



## El discurso del ámbito de la Administración. Una perspectiva lingüística

Iria da Cunha

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The origins of linguistic research on legal language in Spanish can be traced back to the nineties, when seminal works by Martín Martín (1991), Álvarez (1995), Aguirre and de Larramendi (1997) or Etxebarria Aróstegui (1997), among others, were published. Since then, there has been a growing interest in this domain of Forensic Linguistics in the Spanish-speaking world, which is now far from being in its infancy. However, there are still many aspects that have been neglected. One of them is particularly striking: previous literature has focused on legal texts produced by professionals like judges, lawyers, or civil servants, but has generally overlooked specialized texts produced by ordinary citizens, who most probably have never been trained to write in such contexts. This is exactly the niche addressed by Iria da Cunha in her book *El discurso del ámbito de la Administración. Una perspectiva lingüística* ('The discourse of the domain of the Administration. A linguistic perspective'). The title already advances a relevant terminological choice: instead of using labels such as *discurso administrativo* ('administrative discourse') or *discurso de la Administración* ('discourse of Administration') – which are nonetheless included occasionally in some chapters for the sake of simplicity –, she prefers the noun phrase *discurso del ámbito de la Administración* ('discourse of the domain of the Administration') as an encompassing term to highlight the fact that she will not only refer to texts produced by administrative bodies, but also, and particularly, to administrative texts authored by citizens (e.g. complaints, requests, affidavits, etc.).

This volume consists of seven chapters. The first one pertinently frames administrative texts within the broader domain of legal language and summarizes the key advances in research on this topic in Spanish. It also announces the main features and contents of the book.

The second chapter delves into administrative genres in Spain. After offering an overview of the literature on specialized texts, the author, following

Sánchez Jiménez (2016), classifies administrative genres according to speakers' and addressees' identity. This allows her to distinguish three types of genres: texts produced by the Administration addressing citizens; texts produced by and addressing the Administration; and texts produced by citizens addressing the Administration. In order to unveil which ones are more prominent in the literature, she draws upon the list included in Sánchez Jiménez (2016), which is one of the most recent and detailed catalogues of administrative genres, and identifies which ones are explicitly defined in the *Diccionario panhispánico del español jurídico* (Real Academia Española & Consejo General del Poder Judicial 2020) as administrative text types. The results show that the text type terms included in this dictionary mirror the prevailing conception of administrative communication as that carried out by professionals through some genres addressing “passive” citizens for whom understanding them might be challenging. Indeed, as for administrative texts usually produced by members of the public, such as *peticiones* (‘requests’) or *quejas* (‘complaints’), the genres shortlisted through this method were scarce, so the author needed to expand the list by integrating other text type terms analysed in previous studies, as well as those mentioned in an interview by a professional in the field of Administration. She finally proposes a 25-item list of administrative texts authored by citizens.

The third chapter provides an overview of the characteristics of administrative texts produced by professionals. Special attention is paid to the Plain Language movement and its landmarks in Spain. Although the author concentrates on the role of average citizens as producers of administrative texts, this chapter seems a necessary step to accomplish the goals of this volume, since non-professionals tend to imitate the features they detect in administrative texts directed to them.

The fourth chapter tackles administrative genres written by citizens. One of its objectives is to unveil which genres pose most difficulties to non-professionals. Drawing from a varied range of sources –namely the aforementioned interview, handbooks of professional and academic writing in Spanish, and a survey of 80 citizens–, the author establishes that the genres which are less frequently written by non-professionals (e.g. accusations, affidavits, appeals, etc.) are those that respondents considered more difficult to produce. In addition, the main challenges put forward by the participants surveyed are presented: in essence, they concern the structure of each text and the use of specialized vocabulary.

Following these results, the author selects five genres (*alegación* (declaration, statement or submission), cover letter, letter of complaint, claim, and application) and analyses their linguistic features on the textual, lexical, and discursive level on the basis of a corpus of 100 texts. Methodologically, she accurately combines different theoretical approaches and notions: Van Dijk's discourse structures, Swales's moves, Cabré's Communicative Theory of Terminology and Mann and Thompson's Rhetorical Structure Theory. From this analysis, she proposes an in-depth description of the distinctive patterns of each genre, with a view to its application to develop automatic tools to assist citizens in writing them. She also compares the core aspects of each genre statistically, which allows her to demonstrate that there are significant differences among some of them. The annexes complete the contents of this section.

The fifth chapter offers a comprehensive, organized list of terminological resources in Spanish for both the legal and the administrative domain, ranging from monolingual and bilingual dictionaries and lexicons to databases and thesauri. This catalogue seems particularly useful not only for researchers interested in the field of legal and administrative writing, but also for Spanish for specific purposes practitioners, translators, or professionals of the Administration.

This also applies to the sixth chapter, which is devoted to technological tools designed to deal with administrative texts. It contains a thorough inventory of the available corpora, term extraction systems, and automatic systems for writing specialized texts in Spanish. Furthermore, it presents an innovative online text editor developed by a team led by the author of this book: *arText*. This free online tool aims at helping citizens to produce appropriate specialized texts through a simple, intuitive interface. It consists of several modules: the first one assists users with the general structure and contents of each genre, the second one warns them about spelling and formatting mistakes, and the third one suggests different types of improvements on a lexical and discursive level.

Interestingly, she also evaluates the accuracy of *arText* by means of triangulation: she compares the improvements manually marked by a trained annotator in a sample corpus with those automatically suggested by the tool. In addition, she considers the results of a survey of 25 *arText* users. Based on this information, she concludes that, despite some weaknesses, the system proves to be robust and user-friendly.

The volume ends with the seventh chapter, which summarizes the results of the previous chapters and reflects on the future steps in the study of specialized discourse in the field of Administration.

Overall, the author manages to provide a very clear overview of previous research on administrative genres in Spanish, with up-to-date inventories of helpful resources in this domain. This is why this book can be recommended to very different reader profiles, not only researchers and practitioners, but also civil servants, judges and other professionals of the field of the Administration, as the author herself states in page 17. This book is also noteworthy for its ground-breaking approach, since it focuses on texts that had been largely disregarded: administrative texts written by members of the public. Moreover, the pages devoted to arText are particularly stimulating, as they depict a helpful technological tool that deserves to be disseminated as widely as possible to reach non-professional authors of administrative genres, who would otherwise be struggling with textual conventions that they have not mastered.

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