

Bureaucratization of professional routines of Chilean journalists (1975-2005)

Burocratización de las rutinas profesionales de los periodistas en Chile (1975-2005)

Burocratização das rotinas profissionais de jornalistas no Chile (1975-2005)

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ABSTRACT

The article describes the main trends in Chilean journalists' professional practices between 1975 and 2005 in four newspapers of national circulation. It is proposed that the Chilean journalism has increasingly bureaucratized its work, transforming the news making process in a mechanized and automated task that responds strongly to the logic of media market. This trend contradicts the political and ethical demands on journalism, in order to be an objective, independent and autonomous activity that collaborates with the formation of public opinion and the control of political power.

Keywords: print journalism, professional routines, bureaucratization, democracy, public opinion, Chile.

RESUMEN

El artículo describe las principales tendencias de la práctica profesional de los periodistas en Chile entre 1975 y 2005 en cuatro diarios de circulación nacional. Se propone que el periodismo chileno ha ido burocratizando crecientemente su labor, transformando el proceso de producción de noticias en una tarea mecanizada y automatizada, que responde fuertemente a las lógicas del mercado de medios. Esta tendencia contradice las exigencias políticas y éticas hacia el periodismo, en el sentido de ser una actividad objetiva, independiente y autónoma que colabore activamente con los procesos de formación de opinión pública y de fiscalización de los poderes políticos.

Palabras clave: Periodismo escrito, rutinas profesionales, burocratización, democracia, opinión pública, Chile.

RESUMO

O artigo descreve as principais tendências na prática profissional dos jornalistas no Chile entre 1975 e 2005, em quatro jornais de circulação nacional. Propõe-se que o jornalismo chileno tem burocratizado cada vez mais seu trabalho, transformando o processo de produção de notícias em uma tarefa mecanizada e automatizada, que responde fortemente à lógica do mercado de mídia. Esta tendência contraria as demandas políticas e éticas do jornalismo, no sentido de ser uma atividade objetiva, independente e autônoma que colabora ativamente com os processos de formação da opinião pública e controle do poder político.

Palavras-chave: Jornalismo impresso, rotinas profissionais, burocratização, democracia, opinião pública, Chile.

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INTRODUCTION¹

Democratic theories give an important social role to the journalist as a mediator between citizens and public and private authorities regarding the handling of information and decision-making (Santa Cruz, 1996; Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1984), a role that involves a professional exercise under ideal conditions of autonomy, freedom and critical thinking. This framework has encouraged to think about the practice of journalism confronting it with at least two large comprehensive positions: the first, of ethic-normative character, rules on the role that the journalist must comply in modern society, the boundaries of its action and the social value of information and of the media in the political public space; the second, of a mythical character, divides the activity of journalism according to certain values considered to be inherent to the profession –objectivity, sagacity, depth, technical skills, “instinct”, commitment, but also impartiality, weighting, independence, etc–, from which we can discriminate between “good” and “bad” journalists (cf. Bettetini & Fumagalli, 2002; Gomis, 1991). Both positions intersect, are contain themselves partially and usually act together when it comes to understanding what this profession is about.

The vast majority of media studies, therefore, have had to a greater or lesser extent these positions as assumptions when investigating what the journalist does. There are several studies addressing the relationship between journalism and society from the perspective of discourse, denouncing what is politically incorrect, not overt ideological content, or the alienating or interested use of press information. Other works study journalistic enterprises, their situation in the market and relationship with the public, advertising, the State and other institutions. There is also research on the reception of journalistic discourse, forms of organization of the newsrooms, ethics and freedom of expression laws and, of course, about the effects of media contents in the social field, the “justice” with which they represent “reality” or, even, the mode in which they build it. Whether the result of studies of sociological-functional, semiotic-critic, political-economical or ethic-normative approach, in almost all cases the result of the study ends confronting the journalistic labor with one of the two designated comprehensive perspectives: what the journalist “does” versus what “should be done”; alternatively, what the journalist “is” versus what “should be”.

