controversial topic in classical readings.

The concept *linguistic intervention* is not new. There have been many examples of linguistic interventions carried out due to diverse social and historical reasons. Some linguistic interventions are related to the use of language as a medium to foster social change "with any (subsequent) changes to people's own language habits arising as a consequence of this" (Graddol and Swamn, 2003: 191-194). This is the case, for example, of the incorporation of new technologies like computers, the internet and consequently the vocabulary and expressions which this emerging semantic field entails.

Furthermore, some other linguistic interventions attempt to promote linguistic change in the belief that the new language practices will contribute to eliminate, or at least diminish gender inequalities (cf. Alcantud, 2011). In this sense, gendered discourse symbolizes, comprises, maintains and challenges gendered social practices as Litosseliti (2006: 19-20) argues. She explains that:

> Linguistic intervention for change, as regards gender, has taken the form of guide-lines and equal opportunities policies (e.g. in industry and in classroom teaching); awareness training seminars in organizations, [...] the promotion of gender-neutral terms in job advertisements (e.g. fire-fighter) (Litosseliti, 2006: 20).

Thus, I believe that whether we accept that linguistic intervention is an instrument for social change in issues related to, for example, gender violence, it should also be an instrument with regard to violent discourse in broader spectrum, particularly when they concern children.

Therefore, I took the decision of taking *Cinderella*, a fairy tale collected and published by the Grimm brothers in 1857, in order to investigate the presence of violence in it by means of a threefold approach: firstly, a corpus-based analysis (Biber et al, 1998; Scott, 2010), secondly, I made use of the transitivity framework (Halliday, 1994; Downing & Locke, 2006) and finally I analyzed the results following the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2001). My main objective was to find out the relationship between processes and socially-constructed meaning related to power in this tale. By doing this, I intended to shed some light on the power relations that underpin the characters in this tale from both semantic and grammatical perspectives. Additionally, I carried out a study of the character's identities presented in this tale since my secondary purpose was to investigate if holding social power and inflicting violence are linked in *Cinderella*.

Hence, using a corpus-based approach (Biber et al, 1998; Scott, 2010), in order to achieve an objective and empirical classification would help me to demonstrate that some tales like *Cinderella* (the original version) contain an excessive amount of words and collocations related to violence to be suitable for children taking into account that language might reflect, create and help sustain violence and cruelty

I do not mean that the violent content in fairy tales could make children become potential murderers, but that the aggressive discourse in fairy tales from oral tradition, that is, certain ways of expression, might in my view encapsulate or even strengthen violence and cruelty in children and even to cause anxiety. This idea is supported by some studies which demonstrate, for example, that the "reading of violent comic books was correlated with aggressive behaviour in adolescent boys" [...] [and] that frightening stories can cause fear in children and adults alike-fears that can last years to come" (Kirsh, 2006: 157). Additionally, Orbach, Vinkler and Har-Even (1993) found that the frightening elements in stories increased the level of anxiety in 6- to 9-year-olds. What is more, they created three different versions of the Grimm brothers' *Rapunzel*: two frightening versions (one with a happy ending and another one with an unhappy one) and a neutral version and they made some children to read them. They discovered that the frightening version with the unhappy ending caused the highest anxiety in children.

Thus, in order to carry out the present research I followed a three step analysis: I first detected the presence of violence in *Cinderella* by means of a qualitative and quantitative computerised corpus analysis. Therefore, I looked at the role some words related direct or indirectly to violence play in this tale by studying their frequencies and concordances. Increased frequency of words related to the semantic field of violence indicates an increased

content of violence in the tale. Then I compared the results obtained at this stage of my study to a reference corpus: The British National Corpus.

My second step was the study of transitivity (Halliday, 1994: 106-175; Downing and Locke, 2006: 111). Thus, I carried out a study of the processes and their participants. The reason for using a transitivity analysis at this stage of my research was that I agree with Alameda-Hernández (2004: 160) in that "the view that language, as social practice, is a central element in social life and hence, analyses discourse in relation to the wide social and historical context in which it occurs".

The findings at this stage led me to the third and final part of my study which concerned the search of identity, more specifically, the ways in which characters "accomplish membership and non-membership of a potentially relevant category" (Widdicombe, 1998: 52). The category membership at stake is that of taking advantage of using social power to inflict violence, even though this member has previously been the victim of violence.

