

Old age and radio in the pandemic: The case of Cadena SER and Radio Nacional de España

Vejez y radio en la pandemia: el caso de la Cadena SER y Radio Nacional de España

Velhice e rádio na pandemia: o caso Cadeia SER e Rádio Nacional de Espanha

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ABSTRACT | One of the global topics generated by the pandemic crisis COVID-19 is the infection and death of the population over 65 years. In Spain, this focus has been approached by all the media, including radio. Within the framework of Ageing Studies, this research analyzes the representation and presence of old age on Spanish radio during the lockdown, and the resignification of a stereotype of old age that had been replaced in the news media, fiction, and advertising in the last two decades by an image of the golden age related to active aging. The radio programming of Cadena SER, a private station with the largest audience according to the General Media Study, and of Radio Nacional de España were studied during four specific days of confinement: the day of the start of the state of alarm in the country, the beginning of phase 0 of deconfinement and another two intermediate days related to the emergency in nursing homes. A total of 14 programs, 41 editions and 118 radio hours are analyzed. The results show the existence of positive ageism, both in the representation of old age, once again anchored to dependency, frailty, illness, and death, and in the level of presence of the subject.

KEYWORDS: ageism; Radio; COVID-19; stereotypes; radio journalism; ageing studies; Cadena SER; Radio Nacional de España.

HOW TO CITE

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RESUMEN | Uno de los temas informativos generados de forma global por la crisis pandémica COVID-19 es el referente al contagio y fallecimiento de la población de más de 65 años. Dicho foco ha sido tratado en España por todos los medios de comunicación. En el marco de los Estudios etarios, esta investigación analiza la presencia y representación de la vejez en la radio española durante el confinamiento y la resignificación de un estereotipo de vejez activa que había sido sustituido en los medios informativos, la ficción y la publicidad en las dos últimas décadas por una imagen de la edad dorada relacionada con el envejecimiento activo. Se estudian las programaciones radiofónicas de la Cadena SER, la emisora privada con la mayor audiencia según el Estudio General de Medios, y de Radio Nacional de España durante cuatro días señalados del confinamiento: el día del inicio del estado de alarma en el país, el comienzo de la fase 0 de desconfinamiento y otros dos días intermedios relacionados con la emergencia en las residencias de mayores. Se analiza un total de 14 programas, 41 ediciones y 118 horas de radio. Los resultados muestran la existencia de contenidos de edadismo positivo, tanto en la representación de la vejez, de nuevo anclada en la dependencia, la fragilidad, la enfermedad y la muerte, como en el nivel de presencia del tema.

PALABRAS CLAVE: edadismo; radio; COVID-19; estereotipos; periodismo radiofónico; estudios etarios; Cadena SER; Radio Nacional de España.

RESUMO | Uns dos tópicos informativos gerados mundialmente pela crise pandêmica COVID-19 é o contágio e a morte da população acima dos 65 anos. Este enfoque tem sido coberto na Espanha por todos os meios de comunicação. No âmbito dos estudos de etários, esta investigação analisa a presença e representação da velhice na rádio espanhola durante o confinamento e ressignificação de um estereótipo da velhice ativa que havia sido substituído na mídia, na ficção e na publicidade nas duas últimas décadas por uma imagem da idade dourada relacionada com o envelhecimento ativo. Esta investigação se realiza sobre a programação das rádios da Cadeia SER, emissora privada de maior audiência segundo o Estudo Geral de Mídia, e da Rádio Nacional de Espanha durante quatro dias importantes de confinamento: o dia do início do estado de alarme no país, o início da fase 0 de desconfinamento e dois outros dias intermediários relacionados à emergência em lares de idosos. Foram analisados 14 programas, 41 edições e 118 horas de rádio. Os resultados mostram a existência de uma discriminação por idade positiva, tanto na representação da velhice, novamente ancorada na dependência, a fragilidade, a doença e a morte, quanto ao nível de presença do tópico.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: discriminação por idade; Rádio; COVID-19; estereótipos; jornalismo de rádio; estudos etários; Cadeia SER; Rádio Nacional de Espanha.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has strongly affected the elderly, the group with the highest percentage of infections and deaths. In Spain, people over 65 years of age constituted 60% of the entire population affected by this disease in the first months of the pandemic. This fact has placed them at the forefront of information and communication, making them the unwitting protagonists of numerous press headlines, news, and television programs.