During the last three decades, some works which do not confront the activity of the journalist with what must-be or must-do have gradually began to be published, trying to describe and understand this activity from its own logics of production (see Bohjere, 1985; López, 1995; Majul, 1999). A very small and relatively new group of works in Chile has also dealt with the task of studying the journalistic practices. Currently, researchers such as Claudia Mellado, Claudia Lagos and Carlos del Valle, among others, have provided results that inform about the current state of the exercise of the profession, their working conditions, their limitations and routines (see Ramírez, 1995; Hernández, Lagos, Mellado & Moreira, 2012; Del Valle, González, Mellado & Salinas, 2010; Mellado, 2011, 2012; Lecaros & Greene, 2012; Puente, Edwards & Delpiano, 2014) and their relations with advertising. These works have gradually revealed that the profession is affected mainly by factors that are not referred to in the perspectives described above, as the commercialization and privatization of public spaces, the transformation of the audiences and advertisers, and the generation of intermediaries –public relations professionals, corporate journalists, communications agencies– between journalists and companies and public bodies. In these circumstances, it is permissible to wonder if the narratives from which we understand journalism are useful to think about the role it would have (according to these same perspectives) in the formation of public opinion and consideration of information as a social good.

It is an approach that does not presuppose the distinction between opinion and information, professional independence and objectivity of speech as a condition *sine qua non* of journalistic work to assess what it brings to democratic regimes; on the other hand, it seeks to suspend such common place and questioning *what precisely does the journalist* and, only then, find out if what the journalist does has any relationship with the development of democratic political practices.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The journalistic practices have usually been studied from the sociology of the production of news or newsmaking, which distinguishes them, in general, of the study of the journalistic speech as if it were two separate moments: the production process and the product (the news). A first form of approach to the way in

which newsmaking conceptualizes the routine is understanding it as the concrete operation of an individual journalist. Journalistic practices would be essentially of search and collection of information, and these are carried out naturally in the relationship with sources (cf. Hernández, 1997, pp. 225-229; Wolf, 1997).

Another practice recognized as relevant in studies of newsmaking is the so-called gatekeeper: the action of selection and editing of information considered “news” and, therefore, entering the publishing process (cf. Gomis, 1991; Hanitzsch & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2009). The selection of the information is conceived as a naturalized, automated and “intuitive” process, founded on the experience and the individual criterion—although socialized—of journalists and, mainly, of the editors.

While early studies of newsmaking concentrated their attention on the two moments that seemed more routine—relationship with sources and assessment criteria—in recent decades it has been shown that does moments only find their real meaning in the knowledge of the entire process (Lester & Molotch, 1974; Bohjere, 1985; McQuail, 1998; cf. Reese & Ballinger, 2001). Understanding the production of news as a complex process and journalistic routines as a social practice entails to grasp the ways in which they talk and interrelate with external material factors that would also affect their configuration. The journalistic routine would possess, thus, an internalized, institutional and repetitive character, as well as exhibiting, by the way, a social character, in the sense that the production implies a constant exchange and negotiation between professionals within their organizations and from one media to another (Tuchman, 1983, p. 25).

Breed (1955), in a classic study of norms and behaviors relating to the exercise of authority in newsrooms, describes the way in which the professional routine itself functions as a mechanism of socialization and disciplining for journalists. This conception of the process of production as a means of socialization suggests observing press routines as a non-written game of expectations and rules, i.e., as the basis of the professional culture of journalism. This idea comes to strengthen the posterior approach of Tuchman (1983, 1999) and other authors on the closed and self-referential nature of the production process, which involves also warning that this process of socialization works, in addition, as a mechanism of social control on the own practices and routines of journalists. Also Wolf (1987,

pp. 207-248) emphasizes the social, organizational and constructive conception of journalistic routines, such as they have been raised by Tuchman and Breed.

These studies are complemented by another group of researches that, on the basis of surveys to journalists and ethnographic methodologies, try to describe the work environment and the working conditions of journalists. It is the case of the report by Bohjere (1985, pp. 24-77), which describes the traits of vocational training, ways of working and types of businesses in which journalists work. Another study, conducted by the Media and Democracy Program in Latin America, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Instituto Prensa y Sociedad (IPYS) (2005, pp. 7-33) comparing working conditions between different countries of Latin America, argues that these factors directly affect journalistic practices and, therefore, the quality of news and the contribution of the media to the strengthening of democracy.

The same practice would appear under the framework of a closed and self-referential scheme, as a mechanism of social control that will withdraw on itself and its performers. Understanding the production of news as a complex process and journalistic routines as a social practice entails to grasp the ways in which they talk and interrelate with external material factors that would also affect their configuration. It is Mauro Wolf (1997) who poses that the newsmaking should incorporate, as part of its analysis and even as an object of study, a number of dimensions that exceed the concrete operations raised above: technological developments, changes in media ownership, segmentation of the audience, labour market, etc. Investigations in this area, especially from a materialist critical approach, tended to view in the media merely resonances of structural political and economic tensions, i.e., a reflection of the changes induced by the development of the capitalist process. Wolf, on the other hand, moves the discussion regarding these factors from the perspective of infra/super structure towards an integrated approach of the relationship between these factors and journalistic practices.