Hence, this study searches for fields where corpus linguistics, systemic functional linguistics and critical discourse analysis can convene. In other words, using Corpus Linguistics and Systemic Functional Linguistics as a contributor to Critical Discourse Analysis, will provide me with the necessary tools to explore how and who is in charge of inflicting violence in the Grimm brothers' collection and whether it is directly related to power.

Regarding the empirical case in point, *Cinderella*, I can confirm that after having detected the presence of a high content of violence in this tale, the study of its processes has shown that violence and social power are interrelated, since the person who has the power in the tale, is the one inflicting violence.

2. OUTLINE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

2.1 The Grimm brothers Collection

In the first chapter of *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (1987: 3-4), Tatar lists some of the most famous violent scenes in the Grimm fairy tales and concludes that "[i]n fairy tales, nearly every character –from the most hardened criminal to the Virgin Mary– is capable of cruel behaviour". Some of the Grimms' tales, *Hansel and Gretel, The Boy Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was* and *The Juniper Tree,* were included, among other examples by the same authors, in Warner's *No Go the Bogeyman* (1998: 4), a book described by the author herself as a book about fear and which "describes three of the principal methods of coping with anxieties grounded in common experience, as well as the nameless terrors that come in the dark and assail the mind". Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm "only occasionally took advantage of opportunities to tone down descriptions of brutal punishments visited on villains

or to eliminate pain and suffering from the tales" (Tatar, 1987: 5), elements which were present in the original tales for adults. Furthermore, according to Tatar, the Grimms made a point of adding or intensifying violent episodes.

How was it possible then that so much violence was included in tales aimed at children? The truth is that the Grimms' tales did not have, at their inception, the design to be read to or by children. Tatar (2004: xvi) explains that the Grimm brothers' fairy tales collection was the product of philological research focused on collecting old stories from oral tradition, aimed at adults whose target was to preserve German identity and was not, at least initially, to publish a collection of tales for children. Hence, their first intention was political, that is "supporting unification by finding evidence of the basic linguistic and cultural oneness of the German people" (Nodelman, 2003: 306), since what is now known as Germany at that time was just an assortment of duchies and princedoms.

Children's literature began to grow in importance in the 19th century. During this time, the raising in children population gave rise subsequently to the nascence of a commercial interest in publishing books for them. For this reason, educational opportunities began to increase and technological developments made books available at reasonable prices due to cheaper paper and improvements in the printing process (Ray, 1996: 654). These factors caused the Grimm brothers to change some details in their tales from edition to edition in order to "attempt to meet the moral needs of children"; and in 1825, they published a shorter edition of the tales clearly aimed at a popular audience, particularly children (Nodelman, 2003: 307).

2.2. A comparative corpus-based study of frequencies of the lexical units included in Cinderella corpus

As said before, the starting point of the present study was to investigate the presence of violence in *Cinderella* to demonstrate that classical readings aimed at children might be labelled again after carrying out corpus-based approaches. According to Biber et al (1998: 4), the main characteristics of this kind of approach are: first, that it is empirical; second, that it uses a corpus as a basis for the analysis; third, that it makes extensive use of computers for analysis and last, that it depends on quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques.

One of the main strengths of corpus linguistics research is the study of patterns of real language use. Given that "they advocate an analysis of language based on large collections of authentic texts-corpora" (Koteyko, 2006: 145). Exploiting then a representative corpus properly can provide us with a lot of different information about language usage. One example of this could be the quantitative study of grammatical associations, researching the association between linguistic and grammatical features, such as the technique described in the present article.

There is very little research in classical tales collected by the Grimm brothers by means of a corpus-based approach, apart from Zinggeler (2007: 53-86). To fill this gap, I have taken as a starting point Biber et al's statement (1998: 56): "[t]he areas that traditional studies have neglected turn out to be the strengths of corpus-based studies of grammar", as these studies can be carried out on word, sentence and discourse level. Thus, my contribution to this field of research has been a complete corpus-based analysis of the transitivity system in order to study the relationship between power and violence. I have used this approach because it:

> takes advantage of computers' capacity for fast, accurate, and complex analyses: the extensive information about language use found in large collections of natural texts from multiple registers: and the rich descriptions that result from integrating quantitative findings and functional interpretations

> (Biber *et al.,* 1998: 233)

and this description properly suits the kind of study advocated in this article.