Faced with the pandemic crisis situation, the international response of social communication researchers has been immediate, with the publication of different research studies that address our object of study. Coleman (2020), Fonseca (2020), and Rodero (2020) have published studies from the perspective of the radio on consumption habits during confinement in the United Kingdom, Cuba, and Spain, respectively. Authors such as Meisner (2020) or Ayalon (2020), in terms of ageism, have detected the intensification of age discrimination and intergenerational tension as a result of the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, even the United Nations has warned about this issue stating that “we also need to tackle ageism and stigma against older people head on” (United Nations, 2020, p. 4).

In Spain, the presence of news and references regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the elder has been evident both in the press and on television, but not so much on the radio. This is why this study is of interest, to complement other recent research on the subject, such as that of Bravo Segal and Villar (2020) on the growing ageism from newspaper headlines, Montaña Blasco and colleagues (2020) on media consumption in Spain during the pandemic, or its impact on television in Europe, as studied by Túñez-López and colleagues (2020).

Few researchers could foresee that radio would celebrate its first centenary of existence proving once again that it is a living and young medium to face and communicate crisis moments (Rodero & Blanco, 2020). This research seeks to observe what has happened in the case of conventional radio regarding this key issue during the first period of the pandemic, in terms of this medium's approach of this group.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research on ageism, pandemics, and radio must necessarily contemplate two perspectives. On the one hand, the one based on age studies and, on the other, that of communication studies, which in turn unfolds in studies on radio language, oral journalism, and crisis communication. Age studies in communication

can be approached from the point of view of the analysis of representation and stereotypes, but also from the point of view of reception. This research is framed in the first case.

Age studies are not very numerous in the communication and information environment, but they have significant theoretical foundations and applied research. These studies are a part of cultural studies (Hareven, 1996), dealing with the representation and treatment of human groups according to the age at which they are represented. In the case of age studies linked to communication, childhood and adolescence have been the preferred subject of study, especially regarding the representation of these ages in advertising and television series, as well as in cinema (Chivers, 2011; Gravagne, 2013; Dolan, 2017), in addition to audiovisual and recreational products (mainly video games and YouTube channels) aimed at children and adolescents, which are also usually given a gender perspective (Medina & Zecchi, 2020). However, the group of the elderly has been one of the most degraded in the deindividualization. Age can therefore be considered as Gullette & Molinario do, "as a tool to divide categories and determine subjectivities" (2010, p. 79). In the last 20 years we have witnessed the resignification of all ages (Rey-Beltrán, 2004) and the stereotyping of the older population (Muñoz, 2005). The concept of the third age has been replaced by that of the golden age, a healthy, active, full age, represented mainly in advertising and television series, building a stereotype of *young-old* distant from social reality and promoted by the media and advertising (Ramos-Soler & Carretón-Ballester, 2012).

Since the 1970s, the theory of ethnolinguistic vitality has been exploring the importance of the role of the media as an element of social strength and influence of groups in society (Abrams & Eveland, 2003). Vitality is a measure of a group's strength in society; i.e., the level of demographic representation, institutional support, and status it has. Media content about a social group, in this regard, can be considered as an indicator of the strength and influence of that group.

Within this field of age studies, the perspective of ageism focuses on the representation and consumption as characters and recipients (as spectators, consumers, or users), in this case of the elderly, in a discriminatory or demeaning manner. The definition of ageism is summarized as "the maintenance of stereotypes or prejudicial attitudes towards a person solely because he or she is older" (Losada-Baltar, 2004, p. 2). While positive (non-harmful) ageism exists, for some theorists (Palmore, 1999) it is rare, with negative ageism (Butler, 1980) being the most developed and resurgent in this century (Palmore, 2001; Gullette, 2011). Paradoxically, ageism would be -along with gender and race

discrimination— one of the three great types of violence, since the retired is a desired sector for consumption, at least as far as the media is concerned, in a double anti-age and pro-age movement (Iacub, 2008). As for the radio, authors such as Aznar and colleagues (2015) have addressed the importance of the medium regarding the representation of active aging in contrast to the low presence of the elderly collective in morning magazines.