Lester and Molotch (1974, p. 4) designate a second complex aspect of the production process, the overlapping between the practical and evaluative dimensions, which is inherent to the organization of journalistic work and influences in a relevant way in the intentionality given to the news. For these authors, the news, as

product, it is the result of a “triple instance” of production, involving in the process the audience, journalists and sources, each providing specific actions but also assessments, views and different “portions” of the story about the reality. This idea places the journalist in the articulator axis of the process, i.e., as a legitimate producer of public information, as well as it proposes, though not explicitly, that the result of the process is, ultimately, the production of reality.

The study of the relationship between the material, cultural and symbolic factors that cooperate in the production of the news involves an obvious difficulty: social “relations” cannot be measured nor its impact can be assessed, without going to the context and history of professional practices. This implies, in the case of the journalistic practices, that these show the criteria and values from which their field has been constituted, so, despite its timeless or recursive nature, it is possible to see in them the traces of the historical journey of their production.

The literature on newsmaking and, in particular, on the concept of production routines, has been introduced and worked in Latin America especially by Mexican communication researchers. Systematizing the Anglo-Saxons works on the subject, they noticed early the features of the routine that have developed to this point: the notion of a naturalized discursive practice, socially legitimated and highly institutionalized and repetitive, susceptible to be described from logics linked with modes of organization of the newsrooms, but at the same time stressed by material, cultural and ideological factors external to the process of production. This review articulates the functional observations of the administrative communication theory with contributions from most hermeneutic perspectives, as the constructivist or critical. However, its main contribution is to position a comprehensive and global approach to press routines, which integrate the “findings” of the studies already outlined in a theory focused on revealing the way in which these journalistic practices produce daily life and meaning, at the same time that make up its own rules of operation. Such positioning is obtained by incorporating these models of empirical research within the criteria and fields defined by the sociology of fields proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (2002). Thus, it was possible to understand the complex social practice which con-

stitutes the routine from a clearer, inclusive and productive notion: habitus.

The habitus defines relationships or, rather, “dispositions” articulated around perceptual schemes and operations: they are patterns of action and sense, but do not necessarily correspond with the rules and norms of action (Cervantes, 1995, p. 103). The habitus would operate in the manner of a repertoire of “allocations” of meaning, both at the level of everyday practices and at the level of the perspectives, myths and explanatory discourses. In the same way, to perceive social practices such as schemes of relationship—in this case, inside the “journalistic field”—, admits that these practices have a certain autonomy and internal logic because they correspond to the area of a particular field, and understands that they are determined by external factors due to their relational nature. Finally, it assumes that these practices show the criteria and values from which the field involving them has been constituted, so, despite its timeless or recursive nature, it is possible to see in them the traces of the historical journey of their production. Bourdieu (2002) understands the field as a “production system” (p. 14) of symbolic goods, not reducible to a market or another mode of material production, as it is also constituted from the relationships and values woven around these goods. Thus, the field is formed from a network of material and symbolic practices and relations, located according to their place and interaction and not necessarily from “natural” attributes. Bourdieu (2002) says:

The structure of the field is a state of the balance of power between actors or institutions involved in the fight or, if preferred, the distribution of specific capital accumulated during previous fights and orients the subsequent strategies. (p. 120)

Such a definition provides at least two new dimensions to consider. The first one refers to the “historicity” of relations and practices within the field. These are historically situated and, therefore, the set of routines that we can perceive at a certain time carries traces of relations and practices established in the past. Even if these operations were smudged or “faded” by the passage of time, the same contemporary logic inside the field would realize this historical situation of practices, compelling at the same time to think the latter in diachronic terms; furthermore, in “long” times

as opposed to instantaneity that constantly suggest news stories.

The second consideration concerns the idea of “state” of the balance of power inside the field. This idea suggests that these relations are not stable, are in continuous transformation and adaptation and, therefore, the practices and social actors involved in them are also continuously reviewing their own situation inside the field. This means that not all relationships have the same degree, value and intensity every time, but at the same time, they require a unifying element that makes possible, at all times, the occurrence of the relations and interaction of practices and subjects.

