

## Journalists: Their Mental Models Within President Lopez Obrador's Press

### Morning Conferences

*José Luis Palacios Islas*

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**Abstract:** The present study consisted in making a first approach to the knowledge of the mental models that guide the journalists practice who cover the morning conference “la mañanera”, offered by the president of Mexico, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO). The constructed mental model shows that the journalist conceives his practice in terms of being a petitioner, a collaborator with the government, a sympathetic subject of the president, a spokesperson for groups, who sometimes communicates his gratitude to the president for his actions to “save” us from arbitrariness committed, even, by the institutions of his own administration.

**Key words:** mental models, morninger, journalists, AMLO

#### 1. Introduction

The arrival, in December 2018, of Andrés Manuel López Obrador to the presidency of Mexico, created an informative style of its own. The morning press conference or “mañanera”, which takes place from Monday to Friday from 7:00 a.m. to after 9:00 a.m., in one of the rooms of the National Palace, Tesoreria Hall, is the target of controversy, whether in printed, electronic or digital press, whether national or foreign.

The “mañanera” scheme is fixed: The president appears on a stand before the community of journalists and proceeds to “report” on the activities of his administration. Its main tool is a lectern in which it places the documents that it will use in its exhibition. If required, he relies on the members of his Cabinet, those who wait, at the back of the place assigned to the president, for their turn to participate.

Whereas the speech, according to Fairclough (1995 [2010]), is “the use of language as a social practice” (p. 95), The purpose of this work is to carry out an analysis of a social practice such as the interventions of journalists in the “mañanera” conference. An important group are young people without journalistic experience, but with great experience in the use of digital tools, known as youtubers, who grab the first row of the room.

This work is a preliminary part of a larger project intended to make the discursive analysis of the lectures offered during the administration of President López Obrador. From a random sample of all the conferences held since December 2018, the one corresponding to April 8, 2020 was selected.



Image Taken From Excelsior.Com in the Front Row Mostly Digital Media Reporters

## 2. The Context

Incorporating Fuentes-Berain here (2001), the relationship of the Mexican print media — electronic media too — with government power since the post-revolutionary period it has been one of subordination, with very honorable exceptions. The resources used by the Mexican State have ranged from controlling the paper with which newspapers are printed to allocating huge amounts of money so that journalists — in the form of reporters, columnists, editorialists and media directors- maintain a favorable position towards the government in turn.

Despite the controls running smoothly for a respectable number of years, the fissures appeared at various times, according to the author in question:

During 1968, the student marches, passing through the important Paseo de la Reforma avenue, stopped at number 18, the address of the Excelsior newspaper, to shout: *Prensa vendida!* (treacherous press!)

The period between 1976 and 1977 stood out for the newspapers. Important media emerged, such as the weekly “*Proceso*” and the newspaper “*UnomasUno*”. Both would host a generation of reporters and editors who had been the victims of censorship.

In politics, the reform of Jesus Reyes Heróles, of 1977, entitled: Law of Political Organizations and Electoral Processes, made possible a democratic game between parties with ideologies and values different from those of

the official party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

In the period of José López Portillo (1976–1982), journalists were exhibited before the public with the famous presidential phrase: “I don't pay you to hit me.” Thus, began the rupture of the relationship between political power and the newspapers.

The government of Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1984) navigated the economic crisis: triple-digit inflation plus a sharp devaluation of the peso against the dollar. In this context, a newspaper oriented to economic phenomena emerges: *El Financiero*.

The magnitude of the economic problem as an obligatory issue for the media was combined with a crisis in the newspaper “*UnomásUno*”, which caused the departure of important figures of oppositional journalism, who founded, in September 1984, *La Jornada*, a newspaper conceived as a representative of the majority groups.

The controversy surrounding the results of the 1988 presidential election, in which the candidate of the official party, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, was the winner, becoming another key moment for citizens and the national press.

His administration was characterized by triumphalism: The signing of NAFTA entered Mexico into postmodernity, However, at the end of 1994, the uprising of the EZLN and the assassination of the PRI presidential candidate sent the message that the supposed bonanza was only superficial.