Likewise, in the words of Suárez-Serrano (2016), journalism and the media “are at the center of the debate: they are both tools for waging the new wars and also valuable allies in alleviating the suffering of the innocent” (p. 34). To this framework must be added the radio, both in its capacity as a means of public service in crisis communication and in its expressive possibilities. It is well known that radio provides an immediate response in extreme situations, including this one generated by COVID-19; it is a highly credible medium, perhaps even more so now in the era of fake news, for global crisis communication, as Rodero (2020) has shown in the case of Spanish radio. This credibility depends to a large extent on the contents, formats, and use of the expressive elements that constitute radio language. The functions of the word, silence, music, and effects allow multiple possibilities of use.

In this context, the aim of this research is to analyze the Spanish radio treatment given to the population over 65 years of age, based on the fact that during the COVID-19 pandemic this group has been the most affected by the disease both in number of patients and deaths in the country. This objective is established to demonstrate the starting hypothesis, which states that Spanish conventional radio has treated the subject of old age during the period of confinement with ageism, either by absence or silencing of the subject or by underrepresentation. As a secondary hypothesis, it is established the demonstration of a change in the representation of the retired and the elder, going from the last *new stereotype* of active old age to the recovery of the stereotype of negative old age.

METHODOLOGY

We chose a mixed methodological strategy of content analysis, a multiple integrative mixed approach (Hernández et al., 2010), considering that the thematic multi-perspective requires complexity of method, especially in communication studies, which is the current trend in audiovisual communication research (Damasio & López-Díez, 2020) based on the phases used by Arbeláez and Onrubia (2014). In the first instance, we conducted a pre-analysis to determine the corpus based on criteria of temporality, audience, ownership and programming of the broadcasters. The case studies are *Cadena SER*, the private generalist radio

station with the largest audience, according to data from the latest *Estudio General de Medios* (General Media Study) (Neeo.es, 2020) corresponding to the first 2020 wave, and *Radio Nacional de España*, the national public radio station with significant audience ratings, the fourth most listened to generalist Spanish radio station.

Likewise, four significant days were determined in the time frame of the confinement stage in Spain, resulting in two key dates for framing the study: March 14, 2020, the date on which the state of alarm begins, and May 4, when phase 0 of de-escalation, or progressive deconfinement, begins, towards the new normality and the end of the state of alarm. Between these two days there were two other significant dates in the development of the subject under discussion: March 19, 2020, the day on which the news of the situation being experienced in the country's nursing homes appeared, with massive contagions and deaths throughout the country, and April 17, when the Public Prosecutor's Office opened more than seventy investigations in homes for the elderly. As for the selection of the programs in each station, the criterion for inclusion was considered to be those with the highest audience in the morning, afternoon, evening, and early morning, so that the different program formats and the diversity of content, from pure information to the most playful, confidences or sports, could also have a place.

Based on these criteria, the research sample consisted of two national radio stations, one public and one private. An average of seven representative programs from each station was analyzed, which represents a corpus of 14 programs, 41 editions, and 118 hours of radio (table 1).

In table 1, in the column of voices, it should be noted that P refers to professionals (journalists, commentators, regular contributors, most of whom are between 50 and 60 years of age) and NP refers to non-professionals (testimonials, guests, interviewees, specialists, listeners, of much more variable ages, from children to very old people).

The distribution of hours and voices analyzed by station is as follows: *Cadena SER*, 65 h 56', 727 voices, and *RNE*, 51 h 25', 760 voices. The unequal number of hours analyzed depends on the production of the selected programs on the days chosen for the sample. *Cadena SER* broadcasted special programs on weekends, in this case on Saturday, March 14.