METHODOLOGY

Since the intention is to reconstruct historical series of data on the way in which the profession is practiced in the country and its transformations, it was not possible to use the ethnography of newsrooms, which, according to literature, is the most common technique. Its main feature consists in making visible small day-to-day operations performed both by the media and the editor and journalist, to select, give visibility or obscure topics, subjects and voices of the news. However, recent studies demonstrate how the news –i.e. the product of the professional activity of the journalist– manifests in their discursive qualities traces of their routine of production (Verón, 1988). There are studies that relate the routines of production of the news with socio-discursive determinants, as the news cases (Puente et al.,

2014), news values (Sapiezynska, 2013), the professional culture of journalists (Salinas & Stange, 2015) or their working conditions (Hernández et al., 2012; Mellado & Lagos, 2014).

Therefore, we employed methods of analysis that rebuilt the professional practices from the “traces” they left on the corpus of study. This consists of approximately fifteen thousand stories published in seven national written media, chosen with the one week sample method through a semi random sampling (table 1). The result of this inquiry is a complete characterization of the use of fonts, styles of writing and thematic and sectional organizing of the news in these media, according to standardized criteria.

This corpus was confronted with the information obtained from a series of interviews to journalists who worked in the same media during the same period, which allows controlling the expected distortions that result from the attempt to reconstruct the practices indirectly through the speech. Semi-structured interviews, that formed a second corpus of analysis, dealt with the news process and criteria of newsworthiness that these journalists employed in their work (table 2).

A preliminary analysis of part of this corpus allows already appreciating some important trends in the practices of Chilean journalists. In this first approach, we have considered the case of four national newspapers (*La Tercera*, *El Mercurio*, *Las Últimas Noticias* and *La Nación*), comparing the results concerning sources, sections, authorship and genres used in three different years: 1981, 1991 and 2001².

Table 1. Corpus of study: national newspapers

Newspapers	2a week sept. 1976	4a week april 1978	3a week july 1981	1a week sept 1983	4a week dec. 1986	2a week feb. 1988	1a week may.1991	3a week july 1993	2a week oct. 1996	4a week dec. 1998	3a week mar. 2001	1a week may. 2003
<i>El Mercurio</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>La Tercera</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Las Últimas Noticias</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>La Nación</i>			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>La Cuarta</i>					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>El Metropolitano</i>											X	

Source: Own elaboration..

Table 2. Recording and coding of controlled press releases

Dimensions of analysis	In press stories (observed items)	In interviews (questions)
Data collection routines	<p>USED SOURCES</p> <p>(transcended, rumors, unidentified sources from former news, interviews, press releases, other media, technical reports or scientific papers, literature, reporting on-site)</p>	<p>How to choose a topic to report, an article?</p> <p><i>Additional:</i> what is considered news, and what not?</p> <p>What was the daily reporting like during the analyzed period?</p> <p>What was the treatment and relationship which the sources had with you?</p> <p><i>Additional:</i> was it possible to verify the information?</p> <p>How many sources could you consult for a single subject?</p> <p>What are (were) the most common inconvenient when reporting?</p>
Organization of the information routines	<p>THEMATIC ORGANIZATION</p> <p>(sections: general information and international daily chronicle, economic information, sports, culture and shows, others)</p>	<p>Identify the sections of the newspaper during the analyzed period.</p> <p>Are there particular or special practices when a case is reported?</p> <p>Why do decide to follow a case for two or more days?</p> <p>How did you evaluate at the time which theme could have more space and which not? Were there more or less clear criteria in this respect?</p>

Source: Own elaboration.

MAIN RESULTS

PRACTICES ORGANIZED AS REPETITIVE FORMULAS

The daily practice of print media journalist has been historically defined, as we saw, from two stages: information gathering and assessment of its news-worthiness (selection, prioritization, impact, etc). The production of the news develops as a relatively methodical, highly complex and routine procedure which, despite offering an image of spontaneity, dizziness, novelty and action, is more mechanical of what the common may think, according to the data collected during the sampling periods.

In fact, according to our research, it is remarkable to confirm the great standardization of the work routine of journalists, in all newspapers and all the decades. Its practice is described, by the professionals themselves, in terms of a mechanism involving a few default actions, a set of preset operations and rules and nomenclatures, not always explicit but shared by all, which guarantee to obtain at the end of the day an elaborated and ready to publish new.

