

Topic #2

Radio report

Susana Herrera Damas, Ph. D.



Universidad
Carlos III de Madrid



Summary:

- Definition
- Characteristics
- Structure
- Some guidelines to write radio reports
- Types of radio reports
- “Threats” when writing radio reports
- Main steps when writing radio reports
- Some good radio reporter’s skills

Definition of the radio report:

- Relation of the radio report with other genres:

With the NEWS: in both genres, information is what's most important and the story sticks to the facts. However, unlike the news, the report includes the author's point of view

Definition of the radio report:

- Relation of the radio report with other genres:

With the FEATURE: in both genres, information is what is most important and both are inspired by facts. However, unlike feature, the report does not intensify the resources and it takes much less time

Definition of the radio report:

- Relation of the radio report with other genres:

With the COMMENT: both genres, share the same mission: going "beyond" the news. However, the report remains strongly linked to the facts, while comment is a piece of opinion. In addition, the periodicity of the report is not fixed and the author does not have as much freedom to express his own style

Definition of the radio report:

"The radio report is a model of representation of reality, based on the monologue, in which a writer, as a witness, narrates and describes an event from an individual and in context perspective, using for it the production resources provided by radio"
(Martínez-Costa and Díez Unzueta, 2005)

Definition of the radio report:

- The 3 most relevant elements:
 - the reporter has witnessed something
 - It contains interpretation, but the main function is informative
 - Its content is more colorful, plastic, graphic, descriptive and full of anecdotal details

Features of the radio report:

- Regarding the content
- Regarding its style resources
- Regarding its production
- Regarding its integration into programming

Features of the radio report: regarding the content

- Informative function
- Witness character
- Contextualizing purpose
- Narrative-descriptive text
- Factual inspiration
- Plasticity in the content

Features of the radio report: regarding content

- Informative function:
 - Reporting facts is more important than the author's subjectivity
 - The reporter is involved in the story but can never forget that his role is secondary
 - Reports show a high respect for the statement of facts
 - Opinion is never allowed in reports
 - There are other genres for this

Features of the radio report: regarding content

- Witness character:
 - The writer is a witness
 - He is on the scene and has witnessed the facts
 - Therefore, the broadcast occurs at a distance and the message is more credible
 - For this, the reporter must include **all** the elements reinforcing the fact of "being there"
 - He is on the scene to provide information that could not be otherwise obtained (e.g. the work of war correspondents)

Features of the radio report: regarding content

- Contextualizing purpose
 - Since the reporter is a witness he has to contextualize the stories
 - Unlike news, reports goes “beyond”
 - The "plus" of the report is aimed at contextualizing the information, evaluating and analyzing it
 - Today this purpose is key

"Never before has the individual has felt overwhelmed by so much news, but at the same time we have never needed more that these scattered facts have to be set into a coherent whole to find their true value. Otherwise we miss the ultimate meaning of events and we get lost in the whirl of trivial happenings"

Features of the radio report: regarding content

- Contextualizing purpose
 - That's what radio report is all about: it has to place facts in a larger context so that the listener can understand their true meaning
 - Therefore, report focuses on: WHY? and HOW?
 - Ex: [Edward R. Murrow reports](#)

Features of the radio report: regarding content

- Narrative-descriptive text
 - Narration is the linguistic representation of people, situations and circumstances in time
 - Narrative style is mainly present in reports dealing with “spontaneous”, and “unpredicted” facts

Features of the radio report: regarding content

- Narrative-descriptive text
 - Description presents a picture of reality, trying to make issues visible, by explaining their appearance and external form
 - Descriptive style is mainly present in the so-called environment reports
 - In this case, the static of the description has to be accompanied by movement when writing

Features of the radio report: regarding content

- Factual inspiration
 - Reports are made with facts
 - They are the raw material
 - There can be three types of facts:
 - Facts: unexpected and without any deliberate action
 - Actions: prepared, planned and premeditated for which there is a previous performance
 - Statements: versions of witnesses, specialists, experts...

Features of the radio report: regarding content

- Factual inspiration
 - However, these facts always share three things:
 - a) They are specific events that have really and objectively taken place
 - b) They are not opinions
 - c) They occur once and then never again

Features of the radio report: regarding content

- Plasticity in content
 - Since the reporter has witnessed something, his text has to be more visual, graphic and plastic
 - "I'm here, I'm living and I'm sharing it with listeners"
 - Reporters must be able to stir the listener imagination so that he feels he is actually experiencing the same
 - Therefore, details and anecdotes are frequently offered to provide "color" to the text

Features of the radio report: regarding its style resources

- Personal style
- Structural freedom
- Dominance of the word
- Monologue genre
- Colloquial in form