Once the theoretical corpus was determined, in the descriptive phase, we established the different categories necessary for the exhaustive multimodal analysis, gathering categorization components based on three dimensions of

Station	Title	Time slot	Hosts	Editions	Time	Voices
SER	<i>Hoy por hoy</i>	Morning	Àngels Barceló	3	19 h	213 (P.106/NP.107)
SER	<i>La ventana</i>	Evening	Carles Francino	4	14 h	148 (P.72/NP.76)
SER	<i>Hora 25</i>	Night	Pepa Bueno	4	14 h 30'	178 (P.82/NP.96)
SER	<i>A vivir que son dos días</i>	Morning	Javier del Pino	2	6 h	66 (P.24/NP.42)
SER	<i>El larguero</i>	Night	Manu Carreño	3	6 h	46 (P.24/NP.22)
SER	<i>El faro</i>	Early morning	Mara Torres	2	5 h	68 (P.17/NP.51)
SER	<i>La vida moderna</i>	Early morning	David Broncano	2	1h 26'	8 (P.5/NP.3)
RNE	<i>Las mañanas de RNE</i>	Morning	Íñigo Alfonso y Pepa Fernández	3	21 h	323 (P.132/NP.191)
RNE	<i>No es un día cualquiera</i>	Morning	Carles Mesa	1	5 h	32 (P.16/NP.16)
RNE	<i>Solamente una vez</i>	Evening	Amaya Prieto y Julio Valverde	3	5 h 35'	55 (P.29/NP.26)
RNE	<i>El ojo crítico</i>	Evening	Alberto Martínez	3	2h 14'	20 (P.9/NP.11)
RNE	<i>24 horas</i>	Night	Antonio Delgado	3	6 h 25'	176 (P.74/NP.102)
RNE	<i>Radiogaceta deportes</i>	Night	Chema Abad	3	1 h 17'	24 (P.13/NP.11)
RNE	<i>Gente despierta</i>	Early morning	Alfredo Menéndez	2	7 h	62 (P.28/NP.34)
RNE	<i>Juntos paso a paso*</i>	Morning	Juan Fernández	4	3h 34'	68 (P.9/NP.59)
2 stations	14 programs	4 time slots	17 hosts	41 editions	117 h 46'	1487 (P.640 / NP.847)

* not included in the study.

Table 1. Detailed corpus

Source: Own elaboration.

analysis for each program, each of which is expressed in a table: (1) by keywords, i.e., fundamental terms involved in the semantic field on which aging is focused, crucial for the conformation of ideas about what is being talked about or reported, (2) by type of journalistic piece and time allocated, for its implication in the level of presence –both for importance and dedication to the subject–, (3) by sonorous and non-sonorous expressive resources, and for its contribution to the derivation towards subjectivity, linguistic and non-linguistic.

The data capture process initially decided upon was that of downloading and classifying programs by stations and a subsequent traditional hearing (double, a first one for collection and a second one for checking and debugging duplications and decontextualized keywords). The data were managed using Atlas.ti software.

RESULTS

Cadena SER

Cadena SER yields the following results corresponding to the categories contemplated in our analysis. Regarding the key words (table 2) that constitute the semantic field studied, it can be observed that in the designation of the persons under study the most used keyword is older/elder; as for places, nursing home(s), and on concepts, the concept of third age appears rarely. Related to the semantic field, in the April 17 edition of *La ventana* the words geriatric carer appears.

From the number of occurrences of the keywords, it is important to highlight that the days in which this station makes more reference to the topic, with the highest occurrence of words, are March 19, the first day of diffusion of the crisis of the nursing homes in Spain, and April 17, when the Public Prosecutor's Office opens investigations into these centers. The proportion of presence of this semantic field in the analyzed days is 10% (March 14), 60% (March 19), 20% (April 17) and 10% (May 4). Regarding the type of voice using other non-majority words, grandfather and old man are preferentially used by non-professional voices (listeners and interviewees).

Regarding the type of journalistic piece and the time allocated (table 3), the issue investigated as a collateral topic, or inserted in the summary of news outbreaks in pandemics, or in references to the topic in brief interventions by listeners, is referred to as "lose".