NEWS SOURCES

The uniformity of the daily work of the journalist is again confirmed when it comes to the examination of the types of sources that the media in the studied period uses (tables 3 to 5). During 1981, unknown, non-listed sources and rumors were the most common source of published information. It was by far the source most used by *La Tercera* (58%) and had great importance also for *El Mercurio* (31%) and *Las Últimas Noticias* (35%). The second element of greater recurrence was the repetition of information already known by readers. *La Nación*, which at the time was an organ of diffusion of the military regime –and that is a State-owned newspaper– and *El Mercurio* were the two newspapers that more used this resource (54% and 23%, respectively). *La Nación* resorted extensively to press releases (19%) while *La Tercera* and *Las Últimas Noticias* relied also on interviews, mostly to government or military officials (27% and 33%, respectively). The other sources of information had a marginal presence. The informative panorama of that year is almost completely composed of transcended information, contextual facts, interviews and official press releases.

Table 3. Information sources quoted by newspapers, year 1981 (percentages)

Sources	<i>El Mercurio</i>	<i>La Tercera</i>	<i>La Nación</i>	<i>Las Últimas Noticias</i>
Transcended, rumors, unidentified sources	30,7	46,7	0,9	34,6
Previous news	23,0	7,0	54,1	6,8
Interviews	3,2	21,4	11,1	33,4
Press releases	5,1	7,1	18,7	4,8
Other media	7,7	6,8	3,8	3,9
Technical or scientific reports	1,6	1,6	6,2	0,8
Reporting on-site	19,8	5,7	2,0	12,4
Documents, literature	8,9	3,6	3,3	3,1

Source: Onw elaboration.

Table 4. Information sources quoted by newspapers, year 1991 (percentages)

Sources	<i>El Mercurio</i>	<i>La Tercera</i>	<i>La Nación</i>	<i>Las Últimas Noticias</i>
Transcended, rumors, unidentified sources	25,6	39,4	4,2	37,7
Previous news	23,5	4,3	68,6	7,6
Interviews	8,5	40,4	6,7	33,8
Press releases	4,0	5,5	4,7	7,6
Other media	4,9	2,6	6,3	4,8
Technical or scientific reports	6,8	1,6	4,2	1,3
Reporting on-site	21,3	4,3	2,4	4,6
Documents, literature	5,4	1,9	6,7	2,5

Source: Onw elaboration.

Table 4. Information sources quoted by newspapers, year 2001 (percentages)

Sources	<i>El Mercurio</i>	<i>La Tercera</i>	<i>La Nación</i>	<i>Las Últimas Noticias</i>
Transcended, rumors, unidentified sources	7,1	29,6	6,9	28,1
Previous news	40,1	7,2	58,7	5,8
Interviews	8,2	38,7	7,5	44,1
Press releases	7,5	5,7	8,6	3,8
Other media	4,5	6,9	2,3	3,2
Technical or scientific reports	14,4	2,9	10,1	2,0
Reporting on-site	12,3	2,4	2,4	9,3
Documents, literature	6,0	6,7	3,4	3,7

Source: Onw elaboration.

For 1991, second year of democratic government in the country following the end of the military dictatorship, the major sources of information remained the same: the recycling of earlier news, interviews and the use of transcended and unidentified sources. The first was mainly used by *La Nación* (69%) and *El Mercurio* (23%), while the second by *La Tercera* (40%) and *Las Últimas Noticias* (34%). This last newspaper, along *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera*, were those that most regularly used unidentified sources: 38%, 39% and 26%, respectively).

The use of such sources had decreased by 2001 (7% in the cases of *El Mercurio* and *La Nación*, although *La Tercera* and *Las Últimas Noticias* continued presenting values close to 30%), while the use of interviews and contextual elements continued to be overwhelmingly majority, to the point that they appear as the almost exclusive sources of information: *El Mercurio* and *La Nación* use as a pre-eminent source previous information (40% and 59%, respectively), while *La Tercera* and *Las Últimas Noticias* rely mainly on interviews (39% and 44%, respectively). All other maintain—as well as for 1991—a marginal presence.

When breaking down the total number of sources identified and not identified by the total of the stories subjected to this analysis, we obtain that for 1981 each note has an average of 1.2 sources, amount that varies to 1.18 for 1991 and 1.35 for 2001.

The sources that demand a greater research work or the development of on-site activities are, clearly, the lesser-used in the production of news. (The on-site reporting reaches a maximum of 21% in 1991 in *El Mercurio*; in all other newspapers and decades its value is half or less than that. Ward and Hansen already warned in 1991 the intensification of the use of electronic databases between journalists, at the expense of the “active” reporting). Almost all of the information comes from management of recurrent sources or already developed database which are consulted as much as demanded by the news process. These sources are, mostly, of the public and private institutional area (authorities, managers, press releases), so the work of relationship with them is for the journalist, in practice, a daily *public relations* work.