Features of the radio report: regarding its style resources

- Personal style:
 - Since reporters have been witnesses, they are authorized to express their own style in texts
 - They have more freedom to choose verbs, adverbs, adjectives, metaphors, rhetorical figures, etc.
 - However, this freedom also has limits
 - Everything must be referred and linked to facts
 - Reports can't invade areas of opinion
 - This personal style is reinforced by the voice of the reporter

Features of the radio report: regarding its style resources

- Structural freedom:
 - Reporters also have more freedom (than newswriters) to structure their stories
 - There is a minimum three-part structure:
 - a) Opening
 - b) Body
 - c) Closing

Features of the radio report: regarding its style resources

- Dominance of the word:
 - Of all the elements of radio language, word predominates in reports
 - Music, silence and effects are only present if they are “diegetic” (natural and non-artificially introduced from the study)
 - Everything is very austere and functional
 - At most, the report contains statements but they are also word

Features of the radio report: regarding its style resources

- Monologue genre:
 - Monologue is a type of discourse that is entirely carried out by one person, without partners
 - Monologue genres are very useful in radio, but they must be brief

Features of the radio report: regarding its style resources

– Monologue genre:

- Sometimes, however, reports are dialogued
- Trading the turns with presenter provides the report with more rhythm
- Nevertheless, the report still remains a monologue genre because the use of dialogue is artificial and has no interactive meaning

Features of the radio report: regarding its style resources

- Colloquial in form:
 - It is highly recommended that reports be written in an oral and colloquial style
 - Reporters have to write for the ear (not for the eye)
 - With naturalness and spontaneity as if things were said (not written)

Features of the radio report: regarding its production

- Broadcasting from the scene
- Usually produced by reporters, correspondents and special envoys
- Normally live broadcasted
- Short duration

Features of the radio report: regarding its style resources

- Broadcasting from the scene
 - Report requires the reporter to be at the scene of the action
 - This means several things:
 - It provides more color to the report
 - It reinforces the image of the station
 - It allows the reporter to approach the sources more closely.

Features of the radio report: regarding its production

- Usually produced by reporters, correspondents and special envoys
 - Correspondents live in a country permanently
 - Special envoys attend a determined scenario to inform in-depth about a specific event
 - In all the cases, the idea is not only to tell the facts but also to contextualize them and explain their real meaning

Features of the radio report: regarding its production

- Normally live broadcasted
 - In most cases, radio reports are live broadcasted (sent and received at the same time)
 - There are several reasons:
 - 1) Report is closely linked to current affairs
 - 2) Recording reports would slow down the rhythm of normal production at a radio station
 - 3) Aesthetically, it increases the freshness and psychological closeness
 - 4) Recorded broadcasting is usually reserved to save time differences (between Europe and America or Asia, for instance)

Features of the radio report: regarding its production

- Short duration
 - Radio reports are short
 - Longer than news because they have to locate the information but shorter than features or interviews
 - Specific duration depends on:
 - Degree of depth (simple, with declarations and documented 40'' to 2')
 - Technical presentation (monologue or dialogue, 40'' to 4')

Features of the radio report: regarding its integration into programming

- Informative location
- Regular presence

Features of the radio report: regarding its integration into programming

- Informative location
 - Reports have no autonomy to become a program themselves
 - They need to be accompanied by other pieces of news in news programs
 - Especially in main informative programs and in special programs (produced on the occasion of a relevant fact or event)

Features of the radio report: regarding its integration into programming

- Regular presence
 - Radio reports tend to have some continuity and regularity
 - This allows the reporter to establish a bond of familiarity with his audience
 - This legitimates the use of a direct, simple, and sometimes casual tone
 - Depending on the subject, the tone is similar to the one used by columnists or by bloggers
 - The difference remains in the purpose: radio reports always tend to inform, not express opinion

Features of the radio report: recap

- The 3 most relevant elements:
 - i) the reporter has witnessed something
 - ii) it contains interpretation, but the main function is informative
 - iii) Its content is more colorful, plastic, graphic, descriptive and full of anecdotal details

Structure of the radio report

- The report is known for its STRUCTURAL FREEDOM
- This means that the reporter does not necessarily have to stick to a rigid "template" (unlike news)
- He has more freedom to structure his text

Structure of the radio report

- Generally speaking, there is a minimum three-part structure:
 - Opening
 - Body
 - Closing

Structure of the radio report

- **Opening:**

- It is very important
- It places the subject and grabs the listener's attention
- It must contain 2 elements:

- 1) The relevant piece of information that can only be known by being there: the WHAT
- 2) A first description to set the scenario: the WHERE

Structure of the radio report

- **Body:**
 - This is the longest part
 - Contains the details and must provide the contextualization of the facts
 - It especially answers the WHY and the HOW

Structure of the radio report

- **Closing:**
 - It has to be quick (but not as quick as the news) and reiterative
 - It should link to the program where the report is included
 - The closing is sometimes reserved for "mobilizing" or service information (time, price, date to which you can visit the exhibition, etc.)

