



“Ya No Nos Maten”: A Discourse Analysis of the Song “Querida Muerte”

Jacqueline Soto-Jurado

University of Guanajuato, MEXICO
Division of Social Sciences and Humanities

Received: 1 June 2021 ▪ Accepted: 18 July 2021 ▪ Published Online: 22 August 2021

Abstract

Violence against women in Mexico has surged over the last five years. Within this context, the song *Querida Muerte* (Dear Death) (2019) portrays the harassment experienced by Mexican women. Moreover, this song narrates some dangerous events that some women might have encountered living in Mexico. In this study, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is implemented as an approach for the examination of the song, applying the Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) model by Halliday. The findings of this study demonstrate that this discourse was created as a demand for social justice and as an expression of the extent to which women are tired of being scared and in constant threat. The analysis based on the SFL model reveals that this song mostly uses declarative clauses, present tense, and negative adjectives.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, femicides, systematic functional linguistics.

1. Introduction

Daily exposure to news regarding femicides, violence against women, or missing women are part of my daily life. Violence against women in Mexico is a phenomenon that has been increasing over the years, and I feel frustrated for not feeling safe when I am alone. My motivation comes from my experience of living in a dangerous country. This paper aims to show how women use language to claim justice. It is worth highlighting how feminists have drawn on language to express their disagreements and tiredness of being in constant danger. Kelly (1994) explains the relation between feminism and language:

One of the most powerful things feminism has done, and must continue to do, is to create new language and meanings which provide women with ways of naming and understanding their own experience. ... It was our experience of language as a form of power the power to name and define which made it such a key issue from the beginnings of this wave of feminism. We didn't need linguistic or semiotic theory to understand how basic and fundamental an issue this was. It still is (p. 48).

This quote reveals that feminists have the power to name and define what women have lived through the usage of language. It is a way to express what they have been experiencing for many years just for being a woman. Then, considering the connection that exists between feminism and language. This study aims to investigate the linguistic elements that the song *Querida Muerte* (Dear Death) (see Appendix 1) portrays regarding femicides in Mexico. The

examination focuses on the metafunctions analysis following Halliday’s (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics model to answer the following question:

How does the song *Querida Muerte* accomplish to provide an accurate view on violence against women in Mexico?

2. Literature review

This section is divided into three subsections to explain some background information regarding the song that is under study. The first one presents the definition of CDA and some frameworks to develop this approach. Next, I will describe some aspects of feminism as the definition and what this movement defends. The last segment explains details regarding femicides in Mexico.

2.1 *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)*

CDA is an approach to discourse analysis, it is a type of “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” (Wang, 2010: 254). Then, it principally encompasses social issues. Similar to this, Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) state that it is a “school of discourse analysis that concerns itself with relations of power and inequality in language” (p. 1). Following this, Haratyan (2011) explains that CDA “is concerned with the lexico-grammatical analysis of the language in the social, physical, cognitive, cultural, interpersonal and situational context” (p. 1). More specifically, it is a system that represents the “reality in a linguistic text and create the same experience through various lexico-grammatical options influenced by different mind styles or authorial ideologies” (p. 261). CDA explores the influential factors behind the lexico-grammatical choice.

There are different approaches to implement CDA and Todolí et al., (2006) suggest the following models: Fairclough’s Socio-Cultural Method that deals with the relationship between society and power. Van Dijk’s Socio-Cognitive Method focuses on the role of racism, prejudices, and ethnicity in discourse. Wodak’s Discourse-Historical Method emphasis sexism and identities. Halliday’s Systematic Functional linguistics, which highlights the meaning, structure, and function of the discourse. This last framework has been chosen to guide the analysis to answer the research question of this study. It was a suitable approach to analyze the material under study. The following section offers a detailed explanation regarding feminism.

2.2 *Feminism*

Feminism is a movement that started because women have been exploring the “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). Feminists reject the idea of accepting the inequalities between women and men and they “have continued to be active up to the present day in single issue campaigns around, for example, pornography, reproductive rights, violence against women and women’s legal rights” (Jackson & Jones, 1998: 6). This inequality phenomenon has taken place around the world. According to the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI) statistics, Mexico is known as a femicide country. In the following section, I will present information regarding the current situation in Mexico.