Interviews with journalists confirm this relationship with the sources. The main criterion used by professionals, and that it is valued positively, is the “culti-

vate a recurrent source”. Constant access to an official source capable of providing information in a timely and permanent manner is the key to the process of news production, as witnessed by several journalists:

The theme of sources is essential. If not, you do not cultivate news sources, people who are in key positions of national work, who you can get to and with whom you can build some trust (...). Something that I always advised to those who worked with me was developing a very good network of informants, have much access to sources, give trust that you are going to be a responsible transmitter for what they can tell you. (Journalist, 1980-1984)

Each different section has a reporter. Who covers police has its sources in Investigations, Police; who covers the government has its sources there... That is the idea, that each section or a journalist covers certain sector so that it may be known and have its sources (Journalist, 1990-1994)

The phone is widely used here and there is little time to interview people, but it would be ideal, to create better sources, to have more news to be more involved with what is happening. It is a somewhat impersonal relationship with sources. (Editor, 2000-2005)

Journalists tend to evaluate the “familiarity” with their sources according to their effectiveness, without explicitly considering the degree of dependence or instrumentalization which they could exercise over them. From these testimonies emerges that the real purpose of the routine of reporting is to reach the end of the day with publishable information. In this predicament, the key task is to access the source as it is, and keep open the relationship with her at all costs. In other words, it is preferable to arrive at the end of the day with a publishable story, even if it comes from the same sources, every day. In such a situation, methodological or ethical considerations have only a place “to the extent possible”, because it is essential, once again, preserve the news production process: the most important value, the most important task of all, is repeat and end daily routine of production that is internalized as “mode in which things should be” because simply “always been done that way”³.

In such a situation, methodological or ethical considerations are only considered “when possible”, because it is essential, once again, to preserve the news production

process: the most important value, the most important task of all, is to repeat and end daily the routine of production internalized as “the way in which things should be” simply because they have “always been done that way”.

When asking the journalists by the criteria and practices to verify information, responses tend to be of two types. First, they claim to consult other sources to obtain “different views” and publish “soundbites” (highlighted sentences) in two or three different ways:

We always had to have a counterpart. If not, you could not fill the page, you had to have several things. (Journalist, 1980-1984)

But in general it was rather that, adding sources more than checking. One had the notion that we had more freedom in this sense when we wrote issues related to leisure. As there are no numbers or politics involved (...) I used more when I had to gather many sources, but not to verify. (Journalist, 1990-1994)

Secondly, they allege the data verification as a desirable work principle, but determined by the prerogatives of time, space and rates of production:

I try to check that the information is as accurate as possible, but always within the few hours I have to do things, and sometimes I have not checked them as much as I want, because we're always against time. (Editor, 2000-2005)

To these two types of responses, the most widespread in the interviews, incidentally adds a third: the possibility or necessity of verifying sources is directly related to the editorial or political line of the journal: the media opposed to the government or the “serious” media is going to confront data and versions, while the pro-government media or tabloid trusts more easily the predominant official sources:

The issue of the verification of the information began to be more necessary in the last 25 years, [i.e. since 1990]. I don't know if there are statistics for complaints for delivering not true information. (...) In politics, for many years, it was not done (...) it was the colleagues who worked in the media opposed to the military government who—in order to publish the issues that hit with great force, especially the financial scandals and the violation of human rights—, had to have much access to sources, and confirm them very well, because false information could cost them more than a complaint in court, many times. (Journalist, 1980-1984)

This means that the process of corroboration of sources do not responds to a methodological criterion nor has as its goal the preservation of the quality of the information: l other sources are searched to comply with a protocol, fill more columns or strengthen the editorial line of the media. It is curious, in this sense, the apparent naivety with which journalists refer to their relationship with the sources. They hardly cover the interests involved, both of their sources and of public or private institutions that they eventually represent, or the interests of the media in which they work. It gives the impression that the problem is purely procedural, practical. This can express just how the naturalization of professional routine also entails a suspension of the critical position of the journalist in relation to its work.