Guidelines for writing radio reports

- Better active than passive voice
- Better verb than noun
- Better simple structures (s+v+c) than complex ones
- Better to vary the structure of the sentences to avoid monotony
- Better short sentences than long ones (20 to 25 words)
- One sentence, one idea
- Better coordinates than subordinates
- Better indicative than subjunctive or imperative
- Better short words than long ones (2 to 3 syllables)
- Concrete words better than abstract ones
- Past perfect tense better than present (especially if action has already concluded)

Guidelines for writing radio reports

- Choose expressions that reinforce idea that things are happening or have just happened
- Direct style when possible (with audio) for the most relevant statements
- Figures and numbers, only if essential, and normally rounded
- Attribute source only in three cases: 1) guilt, 2) opinion and 3) questionable or debatable information
- First position and then the name
- First content of statements, and then context
- Update your text and try to start with the most recent data
- Add information little by little
- From general to particular
- Keep it simple!
- Straight to the point!

Types of radio reports

- Criteria for classification:
 - 1) According to the kind of author
 - 2) According to the depth
 - 3) According to content
 - 4) According to topic
 - 5) According to presentation technique
 - 6) According to realization technique

Types of radio reports

1) According to the kind of author:

- Reporter report
- Writer report
- Special envoy report
- Correspondent report

Types of radio reports

2) According to the depth:

- Brief report
- Report with statements
- Documented report

Types of radio reports

3) According to content:

- Facts report
- Actions report
- Statements report

Types of radio reports

4) According to topic:

- Politics report
- War report
- Event report
- Courts report
- Society report
- Sports report
- Other

Types of radio reports

5) According to presentation technique:

- Monologue report (closed)
- Dialogue report (more open)

Types of radio reports

6) According to realization technique:

- Live report
- Recorded report

Types of radio reports

- According to the kind of author:

1) Reporter report

Since the reporter is on the scene, he can provide a more direct and vivid account of what is going on

2) Writer report

In networks, this is the kind of report provided by local or regional stations, owned or associated with, or in any case, different than the main one

3) Special envoy report

The fact that the special envoy is from the very beginning engaged in the events turns him into an authority to tell how things have happened

4) Correspondent report

Since the correspondent knows more about the peculiarities of the people in the place, the audience has no problems accepting the author's implication in the story

Types of radio reports

- According to the depth:

1) **Brief report**

Provides first details of event as soon as the reporter knows them: it is a first picture, a first impression

2) **Report with statements**

The reporter's voice is now accompanied by one or two inserts with the voices of protagonists or witnesses of the event

3) **Documented report**

Fact is accompanied by the context and its meaning

Report contains the who, what, when and where –basic elements in news- but also the how, why, or what for

Types of radio reports

- According to content:

1) Facts report

Events of special significance, which are causal and spontaneous
"something happened"

2) Actions report

Planned and premeditated activities, for which there is a previous and intentional performance
" someone has done something"

3) Statements reports

Versions of characters with information, from eye-witnesses to specialists or experts in the subject "someone said something"

Types of radio reports

- According to topic :

1) Politics report

Most common in the press but sometimes also occurs in radio; the reporter has to make an extra effort to translate political decisions into everyday language. Submission of details and reactions are appreciated

2) War report

Assigned only to professionals. Synthesis and inclusion of human interest are appreciated

3) Events report

Attitude of the reporter is clearly informative and direct style is recommended. Details and reactions are also appreciated

Types of radio reports

According to topic :

4) Courts report

Reporters should be familiar with the dynamic and legal terminology

5) Society report

Relate mostly to lives of celebrities

6) Sports report

Very commonly found in programming nowadays. Author is more present in the text than can be noted in other modalities

Types of radio reports

- According to presentation technique:

1) Monologue report

Strength lies in its simplicity; the language is direct but duration has to be brief

2) Dialogue report

More colloquial and can be used for more complex stories containing many different items

Types of radio reports

- According to realization technique:

1) Live report

Esthetic as well as informative arguments in favor of live broadcasting

2) Recorded report

Lacks the excitement because of knowing the outcome

In turn, it allows for more interpretation

Dangers and threats when writing a radio report

- Lack of contextualization
- Presence of value judgments
- Excess of style
- Improvisation abuse

Dangers and threats when writing a radio report

- Lack of contextualization
 - The report has no background or contextualization and only consists of a piece of news told from outside the station
 - This doesn't make any sense, and can be very understandable if we consider war correspondents
 - Their work is hard and very complicated
 - Ej: "Reflections on the war" (testimonies of [CBS war correspondents](#))

Dangers and threats when writing a radio report

- Lack of contextualization
 - Some (but not all) of the main obstacles that war correspondents have to face are:
 - Lack of access to data
 - Difficulties in mobility
 - Desire of civilian and military authorities to turn the correspondents into their own propaganda tools
 - Fierce competition to arrive early to the most troublesome settings and spots
 - The need to be the first ones to report
 - Etc.