In 1993 “*Reforma*” appeared in Mexico City, as an expansion of the Inter-American Communication Consortium (CICSA, in Spanish), publisher, among others, of the newspaper “*El Norte*” in the city of Monterrey. Property of the Junco de la Vega family, the aspiration was that their newspapers would be guided by the rules of Anglo-Saxon journalism: distance from political power, informational balance, economic independence, separation of the editorial and the business and codes of ethics followed by the editorial staff.

After in the period of Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000), the Mexican press had already been uncovered and the levels of empowerment of society had increased, to such a degree that the alternation of power was not far off.

And the alternation, at least electorally, came with Vicente Fox (2000–2006). However, the initial optimism would not last long. Jiménez (2004) points out that the attitude of this president, although in his speech he guaranteed press freedom, in practice, the consensus of journalists from the “left” and “right” was that Fox despised the newspapers, expressed intolerance and exerted pressure to the written media in a form comparable to that applied by the president Luis Echeverría (1970–1976). Like its predecessors, Fox notably favored television represented by large networks such as Televisa and Televisión Azteca. Radio was less so.

Despite the fact that, in theory, cleanliness in the electoral processes was guaranteed in Mexico, the presidential election in which Felipe Calderón Hinojosa came to power for the 2006–2012 period was strongly impeached by the opposition candidate: Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

According to Baltazar (2011), the consensus of the journalists regarding the successes of the president is that only two can be counted: the meeting with the poet Javier Sicilia and the relatives of victims of violence, in the Castle of Chapultepec. The magnitude of these merits is not justified for a government that allocated more than 21 billion pesos in advertising, between December 2006 and May 2011.

Recovering the work of Baltazar, the political communication of the Calderon administration, in terms of generating the conditions to fulfill a government program and to win the next election, failed: he failed to keep his party in power, which returned to the former party official, the PRI.

The return of the PRI to power, represented by Enrique Peña Nieto (2012–2018), was again impeached by Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. One of the characteristics of this six-year term was to allocate enormous

resources to electronic media and, to a lesser extent, to print media. (Expansión Política, 2019).

In his third opportunity, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador arrives at the presidency to fulfill the period 2018–2024. According to Tamariz (2019), his success was sustained in the successful propaganda exercise by numerous youtubers.

One of the recent actions of the offices of the López Obrador administration has been to reduce the amounts of advertising destined for the media. Barragán (2019) shows the following figures: Between January and September 2019, the offices of the Government of President Lopez Obrador have allocated 143 million 384 thousand 278 pesos in official advertising. When comparing this amount with the expense exercised by Enrique Peña Nieto, in the same period, it would represent 7.4 percent of those 1,923 million 469 thousand 099.

### 3. Theoretical Resources

On theoretical resources, it is possible to incorporate into reflection the work of Schutz (1973) about the world of everyday life. It goes without saying that journalism is a component of everyday life, and it is from Schutz's perspective that there could be an obligatory precedent on the construction of models associated with various social environments.

In accordance with the same Schutz (1973), there is an inexorable link between mental models and (human) actions. Some decades later, one of the many aspects of Van Dijk's (2014) work refers to the nexus of mental models with a human action, which is discourse.

A basic notion for this author is that of social knowledge, defined as "the shared beliefs of an epistemic community, justified by contextually, historically and culturally variable criteria of reliability" (p. 21).

Continuing with the work of the mentioned author:

"the cognitive theory of discourse and processing is based on the assumptions that human language users represent their natural, social and communicative environments in terms of multimodal mental models" (p. 21).

Among many mental models that we can have in our memory, for the purposes of this work, the one of the ideologies stands out. Van Dijk (1998). Precisely, he presented a format of ideologies (pp. 69–70).

- Membership: Who we are? Where we are? How do we see ourselves? Who belongs to us? Who can become a member of our group?
- Activities: What do we do? What is expected of us? Why are we here?
- Goals: Why are we doing this? What do we want to do?
- Values/Rules: What are our main values? How do we evaluate ourselves and others? What (should not) be done?
- Position and group relationships: What is our social position? Who are our enemies, our opponents? Who are like us and who are different?
- Resources: What are the essential social sources that our group has or needs to have?