NATURALIZED AND AUTOMATED ASSESSMENT AND DECISION CRITERIA

Including those elements whose apparent nature is intellectual and not mechanical, for example deciding what news is and what is not, or to assess the importance of a subject above other, become part of the routine, with already stipulated criteria which are based sometimes in the same journalists experience or common sense. So, when he asking about the criteria of newsworthiness of the professionals, the usual response is of this type: “When you have been enough time covering a section, you know what you should report” (journalist, 2000-2005). Thus, instances of decision and assessment are not reflective moments of work or evaluation of the own work spaces: they are part of the same repertoire of habits. Decision making is a stage within the routine process of news production and their options are already predetermined. To what extent this routine is extended seems to be demonstrated by that the fact that one of the criteria of newsworthiness is that the contained information is generally the same as in other newspapers:

Front pages [in the 1980s] were much more similar, the cover issues were almost the same, we even came to situations in which if we did not have what appeared on the cover of the journal of the competition, we said: what happened to us, why did we left that topic out. (Journalist, 1980-1984)

The testimony corresponds to the decade of the 1980s, although it is reiterated in the following decades. None of the interviewees explained the reasons which would lead to applying these criteria of newsworthiness.

Table 6. Historical evolution of the sections, *El Mercurio*. Years 1981, 1991 and 2001 (percentages)

Sections	1981	1991	2001
"Body" A (International, sports, culture and entertainment)	40	32	25
"Body" B (economy)	7	17	26
"Body" C (general information, others)	53	51	49

Source: Own elaboration..

Table 7. Historical evolution of the sections, *La Tercera*. Years 1981, 1991 and 2001 (percentages)

Secciones	1981	1991	2001
General information	39	58	34
International	25	8	8
Economy	6	5	11
Sports	22	19	24
Culture and entertainment	5	7	17
Others	3	3	6

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 8. Historical evolution of the sections, *La Nación*. Years 1981, 1991 and 2001 (percentages)

Sections	1981	1991	2001
General information	40	57	44
International	30	9	9
Economy	10	13	5
Sports	11	14	12
Culture and entertainment	8	7	10
Others	1	0	20

Source: Own elaboration.

The thematic coincidence is overwhelmingly majority not only between a newspaper and another, but also over the three decades, offering a quite unusual panorama. If we consider the distribution of the traditional sections in newspapers⁴, it is clear that all media share similar concerns and devote a number of stories cor-

Table 9. Historical evolution of the sections, *Las Últimas Noticias*. Years 1981, 1991 and 2001 (percentages)

Sections	1981	1991	2001
General information	44	60	27
International	8	10	6
Economy	5	2	6
Sports	26	16	30
Culture and entertainment	13	12	20
Others	4	0	11

Source: Own elaboration.

responding to the same issues (tables 6-9). The most relevant, however, is that sections and thematic choices evolve in the same way in all the newspapers.

Despite the exception of *El Mercurio*, which organizes its information on the basis of various "bodies" and not of corresponding sections, it is possible to appreciate common developments in all the newspapers. First of all, the progressive importance of "lightweight" sections, such as Sports or Entertainment (of 19% average in 1981 to 22% in 2001 in the case of the first, and an 8% average in 1981 to 15% in 2001 in the second), which constitute the *appeal* in commercial newspapers and the most recurrent topics in the front page.

At the same time, the importance of the international section gradually diminishes (since averaging 21% in 1981 to 7% in 2001) in a uniform manner in all the newspapers. A particular case is the growth of sections of economy in *La Tercera* and *El Mercurio* (from 6% to 11% in the case of the first, and 7% to 26% in the second), identified with conservative groups in the country and belonging to two of the Chilean market's largest media conglomerates, both openly supporters of neoliberal economic policies.

It is possible to confirm, through interviews with professionals, that these trends are part of the same journalistic work and not happen for simple random or coincidence. Some testimonials realize this:

The topic with more space was the one that would be more magazine-like, friendly, lightweight; the theme which did not put into question the editorial line, nor the respect to the armed and order forces. (Journalist, 1980-1984)

At that time [1990s] the strong theme was still how to sell more newspapers; what sold were the sport and the police section. (Journalist, 1990-1994)

It is interesting to note that, whether for political or commercial reasons (not to disturb the military government, in the 1980s, or increase sales of the newspaper, in the 1990s), the trend does not change with the return of the country to democracy. It seems clear, then, that the standardization of production volumes is a homogenization of the thematic sections, from which we may infer that any Chilean newspaper delivers, depending on the period, proportionally the same amount of information on the same topics as any of the others.

CRITERIA FOR INFORMATION WRITING

The time of writing of the information is also duly formalized according to a series of criteria taken by journalists and editors as a rule guaranteeing the effectiveness of the text. The writing usually follows a model of traditional arrangement of the facts (known as the “inverted pyramid”) that concentrates in the first paragraphs the most relevant information and relegates, at the end of the text, supplementary information, impressions, comments, etc.

