

The moralizing discourse of Justo Arosemena through the catechism

El discurso moralizante de Justo Arosemena a través del catecismo

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Abstract

The article presented the bibliographical documentation used as the basis for the doctoral research entitled *Justo Arosemena, Discourse and Identity: A Linguistic Study*. The study included, among other documents, an analysis of the catechism-type work *Principles of Political Morality Written in a Catechism* by Panamanian lawyer and politician Justo Arosemena, a work that we analyze in this article. Arosemena stood out during the 19th century for his role in the quest for independence and the construction of the Panamanian nation. The article was structured in three parts: the first offered a historical documentary compilation to provide a preliminary context for the 19th century in the Isthmus of Panama; the second presented a bibliographic review of the theory used, followed by the literature of the documents analyzed, which facilitated the inquiry and deepening of the study. The third part included the conclusion and bibliography. The methodology used was based on a linguistic corpus that was codified to facilitate the study. The value of the article lay in the fact that it is the first time that a critical discourse analysis has been carried out using the technique of compiling a vast corpus of selected writings by Justo Arosemena, utilizing linguistic strategies, which allowed for an in-depth assessment of the production chosen for study.

Key words: 19th century, corpus, catechism genre, political discourse.

Resumen

El artículo tuvo como objetivo exponer la documentación bibliográfica que fundamentó la investigación doctoral *Justo Arosemena, discurso e identidad: Estudio lingüístico*. El estudio incluyó, entre otros documentos, el análisis de la obra del género catecismo *Principios de Moral Política redactados en un catecismo* del abogado y político panameño Justo Arosemena, obra analizada en este artículo, figura clave del siglo XIX por su activa participación en los procesos de independencia y en la consolidación de la identidad nacional panameña. El artículo se estructuró en tres partes: la primera ofreció una recopilación documental histórica para proporcionar un contexto preliminar del siglo XIX en el istmo de Panamá; la segunda presentó una revisión bibliográfica de la teoría utilizada, seguida de la literatura de los documentos analizados, lo cual facilitó la indagación y profundización del estudio. Y la tercera parte incluyó la conclusión y la bibliografía. La metodología que se empleó se basó en un corpus lingüístico que se codificó para facilitar el manejo del estudio. El valor del artículo radicó en que es la primera vez que se realiza un análisis crítico del discurso mediante la técnica de la recopilación de un vasto corpus de los escritos seleccionados de Justo Arosemena, utilizando estrategias lingüísticas, lo cual permitió valorar en profundidad la producción elegida para el estudio.

Palabras clave: siglo XIX, corpus, género catecismo, discurso político.

INTRODUCTION

The bibliographic documentation presented in this doctoral research provided the necessary context to examine one of the key works in the chosen corpus: *Principles of Political Morality Written in a Catechism*. Published in 1848 in Bogotá, Colombia, this work belonged to the catechism genre and emerged during a period characterized by the abundant publication of similar texts in Europe and Latin America, contexts in which numerous publications rooted in the Catholic catechism proliferated as part of the magisterium at the service of the faith of the people of God (Carvajal Blanco, 2019, p. 82).

This article sought to analyze this document using a methodology based on corpus analysis. This approach includes the collection and coding of the twelve chapters of the catechism. In addition, the catechetical genre was investigated in the particular context of Arosemena, focusing on the ideological linguistic analysis underlying his reflections on morality, duties, and politics. Arosemena proposed these principles with the intention of forming better citizens in the Isthmus of Panama. The study examined the discursive strategies and linguistic resources employed by Arosemena, contextualized within the Colombian-Panamanian period of the 19th century. This analysis also covers the context of the catechisms written by Colombian ideologues (and others) of the time, from the independence of the Spanish American countries to the end of the period known as Radicalism. The results of this research will provide valuable insights into moralizing discourse and its implications for identity formation in the Isthmus of Panama.

The article presented the bibliography used as the basis for research on one of the works included in the doctoral study entitled *Justo Arosemena, Discourse and Identity: A Linguistic Study*. Specific objectives were also presented. The first emphasized analyzing the discursive strategies and linguistic resources used by Justo Arosemena in his catechism through a detailed analysis of the corpus. The second objective emphasized investigating how the content of Arosemena's catechism influenced the construction of moral identity, civic duties, and political orientations of Panamanian citizens in the 19th century.