Follow-up news is that information introduced by the main host and developed by a second journalist, interspersed with testimonies of those affected or specialists in the subject. Along with the time spent on the topic, we established a level of presence, classified as 0=none; 1=low (from 1 to 30 minutes); 2=medium (from 30 to 60 minutes); 3=high (more than 60 minutes). The time allocated column distinguishes by days analyzed and the overall total for each program.

As is the case with keywords, the days on which *Cadena SER* spends the most time on the topic are March 19 and April 17, with the morning and evening slots being the ones that devote the most time to it and with greater depth, as the topic is dealt with in news pieces and interviews. On the other hand, the early morning slot has no presence. This station, generally, prefers the "lose" format (short sentences with core information) and devotes 120 minutes, two hours, out of a total of 66 hours analyzed, which represents 1.32% of the time spent in the four days analyzed.

	<i>Hoy por hoy</i>	<i>La Ventana</i>	<i>Hora 25</i>	<i>A vivir que son dos días</i>	<i>El larguero</i>	<i>El faro</i>	<i>La vida moderna</i>	Total
Senior(s)	37	7	20	3	3	0	0	70 (41%)
Elders	7	1	12	0	0	0	0	20 (12%)
Grandparents	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	4
Old	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Residents	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	5
Retired	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	4
Nursing homes	21	6	30	0	0	0	0	57 (33%)
Center	2	0	4	0	0	0	0	6
Geriatric	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Elder shelter	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Old age	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Senescence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Third age	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

Table 2. Keywords. RNE

Source: Own elaboration.

The “lose” format is the most abundant, as opposed to the presence of the topic as part of the editorial of each program, which happens only once.

The expressive levels of the voices and other sonorous and non-sonorous elements are summarized in table 4. Radio effects refer to their presence in the program. As for the musical style, informative, classic, melancholic or ambient categories are consigned. Silence has been computed as the significant absence of sound. On the other hand, neutral adjectivation is the standardized adjectivation proper to the information (i.e., that does not use qualifying adjectives or appreciative nouns), while expressive adjectivation is that which shows subjectivization in the lexicon used (it can also affect the type of terms used, not adjectives, such as augmentative or diminutive nouns, or words which by their own semantic load are hyperbolic or of expressive intensification). In the last row of table 4, it is also recorded whether the sum of the previous indicators implies intentionality and appreciative meaning. In addition, it is indicated whether it corresponds to professionals (P) or non-professionals (NP), following the nomenclature used for the distribution of the type of voices previously analyzed in the table.

	<i>Hoy por hoy</i>	<i>La Ventana</i>	<i>Hora 25</i>	<i>A vivir que son dos días</i>	<i>El larguero</i>	<i>El faro</i>	<i>La vida moderna</i>	Total
"Lose"	21	3	11	2	1	0	0	38
News piece	4	2	4	0	0	0	0	10
Follow-up news	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	6
Discussion topic	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Interview topic	1	4	1	0	2	0	0	8
Editorial topic	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Time allocated	42'15''	31'23''	43'07''	2'20''	1'	0	0	120'05''
Days	19/17/4	14/19/17/4	14/19/17/4	14	4	0	0	Día 19
Presence level	2	2	2	1	1	0	0	2

Table 3. Categorization of programs by type of journalistic piece and time allocated. RNE

Source: Own elaboration.

	<i>Hoy por hoy</i>	<i>La Ventana</i>	<i>Hora 25</i>	<i>A vivir que son dos días</i>	<i>El larguero</i>	<i>El faro</i>	<i>La vida moderna</i>
Effects	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Musical style	Informativa	Informativa	Informativa	Informativa	Melancólica	Ninguna	
Prosody	No	Sí	No	No	No	Sí	No
Silence	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Adjectivation	Neutra	Neutra Expresiva	Neutra Expresiva	No	Expresiva Neutra	Expresiva	Expresiva
Intention/ meaning	NP	P / NP	P / NP	P / NP	P	P / NP	P

Table 4. Expressive levels. RNE

Source: Own elaboration.