### 4. The Studies

The field of mental models has allowed numerous investigations to be carried out in various areas of social life. Thus, Merlino (2010) studied the argumentative models that inhabitants of Argentina used when talking about

the way they drive and the situation of car traffic in that country. Meanwhile, Adriana Bolívar (2011) studied the crises that have arisen in international conflicts. It was located in the apologies that are given in the process of negotiation and struggle, which, according to its findings, instead of contributing to the solution of controversies, can weaken the image of politicians and deepen the differences and the non-cooperation.

From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, D'Alessandro (2014) analyzed the different representations of the stonist regime, included in the Paraguayan History textbooks for secondary school, published between 1989 and 2008. In the representations of stonism, strong convictions were found such as the idea of peace and progress, representations that are decisive in the conformation of mental models of the students. Topics such as repression and the means used were omitted, silencing the consequences of the human rights violations during the dictatorship.

More recently, Álvarez-Muro (2016) used the concept of context to study the content of the conviction of Venezuelan politician Leopoldo Lopez to fourteen years in prison. This allowed him to explain the different ways that the prosecution and the accused used to evaluate the same communication situations. The author analyzed the mental models of democracy, civil disobedience and the movement called "La Salida".

Velte (2016) analyzed the coverage of the main Spanish media on the Basque conflict in its post-armed stage, focusing especially on the mental models promoted by those same media when they deal with the prisoners of the political conflict. In this sense, the media displayed an ideological square polarizing the interests of the prisoners and the Basque independence left on the one hand (the ex-group), and the interests of the Spanish State and Spanish society on the other (endo-group). The prisoners were mostly presented as perpetrators and guilty.

Salgado (2016) attended to the government's position on labor legislation in garment workshops. The branch presented a high level of non-registration, which included the work of people in conditions of servitude — mainly migrants from Bolivia — who were transferred through trafficking networks. The author also analyzed the statements of the Minister of Labor Carlos Tomada, who defended a modification on the loss of rights. Through Critical Discourse Analysis, she developed the inferred mental model from her speech.

## **5. The Methodology**

For the analysis of the texts, the work of Martin and White (2005) regarding evaluative discourse was used; the already mentioned contributions by Van Dijk (1998) on ideology, and those by Lakoff and Johnson (1986 [2012]) on metaphors in everyday life.

From a random sample of all the conferences held since December 2018, the one corresponding to April 8, 2020 was selected.

Two speeches by journalists attending the morning conference on April 8, 2020 were randomly selected. For reasons of space, the responses of President López Obrador were not included, which will be the subject of study in a later work. The name of each journalist was omitted for scientific ethics.

The unit of analysis was the video of the press conference held on the morning of April 8, 2020.

## **6. The Interventions of Journalists**

### **6.1 Intervention 1**

President, Good morning. I am (journalist's name), from Los Mochis. No more, not one more corrupt in government.

Analysis: This paragraph opens with the slogan: “*No more, not one more corrupt in government*”. The journalist, in terms of Van Dijk (1998), is assumed to be a supposed authorized spokesperson for an undetermined “we” who, according to the author of the statement, has the norms of “not being corrupt”. If we return to Martin and White (2005), a quantification is used to give strength to the expression in the form of zeroing, “**no more**”. This resource is complemented by what would constitute an intensification with repetition “**not one more corrupt**” in the government.

You have commented that thanks to this circular exercise agreements are made and that is how you find out about many things that are happening in this country, an exercise that Obama did not have and Trump does not have.

Analysis: In terms of the journalistic exercise and the exchange of information, there are some aspects that should be highlighted: Is the “mañanera” an informative event or a “circular exercise in which agreements are made”? In this “exercise”, the president “finds out about many things that happen in this country”. Here it is assumed that the president, due to his intrinsic condition and the resources at his disposal, must be aware of all the affairs of the country. Returning to the work of Martin and White, the **force** system is resorted to by means of **quantification**: the “mañanera” is a resource that not two of the presidents of the most powerful country in the world had within their reach: Obama and Trump. The use of both American presidents in the “mañanera” or any other resource is or was equal to **zero**. As can be seen from the format of the ideologies of Van Dijk (1998), the “mañanera” is one of “our values” and a resource worthy of appreciation.