Likewise, it was analyzed whether, through the catechism genre and its discursive characteristics, Justo Arosemena had a significant impact on the behavior, morals, duties, and political actions of Panamanian citizens in the 19th century. The aim is to analyze whether these values, promoted through the catechism, contributed significantly to the process that led to the separation of the Isthmus of Panama from Colombia, and to highlight that this impact was crucial in assessing Arosemena's role in the formation of a regional identity and in the consolidation of the principles that guided the separatist movement in the historical context of the time.

DEVELOPMENT

The "catechism" genre

The genre of "catechism" is deeply linked to the Catholic catechism, although its creation cannot be attributed to a single theorist. Instead, its development has been influenced by various key figures in the history of religious and educational thought. A relevant starting point is the contribution of the Spanish theologian San Juan de Ávila, whose work *Audi, Filia* (de Ávila, 1573) had a significant influence on catechism pedagogy, as his book contains 113 chapters dealing with various religious topics, such as remedies against bad language, the authenticity of the Catholic faith, deceptions about spiritual feelings and their remedies, prayer, meditation, penance, and the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ; how God hears us, looks upon us with mercy, love of neighbor, among other topics that we associate with the moral arguments developed by Justo Arosemena in his catechism.

It should be reiterated that the catechism is embedded in a religious, social, cultural, and political context that reflects the concerns of the churches (Carvajal Blanco, 2019). Justo Arosemena's catechism is written in an instructive manner, with the aim of shaping people's behavior through its recommendations. Its function is comparable to that of the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai, which provide guidelines on how to live in accordance with God's will.

At this point, it should be noted that the catechism genre emerged to address religious ignorance among adults and to educate children in the Christian faith. Over time, this genre took on an apologetic tone, defending the Catholic Church and responding to the challenges it faced (Carvajal Blanco, 2019). In its modern form, as used by Justo Arosemena, the catechism is characterized by a question-and-answer format (Tovar González, 1999). In addition, it employs a petition-and-answer structure based on moral, social, behavioral, and political precepts. Arosemena's catechism is part of a prolific 19th-century trend, addressing topics such as "the duties that morality imposes on legislators." It also stands out for its objection-response structure, as seen in the phrase: "But courage is not an effect of the will (...)" (Arosemena, Catechism, 1848). The politician directed his catechism to the youth of the time, encouraging them in a context of hopelessness, lack of education, and political turmoil. The country could not meet their needs or be a palliative for their needs and hopes.

DISCUSSION OF THE THEORY

In relation to the documentation consulted, the author who most closely resembles the work carried out with Justo Arosemena's catechism is Leonardo Tovar González, a professor at Santo Tomás University in the area of Colombian Philosophy, Latin, and Political Ethics. He has written a significant number of documents based on 19th-century history, politics, and catechisms. Among other authors from earlier times is de Ávila (Tovar González, 1999), a Spanish theologian who influenced catechism pedagogy with his work *Escucha, hija* (Audi, Filia), a work that is presented as one of the first formulations of Christian doctrine in catechism format. A little closer to our present day, and not directly related to catechism, we have Bakhtin (1996, as cited in Marrero Acosta & Rodríguez Palmero, 2007), whose theory is associated with discourse analysis and discursive genres, so his contribution is considered to provide a theoretical basis for analyzing catechism as a specific genre. Along the same lines, Michele Foucault's work on power and knowledge, and how discursive practices are constructed, can also offer a perspective on how catechisms transmit and consolidate social norms and doctrines (Ávila-Fuenmayor, 2006).

Historical context

Regarding Panama's historical situation during the 19th century, it should be remembered that Justo Arosemena grew up in a turbulent century. He was born in 1817, and Panama gained independence from Spain in 1821 (when the writer was four years old). His education took place amid the union with Gran Colombia, and his adult life unfolded throughout this century of turmoil and ideals for a better life for the Isthmus people. His work was focused on the pursuit of independence and nation building (Aparicio & Beluche, 2018), among other things. Justo Arosemena's catechism is an example of tradition, but also of the transition from the religious to the political/social, following the Enlightenment.