Radio Nacional de España

The case of *Radio Nacional de España* presents a double particularity. On the one hand, it is the only station that has a specific program dedicated to this sector of the population, *Juntos paso a paso*; on the other hand, it presents a break in the representativeness of the subject under investigation between the first day analyzed and the rest, with a notable disparity of criteria in the programming content. In this regard, it is necessary to clarify that although the program *Juntos paso a paso* has been analyzed, the results have not been included in the general comparison, since it has a modest audience (it is broadcast on Saturday mornings, from 7:00 to 8:00, in an insignificant broadcast slot) compared to the rest of the programs analyzed on both stations, which have significant audiences and are the most outstanding programs on each one of them. This program only aired on the first day of the four dates selected for the corpus. In it, the word “elderly” appears only eight times, four of them in statements by a politician and a doctor, and another four between the announcers, recommending caution to the elderly population. “Nursing home” is referred to only once, and only one older listener intervenes referring to people of his age as “grandparents”, in reference to loneliness. The professionals of the program do not use expressive resources that subjectivize the information, neither in their voices nor in the sound resources of music or effects, dedicating their time to other non-health issues, such as the *silver economy*, a story contest or the notice of suspension of cultural routes for this age segment. Regarding the latter, it should be noted that this is a decision-making policy of the management of the public entity.

The intervention of Javier Hernández Bravo, director of *RNE*, in the Fourth Conversatory of the *I Virtual Meeting of the RIU*, held telematically on June 18, 2020, makes this policy clear. In addition to maintaining full programming, it was decided to give voice to listeners as a way of venting in each and every one of the programs and create a specific one for it, *El balcón de Radio Nacional*. In his own words, out of fear:

[Older people] did not want to hear about the pandemic, it was sort of a reminder that they could die at any time, so they tuned out. So, entertainment takes on tremendous meaning. It is not second-rate content, quite the contrary. We needed to distract ourselves, we needed to distract them (...) There is a program we have called *Juntos paso a paso*. It is designed for older people. It is a very popular program that is broadcasted on Saturdays at the first hour and I remember the day when I talked to its director and I told him: ‘What are we going to do? Because you all have to go home’. And he said: ‘I am not going to leave my cute old people without a program, so I am going to do the program anyhow’. And that program never missed its appointment with new content” (Red de Radio Universitaria de Colombia, 2020, 1:14:20).

	<i>Las mañanas de RNE</i>	<i>No es un día cualquiera</i>	<i>Solamente una vez</i>	<i>El ojo crítico son dos días</i>	<i>24 horas</i>	<i>RadioGaceta</i>	<i>Gente despierta</i>	<i>Total</i>
Senior(s)	18	0	1	0	7	0	5	31 (23%)
Elders	9	0	0	0	4	0	1	14 (10%)
Grandparents	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	4
Old	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Residents	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Retired	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
Nursing homes	50	0	1	0	10	0	1	62 (45%)
Center	4	0	0	0	9	0	0	13 (9%)
Geriatric	1	0	0	0	4	0	0	5
Elder shelter	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Old age	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Senescence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Third age	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 5. Keywords. RNE

Source: Own elaboration.

The disappearance of profound references to the pandemic in relation to the elderly as of March 19 is largely justified by these words, which denote a stance in which the absence has not been for positive ageism but for protection.

As a consequence, the use of keywords is very reduced in this station, concentrated on March 19. Even so, it shows the same tendency as *Cadena SER*, with a preferential index for the word seniors and residency, with the words referring to the concept being absent (table 5).

There is a great disparity between the number of voices and the number of times the keywords appear in context: 760 voices for 137 words. The word aging appears only in the program dedicated to this age group; another term not present in any

	<i>Las mañanas de RNE</i>	<i>No es un día cualquiera</i>	<i>Solamente una vez</i>	<i>El ojo crítico son dos días</i>	<i>24 horas</i>	<i>RadioGaceta</i>	<i>Gente despierta</i>	Total
"Lose"	6	0	5	0	5	1	1	18
News piece	2	0	2	0	2	0	1	5
Follow-up news	5	0	2	0	2	0	0	7
Discussion topic	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Interview topic	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	3
Editorial topic	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Time allocated	44'45''	0	1'	0	11'55''	15''	1'30''	58'45''
Days	19/17/4	-	19/17	-	19/17	19	1/4	
Presence level	2	0	1	0	1	0	1	1

Table 6. Categorization of programs by type of journalistic piece and time allocated. RNE

Source: Own elaboration.