Mexico's adversaries and its disinformation systems point out, criticize, that steps are being taken here. The people of Mexico, a large part of the people, see some of those present here as a bridge between them and the government that you lead. Those (sic) are not negotiations, it must be remembered, it is collaborating with this government.

Analysis: Returning to Van Dijk (1998), a membership challenge is manifested: they, the adversaries of Mexico — among whom are its journalists — have misinformed and misinform, disqualifying the work of that “we who manage the demands of the people”, the journalists “who collaborate with this government”. The expression “bridge” from the perspective of Lakoff and Johnson (1986 [2012]), would constitute a metaphor to mean a “solid” and “imperishable” relationship of “we” journalists who, being representative of that great category that is “the people”, collaborate with this government.

I give you an example, two weeks ago I told you about the problem, rather the concern that the small milk producers of Guanajuato and Jalisco had before a new Liconsa guideline, your intervention has left this situation without effect. They asked me to thank you and Mr. Ovalle Rodríguez for understanding their situation and that generates economic peace on mind for them right now.

Last Tuesday, March 31, the undersecretary of health, Dr. Hugo López-Gatell, presented here the health security measures in essential activities, measure one, section C, spoke of the importance that they must remain open, curtains up and attending victim care centers to the population. They asked me to thank you and Mr. Ovalle Rodríguez for understanding their situation and that generates economic peace on mind for them right now.

Analysis: The journalist creates “a we” by assuming himself as a representative of the small milk producers of Guanajuato and Jalisco, who face an adverse guideline from a government agency: Liconsa, but thanks to the

intervention of the president this situation has been left without effect. Thus, and once again resorting to the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1986 [2012]), the president becomes the “savior”, but one who “generates tranquility” before the action of the institutions of his administration. Likewise, the journalist becomes the spokesperson for the gratitude of the small milk producers.

Today I am talking about men, women and children who are hungry, violated or with different capacities, the same ones who only served in the past government for a photo and a speech. The Executive Commission for Attention to Victims today more than a rheumatic elephant is an amputee elephant, the 2020 budget has not arrived.

President, on behalf of the men, women and children who are victims of this country, we ask for an intervention before the Ministry of Finance to release the budget, so that the commission can work calmly, but above all that those men, women and children with hunger, violated and with different capacities they may have one less worry. Thank you.

(After the president's response, the same journalist recovers the word to generate another intervention).

Analysis: In relation to the contributions of Martin and White (2005), an intensification based on repetition occurs in these last two paragraphs: speaking on behalf of men, women and children, either **when they suffer hunger**, are **violated**, or **have different capacities** and also when they are **victims of this country**. The purpose of this intensification is to morally enhance the journalist himself by turning him into an “unquestionable spokesperson” who acquires such a quality by representing equally “unquestionable” groups, such as men, women and children who are victims and with great deficiencies. Administratively speaking, once again the president acquires the role of “savior”, of “great lawyer” who makes an intervention so that the Ministry of Finance does what it must do. Here, the appropriate formula, speaking of journalistic work, would be aimed, predominantly, at replacing the act of “asking” for the act of asking the president why the aforementioned institution does not fulfill its job when sending the budget to the sites and conglomerates where it is needed. Although it sounds bombastic, if the president is the highest “officer”, why does he not perform his function by requiring other officers to fulfill their function?

## 6.2 Intervention 2

Good morning, president. (name of the journalist and means of origin). Just as a precision and as you well say, I reinforce and you are absolutely right, there must be a balance, and the only thing we ask is that, for example, to the digital ones, we were doing the account, it is 5% of the attendance and 95 the rest of the conventional means. I believe that both in the word and obviously in the assistance there must be that balance.

And we fully understand the situation of the health contingency, in fact, we agree that there is a shift, but that it is more equitable, more egalitarian, and not that it be done that way. Nothing else as reinforcement or even sending questions digitally, could also be an alternative, which could be studied as a possibility. It is just a proposal.

Analysis: Within these two paragraphs, the journalist begins his speech by making a claim because, on that date, the restriction of access to digital media was proposed to promote a “healthy distance” between journalists attending the conference. The gist of the claim is that the print media — many of them opposed to the president's administration — were granted a greater number of reporters to enter the conference. It starts from the assumption that the number must be equitable for both types of media. The journalist, who comes from a digital medium, is assumed, appealing to Van Dijk (1998), as part of an “understanding-we” with the president by virtue of the fact that the measure to restrict the access of reporters to digital media occurs as a consequence of the health

emergency. Speaking about the questions, the journalistic interest could have been expressed around knowing what the criteria were for making such a decision and who was responsible for it.