The 19th century was a period in which numerous catechisms were published. Regarding the information gathered on the catechisms published during the early 19th century, it was found that in 1810, a manuscript entitled *Catecismo Político Cristiano* (Christian Political Catechism) prepared for the Instruction of the Peoples of South America, circulated in Santiago, Chile. The author was anonymous, signing with the pseudonym José Amor de la Patria. This document, like that of Justo Arosemena, was dedicated to young people. In one section, the anonymous author writes: "The education of young people is one of the most essential foundations of human society. Without it, peoples are barbaric and enslaved, eternally eternally burdened by the harsh yoke of servitude and worry (...)" (Amor de la Patria, 1810, p. 1).

In our bibliographic search, we also found the work of priest and lawyer Juan Fernández de Sotomayor y Picón, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, who published the *Catecismo o Instrucción Popular* (Catechism or Popular Instruction) between 1777 and 1849. Like Justo Arosemena, he was a deputy and devoted himself to political action in favor of independence, while also serving as a priest. His political and pseudo-religious work forms an important part of this bibliography (Medellín Becerra & Fajardo Rivera, 2005).

In 1821, Miguel Lizarralde published *Catecismo Político Arreglado a la Constitución de la República de Colombia* (Political Catechism Arranged According to the Constitution of the

Republic of Colombia), intended for use in elementary schools in the Department of Orinoco, Colombia. In it, the author pointed out that his experience dictated that it was necessary to instruct young people in fundamental principles because they repeated expressions such as independence, homeland, government, laws, and freedom, but were unable to understand their meaning. He therefore devised the political catechism to somehow remedy this problem (Grau, 1822).

A document of great importance is the work of Colombian Juan José Nieto, who in the introduction to his work ***Deberes y Derechos del Hombre en Sociedad*** (*Duties and Rights of Man in Society*) makes it clear that:

Although citizens' rights and duties are outlined in the Constitution, not everyone has access to it. For this reason, it is very useful to have an excerpt of these rights and duties taken from the country's institutions and from the natural and public law of nations, so that reading them is less tedious and tiresome (Nieto, 2011).

With this, he indicates that his work, written with greater simplicity, is easier to understand than the complex instructions found in state laws and codes.

A small catechism was found in the pages of the Cervantes Virtual Library. It is a document written by Pinzón, a civil servant during the Republican period in Santander, Colombia. He was a teacher, lawyer, jurist, politician, and state official. The document deals with orders for the drafting of a Republican instruction, addressed to the military corps of the Colombian Guard with the intention of training the members of this martial corps in values, at the request of the president of the United States of Colombia at that time, Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera. The document is considered to emphasize motivations and the awakening of moral and political values with which the troops would increase their self-esteem and the value they represented for the country (Pinzón, 1865).

The bibliography used for this article includes a short manual written by Colombian author Santiago Pérez (1882). The author served as part-time president of the United States of Colombia and was a professor, writer, politician, and ambassador to Washington. While he was a

university professor, he had Rufino José Cuervo as a student, and coincidentally, both were founding members of the Colombian Academy of Language. His philological work dates back to his youth and marked the beginning of the spread of Bello's grammatical doctrine in Colombia. Among other works, he wrote ***Compendio de Gramática Castellana*** (*Compendium of Spanish Grammar*), based on Bello's work. The work in question, ***Manual del Ciudadano*** (*Citizen's Manual*), was intended to disseminate comprehensive instruction on issues related to civic and moral behavior in the Sovereign State of Panama, which at that time belonged to the United States of Colombia (Pérez, 1882).

Justo Arosemena's Catechism

The bibliographic collection concludes with the work that inspired this article, entitled ***Principios de Moral Política, redactados en un catecismo*** (*Principles of Political Morality, written in a catechism*) by Justo Arosemena, a native of the Isthmus.

Panamanian history in the 19th century presents a series of events in favor of the emancipation of the Isthmus of Panama from Colombia by Panamanian politicians and citizens. Once independence from Spain was achieved, the Central American isthmus suffered the same situation as other countries in the area, with confrontations, conflicts, civil wars, and political problems, which gave rise to outbreaks of regionalism and displays of patriotism in the isthmus. Educated men of the time, such as the lawyer, prominent intellectual, and Panamanian writer Justo Arosemena, became involved in the liberation process of the Isthmus of Panama, as his ideal was to see the isthmus free from all foreign oppression and subjugation.