	<i>Las mañanas de RNE</i>	<i>No es un día cualquiera</i>	<i>Solamente una vez</i>	<i>El ojo crítico son dos días</i>	<i>24 horas</i>	<i>RadioGaceta</i>	<i>Gente despierta</i>
Effects	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Musical style	Informative	Informative	Ambiance	Classic	Informative	Informative	Ambiance
Prosody	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Silence	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Adjectivation	Expressive Neutral	Neutral	No	No	Neutral Expressive	Neutral	No
Intention/ meaning	P / NP	NP	NP	No	P	NP	No

Table 7. Expressive levels. RNE

Source: Own elaboration.

other program is senior, and others not contemplated –as a result of the treatment of topics not included in the rest of the programs and stations– are *silver economy* or pensioner, retirement, pension system or retired, as a labor-related category, treated in depth and outside the syntagma *retired doctors*, which appeared in other programs when referring to the call of final-year medical students and retired doctors to cover the saturation of hospitals.

In the 49 hours of *RNE*, without considering the program *Juntos paso a paso*, the time allocated, 59 minutes, represents 0.28% of the time analyzed. The level of presence is low, with two programs that never deal with the subject. It can be seen that the “lose” format has the same number of uses as the sum of the rest of the format possibilities considered for the analysis, and it is also concentrated on March 19 (table 6).

RNE’s levels of expressiveness are reduced to a minimum, not only in the use of sound resources such as music, effects, or silence, but also regarding the use of voice and speech (table 7).

DISCUSSION

In terms of qualitative analysis, we can point out that, in the morning slot on *Cadena SER*’s *Hoy por hoy* program, journalists and regular collaborators rarely incur in expressive subjectivity, although the information is linked to the semantic field of death and decrepitude, referring to nursing homes as black holes or critical places where the sick end up dying alone. The listeners of this program, of all ages (including boys and girls) and genders, are those who use the words grandfather/grandmother, elderly, and subjective expressive adjectives, as well as some appreciative diminutive, for example: *un poco sordito* (a little deaf). Some of the politicians interviewed and those responsible for geriatric centers also resort to this type of more emotional language. Music, effects, and silence have no function in this program. There is no difference in the expressive or aseptic use of language between male and female voices, whether professional or non-professional. Nor does it happen with the age factor, as in the rest of the station’s programs. On the other hand, in *Las mañanas de RNE*, the broadcast in which the topic has the greatest number of appearances, especially in the first part of the morning, from 6:00 to 10:00, it is rare to find any subjective expression. The appearance of intensive terms such as virulence, anguish, death, dependence, vulnerability, is reiterated. On April 17, there was little and aseptic talk, without emotional implications, denoting a radical change in the attitude of the radio station, which fluctuated from emotional involvement to abrupt distancing.

In the afternoon, on *Cadena SER's La ventana*, we hear about the elderly as the age group that is being targeted by the virus, the most punished group or the most vulnerable and affected by the pandemic, resorting to a less subjective and more standardized lexicon in the information. Its host is the one who most often uses an affectionate, paternal tone, especially in interviews with the elderly. However, it is an interviewed epidemiologist who, on May 4, is the one to use superlatives, such as very high mortality. It should be noted that, being a program with humorous sections that may joke about some pandemic issues, they never do so with this specific one. Older listeners refer to themselves as elderly or expressing their age and do not refer to health but to loneliness and fear. For its part, in *RNE*, in the program *Solamente una vez*, it is said on March 19: "A greeting to parents and to those of you who are alone and isolated in a residence" (Prieto, 2020a), while on March 17, the host begins the program in this way, evidencing a change of policy: "As always, we will try not to make too much noise and accompany you with tranquility" (Prieto, 2020b).