2.3 Femicides in Mexico

The Vienna Declaration on Femicide (2013) defines femicide as the murder of women and girls due to their gender. This association explains that femicides can take the following forms:

(1) the murder of women as a result of domestic violence/intimate partner violence; (2) the torture and misogynist slaying of women; (3) killing of women and girls in the name of “honour”; (4) targeted killing of women and girls in the context of armed conflict; (5) dowry-related killings of women and girls; (6) killing of women and girls because of their sexual orientation and gender identity; (7) the killing of aboriginal and indigenous women and girls because of their gender; (8) female infanticide and gender-based sex selection foeticide; (9) genital mutilation related femicide; (10) accusations of witchcraft; and (11) other femicides connected with gangs, organized crime, drug dealers, human trafficking, and the proliferation of small arms (Laurent et al., 2013: 4).

Moreover, in Mexico, the number of violent female homicides has been increased in the last few years. According to data provided by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI) (2021) on the years 2010-2015, 7,378 femicides were registered, while in 2015-2020, 9547 homicides against women were reported. Besides, the government has not had effective measures to mitigate gender violence. There appears to be impunity in the majority of criminal cases. In 2018, 93.2% of crimes were either not investigated or reported (INEGI, 2019). Similar to this, femicide cases have not received the necessary attention. The authorities do not continue with a formal investigation. Then, there is no punishment by the justice system for the murder. These statistics reveal the dangerous situation that women encounter living in Mexico.

3. Methodology

This section aims to describe the methodology used to carry out this study. First, I selected the song *Querida Muerte* by Renne Goust (2019). This song describes the fear experienced by women when they are in the streets alone and some harassment events. Due to the relation of this discourse with the current femicide context in Mexico, the analysis followed the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach by Halliday. The following section contains details regarding the process of the analysis based on Halliday’s framework.

3.1 Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Halliday’s framework is contemplated as the main base of CDA (Wang, 2010). It deals with how speakers convey meaning through spoken or textual discourse (Haratyan, 2011). Halliday (1978) explains that from an SFL view, discourse is seen as:

A multidimensional process and text as its product not only embodies the same kind of polyphonic structuring as is found in grammar, (in the structure of the clause, as message, exchanges and representation), but also since it is functioning at a higher level of the code, as the realization of semiotic orders “above” language, may contain in itself all the inconsistencies, contradictions and conflicts that can exist within and between such high order semiotic systems (p. 96).

Then, discourse is considered as a multidimensional procedure, which involves three main metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Haratyan, 2011). Table 1 describes the functions of each category.

Table 1. Functions of Systematic Functional Linguistics (Haratyan, 2011; Romo Linares, 2018)

Ideational Metafunction	This category is based on transitivity. It deals with how ideas are transmitted through six processes: material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential.
Interpersonal Metafunction	This represents how the information is conveyed (imperative, interrogative, declarative). It also deals with the use of tenses, and the type of adjectives.
Textual Metafunction	It refers to the structure of the sentences to achieve coherence in discourse.

The information in Table 1 outlines what each metafunction entails. The ideational is related to how people convey ideas. Those thoughts could be through six processes: material (a verb that is the doer of the sentence, e.g., give, run); mental (is related to perceptions, and reactions, e.g., believe, look); relational (represents the identification of features and attributes, e.g., she is tall); verbal (characterizes the verbs to describe or exchange information, e.g., say, tell); behavioral (describes the physiological and psychological needs, e.g., smiling, crying); and existential (is connected to something that exists, e.g., there is a bus) (Wang, 2010). Next, the interpersonal metafunctions categorize how the information is delivered. It can be in an imperative (be careful), interrogative (is she a girl?), or declarative (she is a girl) form. Finally, the textual metafunction deals with the flow of the discourse. It also represents how the sentences rhyme and achieve coherence. Moreover, the song was divided into stanzas to carry out the analysis of the three metafunctions. In the following section, I will illustrate the process of each element of the analysis and the results

4. Findings and discussion

This section represents the findings based on the three metafunctions from Halliday’s framework. I will discuss each part of the analysis which was divided into three sections. The first is related to the ideational metafunction and it involves the six SFL processes. The second part of the analysis deals with the interpersonal function, which describes the mood analysis, use of tenses, and adjectives of the discourse. The last section analyses the textual metafunction that is concerned with how the text is unified to convey the expected meaning. Table 2 provides information regarding the number of tokens and types of the song that is under study.