2.3. Study of transitivity and Critical Discourse Analysis

As has elsewhere been pointed out (cf. Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2001) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) mainly deals with the relationship between discourse and power. More concretely, it is a type analytical research of discourse that primarily studies the way, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. In other words, CDA is based on "the notion that language plays a central role in social life" (Alameda-Hernández, 2008: 162) because it especially analyses the expressions of those social situations related to issues which, as Van Dijk (2001: 353) argues, have something to do with the addressing of social problems, power relations, society and culture, ideological and historical work and the link between text and society.

To be more precise, CDA is devoted to firstly to the study of how these situations have been produced through discourse and secondly to the analysis of discourse itself as related to the social, historical and political context in which it is immersed. As Alameda-Hernández sums up "CDA analyses social life in its discursive aspects, aimed at providing social criticism based on linguistic evidence".

As Halliday (cf. 1994) propose, whether we regard language as a social phenomenon and hence we study it in relation to its use within society, then Systemic Functional Linguistics or Functional Grammar has been proven to be one of the best tools for the type of analysis CDA carries out. In fact, Functional Grammar is so called because it studies the function and use of language and this use is addressed, according to Halliday (1994: xiii), from three perspectives: the interpretation of texts (because it studies how the language is used), of the system (as the fundamental components of meaning in language are functional components) and of the elements of linguistic structures (because each element in language is explained by reference

to its function in the whole linguistic system). Thus, my main objective within the present study is focused on processes. As Halliday (1994: 106-175), Downing (2002: 111-151) and Calzada (2003: 71) argue, there are different types of processes: (1) material or processes of doing and causing: which express the notion that someone, somebody or something 'do' something (Halliday, 1994: 112). (2) Mental or processes of experiencing or sensing which are processes of the inner experience, (3) relational or processes of being (something or somewhere) or becoming, (4) verbal, (5) existential, and (6) behavioural. Hence, in the present research, the identification of the types of processes in which the characters in *Cinderella* by the Grimm brothers are involved will help me to understand how the relationship between power and violence is presented in this tale, as transitivity analysis implies a process of reasoning and interpreting data, rather than merely labelling.

2.4. Identity

The final step of the present research is to look at the identity implications of violence, that is, how participants handle actions (or processes) which in the present study, consist of taking advantage of their predominant position –their power– to commit violent acts. I shall be showing how inspection of the processes in the Grimms' tales demonstrates that at the heart of the participants' activities is the relation between the category of 'violent' and its attendant implication of 'committing violent acts as a sign of having power or occupying a predominant position (Paoletti, 1998: 171). To do so, as given that the search for a proper understanding of self and identity has provided a rich vein area of research in the social sciences (Mckinlay and Dunnet, 1998: 34), the definition of the concept of 'identity' in the words of Antaki and Widdicome (1998: 2) as "a person's display of or ascription to membership of some feature-rich category" would appear to be a good starting point. All categories imply features and, as Antaki and Widdicome (1998: 4) argue, features also imply categories too because if someone is identified with a certain range of features, he "is treated as a member of the category with which those features are conventionally associated".

Hence, my purpose with regard to the study of identity of participants in *Cinderella* is to identify the categories to which they are assigned within the tale and study them in depth in order to confirm whether having power and inflicting violence are intrinsically related or not.

3. STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

After investigating the presence of violence in the Grimm brothers fairy tales collection by means of a corpus-based analysis (Biber et al., 1998) of the tale *Cinderella*, with the intention of finding out what kind of processes predominate in this tale and whether they can be related to violent actions, my initial hypotheses are: firstly, that a corpus-based analysis could

empirically detect the presence of polemic topics such as violence in children's tales. Secondly, that this method also proves to be a good tool to reveal each character's identity through the type of processes assigned to them.

4. METHODOLOGY

In this section I shall describe the structure of my study. My investigation consisted of three parts: I first carried out a study which involved the analysis of frequencies of the lexical units in the C*inderella* corpus and then, I compared the results obtained in the frequency test to a reference corpus: the British National Corpus. The comparison and its results supported the presence of higher than average percentage occurrence of use of some words related directly or indirectly to violence.