In the evening slot, the *SER* program *Hora 25* returns to the cold and distant treatment of the morning slot, based on figures and little expressiveness, avoiding appreciations. The director expresses herself in this way, with informative rigor: "50 people have died in nursing homes" (Bueno, 2020a), adding at most the adjectives vulnerable and elderly, although she can add an expressive intensification to show the magnitude of the problem: the alarm generated by the deaths in nursing homes, overflowing residencies, or elderly people as major dependents. Most of the expressive resources are concentrated in the voices of listeners in the March 19 program, in which many congratulated their hospitalized or nursing home parents. The most marked expressiveness occurs on May 4 in the voice of one of the listeners who expresses: "More than half of the people killed by the coronavirus were in nursing homes, please... Is no one talking about doing an audit on this? Is no one talking about making a plan so that nursing homes are not what they have been during these two months? The government should look for solutions so that they are medicalized, so that they are not places to make money, that they have a social function" (Méndez, 2020). With a severe tone and emphasizing the words, the only response found was that of the hostess saying: "It should be the only political issue" (Bueno, 2020b), closing the subject and not deepening into it. The change of tone is also perceived in *RNE's 24 horas*. The host says on March 19: "The elderly, the most vulnerable, and among the most vulnerable are those in nursing homes. At least 79 elderly people have already died there. The civil guard is checking them to see what their situation is (...) The situation of some of them has been a real scandal" (Delgado, 2020a). On April 17, the distancing and brevity are summarized in this way: "The State Public

Prosecutor's Office has reported that it has at least 38 criminal investigations open, 19 in Madrid, regarding homes for the elderly in this pandemic. Precisely VOX has filed a complaint this afternoon in front of the Provincial Prosecutor's Office to investigate what happened in these centers" (Delgado, 2020b). Finally, it is worth mentioning two more elements in *Cadena SER*, two cases of ageism. In *A vivir que son dos días*, on March 14, one of the journalists, talking about a character in a novel, says in a derogatory way "voz de vieja" (old woman's voice). The adjective *viejo/a* is never used in this station to refer to real people in subjects related to the pandemic; in this case, it is used for a fictional character. In *El larguero*, almost the only reference to the subject in this program, on May 4, a young sportsman complains of having been reprimanded as irresponsible when going for a run by a couple of elderly people, to which the director Manu Carreño adds: "Of course... They would tell you what young people are like..." (Carreño, 2020). It should also be noted that there is an important presence in the field of advertising. On March 14 and 19, there are special spots of *El Corte Inglés*, offering the priority of purchase and schedules as an aid to the elderly for the purchase in confinement, addressing the elderly informally (*El Corte Inglés está a tu lado* (*El Corte Inglés* is next to you)). On April 17, this add has already disappeared, and *Cuideo*, a company dedicated to the care of the elderly, has appeared.

CONCLUSIONS

Beyond these specific examples, an abstraction of the data leads to the conclusion that:

- The representation of old age is made as a collective stereotype that is not individualized, constructed in a contradictory way based on euphemisms that avoid semantic negativity, but reinforcing the idea of dependence, illness, and death. This implies a resignification regarding the last stereotype of greater scope in recent decades linked to the golden age (Guarinos, 2021).
- The presence of old age is minimal in terms of time allocated to it, but also in terms of in-depth coverage of the topics that concern it, due to the minor and brief news formats in which the news referring to old age in pandemic has been conveyed.

Both the representation modes and their presence speak in favor of a positive ageism, not hurtful, but marginalizing, due to the scarcity of time dedicated and the lack of depth in the treatment of issues affecting the elderly. Given the results, it can be inferred that this research ratifies what has already been discovered regarding other media, in this case as far as radio journalism is concerned, offering a more complete

panorama, by adding the radio medium to the age studies in communication, also including the confirmation of a generational gap produced by the pandemic crisis. Likewise, this work allows us to open new lines of study based on the analysis of the programming of other radio stations with national coverage and their subsequent comparison. However, what would be really interesting would be to be able to establish a comparison with other international Spanish-speaking radio stations, so that a more complete picture could be achieved, which would help to overcome this limitation of partiality, since this is a small study.

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