Table 2. Tokens and types in the song’s lyrics

Item	No.	%
Tokens	330	100
Types	139	42.12

The data from Table 2 show the total of tokens that the song has. It also provides information regarding the variety of linguistic units that corresponds to 42.12% of the discourse; It means that the lyrics may be repetitive. The song starts and ends with the same stanza and the chorus is repeated two times. Even though it does not contain an extensive vocabulary, the author conveys a powerful and significant message.

4.1 Ideational metafunction

This metafunction is based on a transitivity analysis. Halliday (1985) defines transitivity “as a major component in the experiential function of the clause that deals with the “transmission of ideas “representing ‘processes’ or ‘experiences’: actions, events, processes of

consciousness and relations” (as cited in Haratyan, 2011: 261). It encompasses six processes (material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, existential) (see Table 1). Table 3 demonstrates the results from the six procedures as well as some examples from the discourse.

Table 3. Transitivity analysis

Process	No.	%	Examples of the process
Material	21	34.4	<i>matar</i> (kill), <i>correr</i> (run), <i>ir</i> (go)
Mental	11	18	<i>ver</i> (look), <i>gustar</i> (like)
Relational	12	20	<i>femicida</i> (femicide), <i>libre</i> (free)
Verbal	3	5	<i>decir</i> (Say)
Behavioral	2	3	<i>rabia</i> (anger), <i>preocupacion</i> (worry)
Existential	12	19.6	<i>yo</i> (I), Forms of to be

The results showed that the author used material process (34.4%) to describe actions that have been done in Mexico. Some examples are the following: *Ya no nos maten* (Stop killing us), *Sera que lo mejor es ir a prisa* (Would it be best to speed up my pace), *Estan afuera libres emborrachando a alguna chica* (They are free, out there getting some girls drunk). Based on the sentences, it can be observed that they might represent real situations that happen in Mexico. Therefore, the reader could treat the clauses as facts about the situation in the Mexican country.

The second most used process was the relational (20%). This process classifies certain people or objects depending on where they belong. Some of the sentences that demonstrate this, are the following: *Ahora estar de suerte es que tu novio no resulte violador, abusador o femicida* (Consider yourself lucky if your boyfriend does not turn out to be a rapist, an abuser, or a femicide), *Ciudad exponencialmente pesada* (This city is exponentially dangerous). By these examples, the reader might understand the possible risks that women could encounter living in Mexico.

The verbal process was used 5% of the time and the behavioral one 3% of the time. These two processes were the least used. The first procedure is related to the actions to exchange information. An example of this is *Mi madre me decía ten cuidado* (My mother used to tell me be careful). Regarding the behavioral one, it encompasses emotions and feelings. The following sentence represents this process *No se si le mortifique que alguna mujer los mate* (I don't think she's worried that a woman might kill them). In these two examples, it is possible that the reader might perceive the following: a piece of advice that the mother gives to her daughter and a description of some emotions.

4.2 Interpersonal metafunction

This metafunction encompasses a modality analysis which examines “all uses of language to express social and personal relations. This includes the various ways the speaker enters a speech situation and performs a speech act” (Hu Zhuanglin, 1988: 313). The objective of the text that is under study is to show what Mexican women face in their country. In the mood analysis, the results indicated that the declarative clauses were used 43% of the time. The following sentence is an example of this statistical item: *Estar de suerte ahora es estar viva* (Consider yourself lucky if you are alive). It represents that the author of the song conveys the statements as facts or situations that are happening in Mexico. This discourse also uses 30% of the time imperative clauses. An example of this is *Ya no nos maten* (Stop killing us). This type of sentence expresses requests, orders, or commands. With this category of utterances, the readers can perceive what Mexican women desire: to be safe. Finally, the interrogative clauses were used 27%

of the time. The author included some questions. It makes readers aware of the doubts a woman has when she feels in danger (e.g., *¿Será que lo mejor es ir a prisa Mientras doy vuelta en la esquina De los ojos que me acechan?* Would it be best to speed up my pace while I turn that corner where those eyes are staring at me?).

