THE POWER OF LANGUAGE: THE ENGLISH WORDS THAT MADE GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

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A language analysis of the English-speaking media about the Colombian author across space and time.

Language is a tool. Like the mallet and chisel the sculptor uses to create form, language also uses words to sculpt meaning in an inert reality. When this process is observed at the collective level, the accumulation of words ‘chiseled’ into our reality render an image that gives form to meaning. During the last 42 years, much like the outcome of beautiful artwork, the combination of words in the English language sculpted the global reality we know as Gabriel García Márquez.

Gabo, as an important figure, is portrayed differently in different parts of the anglophone world. For example, the media in Australia and Canada (Figure 1), portray him and his stories within a geographical framework, as if the readers need ‘confirmation’ of the regional source. For Canadians and Australians, the name Gabriel García Márquez appears jointly with explicit references to their own countries, which confirms that there is a link between ‘regional emphasis’ and the famous writer. However, in the United States (US) and England (Figure 2), to situate Gabo, the media refers to issues related to their own reality, such as the economy, Hollywood, and relations with Cuba; but no mention of regional names.

The language of these media portrays Gabo as an unofficial diplomat, a tireless journalist, and one of the great social connectors of the 20th century. His language is built upon a
series of “clusters” that show that the reality of Latin America is closely associated with these words: Fidel, Cuba, Revolution, Chávez, México City, Obama, Cuban Revolution, and violence. Whereas “drugs” is the only word never mentioned in the same sentence with Nobel Prize.

When we analyze the most frequently used words before and after 2014 (the year of his death), we notice some changes in the general tendencies that describe the man of Aracataca. Before 2014, he is mainly referred to as García Márquez or Gabriel García Márquez, while after his death, fame granted him the name Gabo, the product of his closest family and social environment. After 2014, even in the English world, Gabriel García Márquez became forever known as Gabo (Figure 3).

It is important to note the impact of the Nobel Prize on its recipients. Although García Márquez was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1982, it only became a significant milestone
GLOBALIZATION OF MAGICAL REALISM

The term “magical realism” appeared frequently in the articles published by the English-speaking media. After 2014 when journalists started to refer to it as the most important milestone of his life. It is not only the impact of his novels, or the globalization of “magical realism” - one of the terms that appears most in the period analyzed -, but the iconic validation of the Nobel Prize, which will be forever associated with his name and legacy.

Celebrity culture also contributed to Gabo’s fame. For example, Javier Bardem, Spanish actor and Academy award winner, appears on several occasions in association with Gabo (mostly before 2014), mainly because he was Florentino Ariza, the protagonist in the film depiction of “Love in the Time of Cholera” (2007). This undoubtedly is a reflection of the power of ‘the language of the media’ over the actual masterpiece of the Caribbean writer. Moreover, it is also relevant to mention “Florecia en el Amazonas” (1996), - an opera scripted by Marcela Fuentes-Berain, a pupil of García Márquez - a work greatly inspired by “magical realism”. Following its release in Houston in 1996, it was presented in the most important opera houses in the United States. The circulation of this opera is indicative of the influence of adaptations; it was also an opportunity for American culture to reflect upon its English-Spanish bilingual reality.

Language as a vehicle of communication sculpts our perception of the most important figures in society. The construction of Gabo’s identity in the English language illustrates the power of words, especially the power of this four-letter word: Gabo. After all, his greatest legacy is his ability to connect distant worlds and elicit connections that transcend geographical boundaries, in life, and after his death.

METHODOLOGY

First, we searched for “Gabriel García Márquez” on LexisNexis Academic* with no restrictions on date range and media source. The result was a set of 9,769 articles and 638 media. Then we applied Natural Language Processing to extract the date and the media source from the text of the articles. Lastly, we represented the frequency distribution of the most used terms with the tool Scatter Text.

* LexisNexis Academic only has English sources.