Then, my second step was the study of processes (transitivity) (Halliday, 1994: 106-175; Downing, 2002) in this same tale from a functionalist viewpoint. By means of this linguistic phenomenon, I carried out a study of the participants in the mentioned processes. The findings in this step at this stage led me to the third and final part of my study which concerned the search of identities within the tale.

The main reason for the choice of this particular study is that violence and children are two issues the existence of which should never meet. Unfortunately, it is not within the realms of this study to propose ways of separating the two in real life, but we have the choice of separating and keeping them under control in fiction writing. By using a corpus-based approach, it is possible to reclassify readings aimed at children again empirically.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Corpus-based analysis

Firstly, I generated a list of the most frequently used words – by using *WordSmith Tool 5*– in order to find their frequency percentages , not taking into account grammatical words. This analysis was done at word level, focusing mainly on nouns, adjectives and verbs, for this reason, all the grammatical words such as prepositions, articles and others were removed since they were not considered relevant for the present study.

By doing this, I was able to identify those words which were directly or indirectly related to violent and cruel situations. After doing this, I selected some words from the list which, after studying their collocations, were related to violence: *cut ashes, foot/feet* and *blood.* I was mainly interested in the analysis of words which, at first sight, were not related to violence but which were involved in violent situations after investigating their concordances

and collocations. I did not focus on words such as *kill* or *dead* because they were directly related to violence and it was quite easy to find out their frequency.

Thus, there were some instances where these words appeared which apparently did not have any relation to the semantic field of violence or cruelty, but after examining their concordances within the tales corpus, there was a clear relationship. This was the case of words like *foot/feet or ashes* (see Tables 1 and 2). They were included in the most frequent words used in this corpus (*ashes* is used 11 times and *foot/feet* 9 times). After investigating their collocations lists I noted the high percentage in which these words were used related to violence.

By studying these collocations in depth, I discovered that the use of the word *ashes* throughout the text was related to *ill treatments,* for instance, on line 9, we read, "*Cinderella lay in her dirty clothes among the ashes, and a…*" or on line 10 "*she has placed herself in the kitchen amongst the ashes in her grey gown".* In both situations, Cinderella was near the ashes because she was obliged to do so by her step-mother. Another example can be read on line 3 "*I have emptied a dish of lentils into the ashes for thee*", an action carried out by the step-mother again. The study of the words *cut* and *blood* provided me with more examples related to cruelty and violence, e.g., on line 2 of the word *cut* we read "*Then her mother gave her a knife and said, 'cut the toe off; when thou art Queen…"* describing the moment in which the step mother made her daughter cut off her own toe. An striking finding was the collocations of the word *foot/feet*, as, at first sight, it is not a word easily related to violence and in spite of this, we find examples (such as in line 4: *"Then he looked at her foot and saw how the blood was streaming from it"*).

N Concordance
1   on foot." The maiden cut a bit off her heel, forced her foot into the shoe, swallowed the pain, and went out to
2   thou art Queen thou wilt have no more need to go on foot." The maiden cut a bit off her heel, forced her foot
3   shoe. Then she seated herself on a stool, drew her foot out of the heavy wooden shoe, and put it into the
4   The true bride waits for you." He looked down at her foot and saw how the blood was running out of her
5   thou art Queen thou wilt have no more need to go on foot." The maiden cut the toe off, forced the foot into
6   said to him, "No one shall be my wife but she whose foot this golden slipper fits." Then were the two sisters
7   The true bride waits for you." Then he looked at her foot and saw how the blood was streaming from it. He
8   to go on foot." The maiden cut the toe off, forced the foot into the shoe, swallowed the pain, and went out to

Table 1. Concordance lines of FOOT

N Concordance
1   were the two sisters glad, for they had pretty feet. The eldest went with the shoe into her room

Table 2. Concordance line of FEET

What seems clear from the findings is that the frequency of the words related to violence within this context is very high in The Grimm Corpus. When I compare my results to those obtained with the British National Corpus I notice that there are remarkable differences in the frequency of occurrence between the selected words. Interestingly, the present findings show that the frequency of occurrence of *cut, blood, ashes* and *foot/feet* is remarkably lower in the reference corpora than in The Grimm Corpus.