Based on the mood analysis, it might be possible to identify what the author wants to express which is related to some situations that women have experienced, more specifically femicides. Then the audience might understand how women feel in the streets. Table 4. Provides information regarding the modality analysis of the lyrics of the song.

Table 4. Mood Analysis

Statistical item	No.	%	Example
Imperative	11	30	<i>ya no nos maten</i> (stop killing us)
Declarative	16	43	<i>ciudad exponencialmente pesada</i> (this city is exponentially dangerous)
Interrogative	10	27	<i>¿será que les aguanto la mirada?</i> (Should I stare back at them?)

Moreover, Table 5 provides information regarding the analysis of tenses of the lyrics of the song. The results demonstrated that 63% of the time the author uses verbs in the present tense. It indicates that the author tries to convey evidence of a current social topic. Then, the second tense most used was the infinitive one. It was used 29% of the time to express some advice for a woman. An example of this is the following utterance: *Mi madre me decía ten cuidado* (My mother used to tell me to be careful). With these types of sentences, the audience might understand what a woman needs to be cautious of when she is alone.

Table 5. Use of tenses

Statistical item	No.	%	Example
Present	35	63	<i>ver</i> (look), <i>matar</i> (kill), <i>tomar</i> (drink)
Past	2	4	<i>dijo</i> (said)
Infinitive	16	29	<i>hacer</i> (to do)
Future	2	4	<i>correremos</i> (will run)

The last level of this process is related to the usage of adjectives. The author of this text does not use many of them. The total of these linguistic units in the discourse is 13. Table 6 demonstrates that the negative adjectives are the most used. They describe some situations, for example: *Ahora estar de suerte es que tu novio no resulte violador, abusador o femicide* (Consider yourself lucky if your boyfriend does not turn out to be a rapist, an abuser, or a femicide). With these types of utterances, the reader might understand how difficult the situation is in Mexico.

Table 6. Use of adjectives

Statistical item	No.	%	Examples
Positive adjectives	5	38.5	<i>Querida</i> (dear), <i>viva</i> (alive)
Negative adjectives	8	61.5	<i>peligrosa</i> (dangerous), <i>abusador</i> (abuser)

Also, the usage of positive adjectives represents 38.5% of the discourse (e.g., *Querida Muerte*). Even though the author used some positive adjectives, they seem to be negative due to their context. In general, the reader might not perceive them as positive for the context of the song.

4.3 Textual metafunction

This metafunction “refers to the fact that language has mechanisms to make any stretch of spoken or written discourse into a coherent and unified text and make a living passage different from a random list of sentences” (Wang, 2010, p. 260). The song *Querida Muerte* has the objective to illustrate the current situation that many Mexican women live. The following verse reflects the first lines of the song:

Si observas desde afuera no lo notas Pero una duda crece en mi cabeza ¿Será que lo mejor es ir a prisa Mientras doy vuelta en la esquina De los ojos que me acechan? ¿Será que les aguanto la mirada? ¿O será mejor andar Y dar la vuelta en otra cuadra?. La otra cuadra es un poco lo mismo Ciudad exponencialmente pesada / If you just glanced at me you wouldn't notice, but there is a doubt that grows inside my head. Would it be best to pick up my pace while I turn that corner where those eyes are staring on me? Should I stare back at them? Or would it be best to walk and turn at the next corner? The next corner is basically the same. This city is exponentially dangerous.