Justo Arosemena's work presents a question-and-answer structure in 12 chapters. Important notes were extracted from these chapters, which are detailed below:

The question/answer structure within the catechism is a key pedagogical method that facilitates instruction (characteristic of the discursive mode of catechisms) and understanding of doctrinal and moral principles. This structure works as follows: A question or request (representing the petition) is noted, and then an answer is provided that clarifies or expresses the required information. This

is a particularly effective way of establishing communication in educational texts and for training the receiver, because it organizes the information in line with the interactive learning process. An example of this, found in the catechism, is: “Decide on the duties that morality imposes on legislators” (Chapter III:5). This would be the petition, represented in the clear request to set out the moral duties that legislators must practice. The answer to this request would be a detailed explanation of those duties, based on the moral principles that the catechism aims to teach (Carvajal Blanco, 2019). This structure, used by Justo Arosemena, facilitates teaching and preserves the pedagogical tradition.

Regarding the objection/response structure found in Justo Arosemena’s Catechism, we observe that catechisms use this rule to anticipate and address possible doubts or counterarguments that the reader or receiver might have. For example, the objection presents a question or criticism of a statement, while the response provides an explanation or defense of the proposal. This can be illustrated with the following case from J. Arosemena’s catechism, “But courage is not an effect of the will (...)” (Chapter IV: 12); this represents an objection to a possible previous statement, and the response would be refuting it and offering a more complete view of the subject (Martínez, 2014).

A key point in catechisms, according to research and observation, is addressing a plural interlocutor. This modality also appears in Justo Arosemena’s catechism and is manifested through imperative requests addressed through a “you” and used in the following way. The catechism contains imperatives addressed to a group of people: “Designate the first ones” or “Designate their main moral duties” (Chapter XII: 41). The quote shows us how the text addresses a community, probably with the intention of getting the group to reflect and respond together. With this technique, the catechism aims to become a means, a tool for collective teaching. In other cases, the catechism directly addresses the group with questions such as: “Do you have another reason for not specifying individually all the moral duties of the head of state?” (Chapter IV: 9). This direct questioning reinforces the participatory nature of the text, encouraging the plural reader or a group of 19th-century young people to respond to the questions in a critical and reflective way (López, 2015).

Another point addressed by Justo Arosemena’s catechism is the concept of “Morality” and its variants: political morality, moral lessons, moral duties. These concepts form the fundamental basis of the catechism and appear both in the title and in the chapters, highlighting their central role in the author’s thinking. The repetition of these terms highlights the importance the author attaches to morality as a fundamental principle for regulating the behavior of 19th-century Panamanians. The numerous times the writer uses these terms indicate that morality is not only a guide for personal behavior, but also the basis for constructing laws and performing civic duties. As for the content of the catechism, it is believed that the constant repetition of these concepts reinforces thematic coherence, ensuring that moral principles are integrated into all aspects of social and political life described in the text (Gómez, 2010).

Another fundamental aspect that Justo Arosemena develops in his catechism is the terms “*duty*” and “*utility*.” The concept of duty is central to his work, as it is related to political morality. The *Diccionario Panhispánico del Español Jurídico* (Pan-Hispanic Dictionary of Legal Spanish) was also consulted, from which the following definition was obtained: “A duty is what people are obliged to do, either for moral reasons or by law.” It is understood, then, that citizens have obligations rather than rights, since awareness of their duties or obligations will bring about order and social well-being (Busato and Montes, 2009). The author frequently uses the periphrasis of obligation and the verb “must” to emphasize the importance of the responsibilities of citizens and rulers (Martínez Díaz, 2002). For example: “Express the duties of agents and politicians located in the sections of the territory.” / Answer: “They consist of religiously complying with superior orders and acting in their section as the head of state throughout the territory, but always under his authority” (Arosemena, chapter IV: 11).