Mister President, I would like to expose you the following. Entering the subject, SMEs generate 80 percent of employment, here this issue has already been reinforced at this time in this formal conference in Mexico. These companies are forgetting somewhat, it is understood that there are large companies in Mexico that can withstand and overcome crises, you have been meeting these days with them. You are not asked to fall back into the error of contracting debt to rescue them, in fact you have also been quite emphatic, but a completely different situation that is happening with SMEs, I am referring specifically to micro-enterprises, those with one to 20 employees registered with the IMSS, which have also already shown these graphs. Its program of 500 thousand loans for family businesses, inns, shoe stores, and small stores will not benefit the bulk of this sector of the formal economy. Do you not think it is fair and necessary to open the door to be able to support these companies even more? Since with the amount that has been announced today, well, you have already been fine-tuning it and today you have specified it. In more detail, not doing so is turning your back on millions of small entrepreneurs who, as you said, are heroes, because they have made the least layoffs so far. Namely, this support of 25 thousand pesos, which is fair enough for these small companies, but to what extent is there really a projection that is benefiting them? That is sufficient or that there is a second stage, because definitely the majority, and the point has already been made here, are the ones that have sustained the most at this time of storm and that you have already raised here. Specifically, it would be this question and right now very quickly I will ask a second one.

Analysis: In this broad intervention by the reporter, it could be concluded that the essential question was, as the journalist himself puts it: "Do not you think it is fair and necessary to open the door to be able to further support these companies?", in reference to small and medium-sized companies. On the periphery of this question there is a set of ideas intended to praise small businesses, and the journalist takes up the words of the president in the following allocution: "To millions of small businessmen who, as you said, are 'heroes', because they have made the least layoffs so far." Here the intention is obvious to elevate the role of the entrepreneur, in this case "small and medium", by means of the use of a metaphor, continuing with Lakoff and Johnson (1986 [2012]). Thus, the scene of the health emergency acquires the character of war where the "heroes" appear. However, this metaphor involves an omission: they still own something, but the workers only have the salary they receive. They do not reach the quality of "heroes"; they are only unknown soldiers, but without a monument.

## **7. Conclusions**

If the "mañanera" is a discursive practice in which one wants to "inform", according to President Lopez Obrador, then it is worth asking: what could he understand as information? For Paoli (1983), information is the "set of mechanisms that allow the individual to take back the data from their environment and structure them in a certain way so that they serve as a guide for their action" (p. 15). If this is the concept of journalists attending the "mañanera", then the mental model or models of journalistic practice should be guided by this concept or a similar one. It was seen that in the interventions of this first approach, journalists are not guided by the need to obtain information to determine the degree of efficiency and effectiveness of the presidential administration. The mental model built on the discursive acts analyzed allows us to see that the journalist is a petitioner, a collaborator with the government, an understanding subject and a spokesperson for groups, who sometimes communicates his gratitude to the president for his actions to "save" us from arbitrariness committed, including, by the institutions of your own government. Given that the interventions of journalists are generally prolonged, and the interventions of the president tend to be longer, the informative potential of the morning is considerably reduced, and it



becomes more of a propaganda act than an informative one. The intensifications through repetition and strength endowments through quantifications were the resources used for this purpose.

In Mexico, new communicators with ideology are released, who support and defend Lopez Obrador, they present themselves as academics, then as specialists, analysts and finally they are “journalists”, readers of news, scripts or promote the ideology of the ruler in turn. Some of these analysts have the academic degree of Doctors, but they are neither journalists nor communicators, however, they became columnists in newspapers and hosts of public television programs.

Others who have practiced the profession of journalism, members of the Lopez Obrador government, are those who defended the left and today hold positions in the federal government. It is enough to make a query to the system of the General Directorate of Professions of the Public Education Secretariat to verify that journalism in Mexico is not carried out by professionals in the field but by those close to power, by recommendations, by friendship or by having a pleasant physiognomy.

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