Firstly, it tells a story of a woman asking herself what to do when she is in danger. This group of clauses makes the audience feel the situation pretending they are the woman. Then this catches the attention of the audience but at the same time makes them feel some emotions (frustration or anxiety). Then, the author provides some advice that a mother gives to her daughter:

Mi madre me decía “Ten cuidado”. Mejor no andar de noche por las calles y fíjate muy bien que cualquier trago que te tomes te lo sirvan cuando estés ahí delante[...] Yo ya no sé qué hacer con esta rabia. Lo mismo mis amigas y pareja Denuncias y denuncias y denuncias y denuncias Y nomás no se ve nadie tras las rejas. / My mother used to tell me “Be careful”. It's best you not be out alone at night and make sure that anything you drink is poured right before your eyes [...] I don't know what to do with this anger neither my friends nor my couple. We press charges upon charges and there is no one in jail.

Some female readers might feel identified with this part of the song because it reflects the impunity in criminal cases. It also seems that the government has not paid sufficient attention to femicides. In general, the whole text is organized, logical, and accurate. Its sequence encourages the audience to continue listening by making them aware of the reality of femicides in Mexico. It represents what the author desired to communicate. This song is a message for society to feel empathy towards the situation that women live in Mexico.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, in this study, I analyzed the lyrics of the song *Querida Muerte*. This analysis was achieved by implementing a CDA approach, which informs regarding social issues in any discourse. The exploration also followed the metafunctions of the SFL model to carry out the analysis. Considering the relation between feminism and language; This discourse is evidence that women use language to convey how they feel and to claim social justice. The results of the analysis demonstrated that the lyrics of this song contain the following: declarative clauses, present verbs, and negative adjectives. It shows that the author decided to reflect on recent dangerous events that women experience in Mexico. Language is powerful, and women are using it to express their tiredness of being in constant danger. It is time to speak out for justice.

Acknowledgements

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The author declares no competing interests.

References

- Blommaert, J., & Bulcaen, C. (2000). Critical discourse analysis. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 29, 447-466. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/223428>.
- Goust, R. (2019, November 3). *Querida muerte (No nos maten) en vivo en Ciudad Juárez* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejSwNqgmigM>.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic*. Edvard Arnold Press.
- Haratyan, F. (2011). Halliday's SFL and social meaning. *IPEDR*, (17), 260-264. <http://www.ipedr.com/vol17/49-CHHSS%202011-H10074.pdf>.
- Hu Zhuang, L. (1988). *A course of linguistics*. Peking University Press.
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (2019, September 24). Encuesta nacional de victimización y percepción sobre seguridad pública (ENVIPE) 2019. https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/envipe/2019/doc/envipe2019_presentacion_nacional.pdf.
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (2021, January, 26). Datos preliminares revelan que de enero a junio de 2020 se registraron 17123 homicidios. https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/saladeprensa/boletines/2021/EstSociodemo/Defcion_eshomicidio_En-Jun2020.pdf.
- Jackson, S. (1998). Feminist social theory. In S. Jackson & J. Jones (Eds.), *Contemporary feminist theories* (pp. 12-33). Edinburgh University Press.
- Jackson, S., & Jones, J. (1998). *Contemporary feminist theories*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Kelly, L. (1994). Stuck in the middle. *Trouble and Strife*, 29(30), 46-50.
- Knight, K. (2006). Transformations of the concept of ideology in the twentieth century. *American Political Science Review*, 100(4), 619-626.
- Laurent, C., Platzer, M., & Idomir, M. (2013). *Femicide: A global issue that demands action*. Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) Vienna Liaison Office.
- Musixmatch (2021, May 10). *Lyrics querida muerte (no nos maten) Renee Goust*. <https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Renee-Goust/Querida-Muerte-No-Nos-Maten>.
- Romo Linares, R. (2018). Los mirreyes de outlet: A critical discourse analysis on a broadcast portraying the postmodern lifestyle of Mexican Middle class. *Open Journal for Studies in Linguistics*, 1(2), 47-56. <https://doi.org/10.32591/coas.ojsl.0102.03047m>
- Todolí, J., Labarta, M., & Dolón, R. (2006). What is critical discourse analysis? *Quaderns de Filologia - Estudis Lingüístics*, 11, 9-34. <https://ojs.uv.es/index.php/qfilologia/article/view/5041>.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Ideology and discourse analysis. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11(2), 115-140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310600687908>
- Wang, J. (2010). A critical discourse analysis of Barack Obama's speeches. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 1(3), 254-261. <http://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.1.3.254-261>