This order is done in accordance with criteria about “important”, “shocking” and “novelty” which, although not defined, are used extensively. The acquisition of these criteria is determined by the professional experience, the profession and the development of a “journalistic sense”. Thus, journalists pointed out:

When one works as sub-editor dedicated specifically to a single informative issue, you learn, I don't know how (but learn, is as an expertise acquired on the basis of the experience) to distinguish between what is most and least relevant in news terms. (Journalist, 1980-1984)

That is analyzed day to day, news to news, and –obviously– the decision is taken by the editor on duty based on the material which the journalists have gathered in their topics and their guidelines in general (...). It can come up to anything, but the basic criteria are what is more shocking, more relevant, causes greater amazement, is more novel. They are the traditional values of news, those that do not change. (Journalist, 1990-1994)

DISCUSSION

The routine is repeated: according to a preset guideline of newsworthy events⁵, a closed collection of information process is done, whose order and final structure is determined in agreement with the editor, or either

left completely in its hands. Most importantly, however, is that the mechanics is internalized as a repertoire of habits: journalists act on the facts, they do not meditate upon them; the news are written one after the other without carefully repair on them. As with any of our everyday habits, on which we rarely reflect, the mechanics of daily work of printed journalism should be naturalized as an automatic and not an analytical work.

The similar evolution of the sections in the entire sample, as well as the standardization of writing, show the high degree of uniformity that editors and reporters share regarding their perceptions on the place of the information in the newspaper and its valuation. It is a measure of the criteria internalized almost in an unquestionable way, sheltered in the “professional experience” or in the media business strategy. That almost all professionals completely share criteria on what is news, not always explicitly, to which section it corresponds, what are the sources for its coverage and what treatment is the most relevant, would mean that the production process has preset decision guidelines that also automate the news value of the information.

If we understand, therefore, that the collection of information is routine and that the assessment of the news is naturalized, the image more appropriate to understand the production of news would be the one of *active bureaucracy*. Journalism professionals operate as agents running roles according to certain standards and protocols, in a certain time, and whose work inside the newsroom is organized into departments (“news topics”) with responsible and well recognizable hierarchies. The professional practice of journalists is a bureaucratic job, determined by rules, deadlines and roles, pressured by economic and institutional structures whose prevalence is greater than any individual decision in the news production process.

Professional routines of journalists in Chile have been described as a repertoire of naturalized, repetitive, impersonal habits, whose purpose is to carry out a simultaneous, continuous and unstoppable production process of information. It is a process regularly adjusted to an also naturalized set of criteria and decisions, turned into common sense, that demand the journalist's active engagement in the implementation of routine tasks and a total submission to the rules of production. In this context, they also agree to postpone the exercise of their autonomy and own discretion on

behalf of the highest value: the daily production of news.

Despite the obvious links between journalism and political contexts showed by this study (the thematic orientation according to the audiences' markets trends, the biases of the dictatorial environment regarding the sources), the professional practices of Chilean journalists show that they acquire, in a consistent manner throughout the studied decades, the physiognomy of an *active bureaucracy*. The journalist is a worker of the

media, who produces information whose primary value is the one that it obtains in the press market. The social uses of information are subordinated to this market value, in the same way that professional values supported by the narrative of the journalist appears to be only a legitimating element of the true nature of the profession. This does not mean that journalism is a business disguised as a public activity, but that this public political role is *not the one natural or primary of journalism*.

FOOTNOTES

1. The introduction and theoretical context of this article gather up earlier discussions offered by the authors (2009, 2011 and 2013).
2. The examination of the total of the corpus exceeds by far the available space of this article and requires some analysis that are still in development.
3. This is precisely the phenomenon studied by Tuchman (1999) to demonstrate that, in the journalistic discourse, "objectivity" is not a methodological or epistemological criterion, but an illusion of fairness.
4. The nomination of the sections has been done after a set of standardizations, as they vary their names and areas depending on the media. Thus, sections "Sports", "International" and "Culture and entertainment" are differentiated in the same way in all the newspapers, while the "Economy" section brings together the fields of finance, labor, etc.; and "General information" section concentrates the daily chronicle, political and police stories, all of which appear in some newspapers as differentiated sections, while, in others, they are subsumed in a single category (e.g. "Country", "Day", etc). Finally, the section "Other" refers to those temporary sections (e.g. about the World Cup or municipal elections) or to those of recent addition in newspapers (healthy living, technology, etc.).
5. During recent decades, Chilean newspaper reports guideline has depended in good grade of information offered every morning by Orbe news agency.

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