On the other hand, the term “utility” (usefulness) is included, which also appears several times in Justo Arosemena’s catechism as an important aspect of the text. Utility refers to the ability of something to be useful, that is, to satisfy a need or improve a situation (Flores Cedeño, 2018). In the political context, utility can be related to the way in which policies and laws serve the common good and government efficiency. In his work, the writer uses the concept to evaluate and justify the

policies and decisions of the government of his time. In his catechism, he asks whether a policy is beneficial and effective in practice and whether it achieves its stated objectives. This way of thinking about “utility” is deeply influenced by the principles of the Enlightenment (18th century). During this historic Age of Enlightenment, it was promoted that knowledge and actions should be evaluated based on their ability to improve human well-being and provide practical benefits (Kant, 2009).

CONCLUSIONS

This article has been made possible thanks to the contributions of various authors, selected for their relevance in lending credibility to the study. The theoretical discussion includes the Spanish theologian San Juan de Ávila, whose work *Audi, Filia* (1573), with its eminently religious discourse, represents the first pedagogical example with characteristics of catechism. In addition, the discourse analysis theory of Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin was used, which was fundamental to the linguistic analysis of this work and the future doctoral thesis. Michel Foucault's research on power and knowledge, related to the content of Arosemena's Catechism and other works analyzed, were also considered.

Among the authors who explored the subject of catechism was the Colombian priest and lawyer Juan Fernández de Sotomayor y Picón, with his publications *Catecismo o Instrucción Popular* (Catechism or Popular Instruction, 1777 and 1849). The work of Miguel Lizarralde, *Catecismo Político Arreglado a la Constitución de la República de Colombia* (Political Catechism Arranged According to the Constitution of the Republic of Colombia, 1821), was also considered. Likewise, Colombian researcher José Nieto was taken into account in *Deberes y Derechos del Hombre en Sociedad* (Duties and Rights of Man in Society, 1821). He sought to make citizens' rights and duties understandable. Likewise, Pinzón (1865) was located, who wrote the *Catecismo Republicano: para instrucción popular* (Republican Catechism: for popular instruction), aimed at forming civic values in the military. In addition, Santiago Pérez's *Manual del Ciudadano* (Citizen's Manual, 1882), related to civic and moral behavior in the Sovereign State of Panama, was included in this article.

Finally, Justo Arosemena stands out as a lawyer, intellectual, politician, and writer who, in an era marked by upheaval and aspirations for change, reflected in his catechism the desire to leave a legacy for young people in his work: *Principios de Moral Política, Redactados en un Catecismo* (Principles of Political Morality, written in a Catechism), which reveals his intention to transmit essential knowledge and practices to the youth of his time, using the catechism genre prevalent in the 19th century.

A thorough analysis of the bibliography used demonstrates how the linguistic study of Arosemena's catechism provides valuable information applicable to current philological studies. The values embodied in his discourse not only offer lessons for the present generation, but also provide lasting messages for future generations interested in linguistics and the improvement of their country. Justo Arosemena's legacy lies in his ability to communicate universal principles that remain relevant and necessary in the contemporary context. The methodology of corpus analysis and critical analysis of written discourse allowed us to draw significant historical conclusions from a decisive 19th century for Panama, a prelude to its definitive separation from Gran Colombia on November 3, 1903.

Contribution to knowledge

First and foremost, the topic was chosen for its nationalistic value. As the search for documents progressed, others of historical value were discovered that were considered appropriate for a doctoral study or other future research, always framed within the critical analysis of written discourse, based on corpus linguistics. An added value was established precisely in the preparation and organization of the corpus, a very up-to-date line of research. Similarly, those writings that did not have the benefit of modern aids, such as technological systems, were also appreciated, and the documentary value of these texts was recognized, as they reflect with remarkable clarity the socio-political reality of their time and their contribution to the nationalist struggles of renowned Panamanians who forged a future for subsequent generations and left that testimony through their vast historical writings.

Limitations

The limitations encountered were related to the limited time available for research and writing due to work commitments. Another limitation was the scarcity of literature available in national libraries. Likewise, as these are documents from the 19th century by a deceased writer who belonged to the period when Panama was part of Colombia, the only documents available are those found on the internet.

As for bibliographic references, the document under study has not been the subject of recurrent analysis. It should be reiterated that it is a document written in the 19th century, so there are not many recent books or scientific studies that address it. During the course of the research, it was possible to locate some related documents in the Biblioteca Virtual Nacional de Colombia (National Virtual Library of Colombia), but they were difficult to download because they are highly protected. The solution is to travel to the neighboring country and obtain the necessary permission to access the required information.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest

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