5.2. Analysis of processes

As explained above, a Functional Systemic perspective proved to be a useful theoretical frame to investigate this register-based variation and reach interpretive results. To do so, I worked on the same frequency list provided by the corpus analysis in order to achieve a complete list of all the processes involved in this tales. Hence, my first step was to remove from the list every word except the verbal units and then study all the collocations which each one of these verbal units was related to. All these data were collated in a table which had three columns in order to study not solely processes but their participants too.

The analysis of the types of processes –after studying in depth the table with all the processes involved– in the tale *Cinderella* collected by the Grimm brothers has shown that, from the 282 processes found, the kind of actions that this tale is most frequently involved in are material (201 samples, 71.3%), that is to say, processes of doing and causing. Relational attributive processes or processes of being (something or somewhere) or becoming, are the second in occurrence with 54 samples and, in lower proportion, actions implying mental processes, that is to say, actions which belong to the realm of the inner consciousness, involving processes of experiencing o sensing, with 22 samples. I consider that the number of samples of verbal (3) and existential (2) processes is not relevant for the present study due to their low occurrence.

The analysis of the participant roles assigned in this tale has shown that the most relevant participant roles are agents, mainly *Cinderella, the two step-sisters and the step-mother* who are the subjects of most of the material processes carried out. In lower occurrence, *birds* (of different kinds: pigeons, hazel twig, doves, and so on) *the king, the prince and Cinderella's father*. That is to say, animate agents are the most frequent participants in these tales. Besides, forces (or inanimate agents) appear infrequently and are represented mostly by *the shoe* (which Cinderella loses and the Prince uses to look for her), some acts like *the festival, the wedding* and some isolated ones like *the blood.*

All the material processes, which as mentioned before refer to actions of 'doing' and thus entail a volitional act (even though it is a violent act) involve two different kinds of situations: the first one, that related to domestic violence and cruel situations and whose main participant is the person who holds the power (step-mother, step-sisters); the second one that committed by birds in the shape of very cruel revenges (picking out eyes).

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results achieved with the analysis of the original version of *Cinderella* confirm an excess of violent scenes in it. The findings obtained here are based on empirical linguistic (semantic and grammatical) analyses that clearly support this statement. These results may certainly help justify a linguistic intervention in this tale collected by the Grimm brothers, with the intention to help decrease the general willingness for violence and its consequences (unnecessary fears and anxiety) in children as mentioned previously. My proposal with regard to this intervention is to reclassify it according to the same age criteria followed by most publishing companies when there are involved readings aimed at children.

Regarding my secondary objective, due to the high rate of occurrence of material processes in the tale *Cinderella*, I focused on these types of processes, as they have built up the identity of participants in this tale. Analyzing the processes found in *Cinderella,* material processes provided me with different information about the identity of participants. The preliminary observations gathered in study hint at the fact of two different violent identities in *Cinderella*, an active one and a passive one. I consider violent active personalities the step-mothers and step-sisters who "*did her every imaginable injury*" to Cinderella. Additionally, the step-mother make her own sisters cut their toes off so as to force their feet into the shoe only because she wants them to become queens. Her power is based on a better status position within the family. The second kind of participant related to violence, the passive, is the spouse, the father. The identities of women and men spouses in some of the Grimm brothers' fairy tales collection can be described as weak and characterized by not making decisions. They do not commit active violent acts but, in my view, allowing their spouses to carry out their violent acts is like committing them in a passive way, this is the case of Cinderella's father who lets his wife and step-daughters ill-treat his own natural daughter.

To summarize, analysing processes involves studying how different identity categories are produced in narration, thus, I have critically investigated how violence and power are part of constructing a violent identity and how different ways of inflicting violence are negotiated in terms of the fact of having, to some extent, power, in relation to other characters. To that aim, I discussed how power and violence were related within the main characters of the Grimm brothers' fairy tales collection.

As a general conclusion stemming from the present analysis, I would like to formulate the proposal that the consideration of a multidisciplinary study composed of a corpus analysis, a transitivity analysis and a Critical Discourse Analysis can provide an objective study in order to identify controversial topics in readings, for example aimed at children as the basis of a possible reclassification according to updated criteria.

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