Dangers and threats when writing a radio report

- Lack of contextualization:

"To die in these conflicts is not a mere possibility but a grim reality. Working among people in full revolution or between eager blood soldiers means that journalists are at the mercy of armed men, ready to shoot and for whom human life has no meaning just that they die or kill without ever fully know the reasons"

Dangers and threats when writing a radio report

- To know the number of casualties, or of the number of attacks from one of the sides, journalists do not need to risk their lives
- If they do so, it is to provide a more direct and deeper understanding of what is going on
- For this reason, there must always be contextualization in the report
- Not having it is a danger and a threat that we will have to avoid when writing radio reports

Dangers and threats when writing a radio report

- Presence of value judgments
 - This refers to the opposite danger
 - To disregard the limits of a report believing that, in the desire to transcend what is strictly information, anything is allowed
 - However, this is not true
 - Fact judgments are allowed, but value judgments are not
 - Therefore, the author's view has to be supported by data and he/she cannot engage in a "free" or disconnected way from the facts

Dangers and threats when writing a radio report

- Excess of style
 - Another risk is attempting to turn the report into an exercise of style
 - In this case, the author interprets his freedom as a way to express his style and literary brilliance
 - No problem if the story is clear
 - However, if this supposed "brilliance" goes against the text's clarity and understandability , it is a mistake; this is a danger that must be avoided

Dangers and threats when writing a radio report

- Improvisation abuse
 - Improvisation is the ability to know how to express things with no additional preparation than the knowledge we have
 - Journalists must know how to improvise
 - However, abuse of improvisation is not allowed, because this leads to poverty of expression
 - Therefore, reporters have to take time to write the report or, at least, document it
 - If this is not possible, reporters will take advantage of the knowledge of the lexicon of what is being described and also of the upcoming procedures

Steps when writing a radio report:

- Previous preparation
- Collecting first hand information
- Identifying the narrative thread
- Writing the script
- Reporting on air

Steps when writing a radio report:

- Previous preparation
 - The reporter has to take advantage of all available resources to get informed
- Collecting first hand information
 - On the scene, by...
 - observing the scene
 - talking to the protagonists
 - recording testimonies with a significant descriptive and narrative value
 - achieving the human dimension of facts, details and anecdotes
 - ...but with
 - distance
 - his/her own autonomy and independency

Steps when writing a radio report:

- Identifying the narrative thread
 - The idea here is to draw an outline to sort all data to start setting the report's main structure looking for those aspects, which provide an additional and unique value to his station
- Writing the script
 - It's better to work with an open and flexible script so as to facilitate last minute changes

Steps when writing a radio report:

- Reporting on air
 - taking the right tone depending on the events being described and avoiding losing the sense of sound
 - if report is live: urgency and the current state of the news are the most important points
 - if report is not live: emphasis will be put on contextualization and interpretation

Some good radio reporter's skills:

- To observe
- To listen
- To think
- To know how to communicate
- To know about the human being

Adapted from Sánchez Sánchez:
“[Writing as a way of life](#)” (in spanish)

Some good radio reporter's skills:

- To observe
 - with thorough curiosity and interest
 - thereby, journalists will avoid preconceived schemes and ideas, go beyond appearances and adopt a skeptical attitude towards non-verified facts
- To listen
 - hearing is not enough
 - listen with all five senses, paying a complete attention to the speaker and trying to understand him in every way

Adapted from Sánchez Sánchez:

[“Writing as a way of life”](#) (in spanish)

Some good radio reporter's skills:

- To think
 - To stop and think
 - only those who think well will be able to express their thoughts in a clear way
 - This will lead the journalist to ascribe a deeper meaning and context to the facts
 - This is a major need in nowadays society, in which media tend to present the world in a fragmentary and superficial way

Adapted from Sánchez Sánchez:

[“Writing as a way of life”](#) (in spanish)

Some good radio reporter's skills:

- To know how to communicate
 - With clarity, brevity, logical consistency, redundancy and compelling testimonies and sounds
 - Within an “unbiased subjectivity”, to satisfy the report's main objective: to inform
- To know about the human being
 - since he is the object dealt with and also the messages' purpose

Adapted from Sánchez Sánchez:
“[Writing as a way of life](#)” (in spanish)

The end

Thank you very much for your attention