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***The New York Times'* Bet on the Spanish-Speaking Market (2016-2019): Highs and Lows of a Pilot Project**

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Abstract: This study analyzes the model of the *New York Times en Español*. From February 2016 to September 2019, this initiative attempted to cultivate a global audience, capitalizing on the world's burgeoning Spanish-speaking population, which is currently greater than 572 million and is forecasted to reach 754 million by the middle of the century. This study outlines the characteristics of the entirely digital project, which was cancelled after it "did not prove financially successful," and focuses on the paper's language policy: in the face of other publications' neutral Spanish, the *New York Times en Español* demonstrated that it is possible to ensure understanding without hampering cultural and linguistic richness.

Keywords: *The New York Times*, journalism, Spanish, media, internet

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1. Introduction

Does the Hispanic market offer the opportunity to cultivate a global audience in Spanish? When Pope Francis traveled to the United States in 2015, the *New York Times* launched an experimental process to confirm its intuition: that in Latin America, as well as Spain and the U.S., there is a Spanish-speaking audience “that is curious, that seeks to understand the world’s most complex problems, and that wants accurate, reliable, and independent information” (López, 2017).

At first, the “Gray Lady” of journalism limited itself to translating articles from its English edition, and it worked. The paper’s online distribution enabled thousands of users to read the news in Spanish, to the point that the newspaper’s management decided to begin gradually producing original Spanish-language content. On February 7, 2016, the publication officially launched its new project, the *New York Times en Español*, and Lydia Polgreen, editorial director of NYT Global, introduced a web page full of “relevant” stories (Polgreen, 2016).

This global effort was spurred by the size of the worldwide Spanish-speaking population, which continues to expand even as global demographic trends have prompted a decline in the proportion of native Chinese and English speakers (Fernández Vítóres, 2018, cited in Instituto Cervantes, 2018, pp. 25–26). According to data from the 2018 *Anuario del Instituto Cervantes*, there are over 577 million Spanish speakers in the world, a figure that will reach 756 million by the middle of this century (pp. 21, 24). According to that same source, the numbers are equally favorable in the digital realm: Spanish is the second-most-used language after English on two of the web’s main social networks, Facebook and Twitter. Over 18% of Facebook users communicate in Spanish, as do over 10% of Twitter users (pp. 64, 66).

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Given these trends and the fact that “the number of Spanish speakers is growing most fervently” in the U.S. (Morales, 2018), the Observatory of the Instituto Cervantes at Harvard University initially conducted a study on the U.S.’s four leading Hispanic newspapers (Albalad, 2019): *El Nuevo Herald* (Miami), *La Opinión* (Los Angeles), *El Diario* (New York), and *El Tiempo Latino* (Washington, D.C.). That research confirms the relevance of Hispanic journalism in the U.S.—which lends cohesion to the “multiethnic community” and shapes the “pan-Hispanic identity” (Gómez Mopart and Coperías Aguilar, 2014)—and demonstrates how, although many Spanish-language newspapers are simple informational leaflets (Covarrubias, 2016), it is possible to sustain substantive journalistic endeavors.

Now, after the publication of other reports on the reality of Hispanic journalism in the U.S. (González Tosat, 2015 and 2019; Hernández Nieto and Gutiérrez, 2017), this study will discuss the *New York Times en Español*, an entirely digital venture that, from February 2016 to September 2019, aimed to boost the impact of the paper’s journalistic offering in Latin America and Spain. That is, its focus was not limited to the Spanish-speaking audience in the U.S., but to the entire Spanish-speaking world (Caffarel Serra, 2014). This bid, which, according to the newspaper itself, was discontinued when it “did not prove financially successful,” calls for a particular analysis on the outlet’s use of Spanish, given the absence of a single, homogenous version of the language in Ibero-America.

The newspapers that the Observatory analyzed in its previous study solve this problem with *neutral Spanish*,¹ which encompasses all of the language’s speakers (Albalad, 2019). In order to reach a heterogeneous body of readers, these publications avoid expressions particular to any given country. The obvious question, then, is: to what extent is it possible to ensure understanding without hampering cultural and linguistic

¹ For more on this concept, see the article listed in the bibliography: “Español neutro, global, general, estándar o internacional” (Gómez Font, 2012).

richness? From the outset, the *New York Times* had no doubt that Spanish “is a vast and rich language, and it’s better to encourage its variety, rather than limit it” (López, 2017). Thus, during the project’s three and a half years of operation, it offered the Hispanic community a digital product with reporting that evinced the inexhaustible abundance of the language.

This article explains the model of the *New York Times en Español* (2016–19) through a descriptive analysis that includes the characteristics of the editorial project and delves into its language policy. Rather than quantitative techniques, this study relies on a qualitative method: the in-depth interview. Specifically, the author has spoken with the outlet’s last editorial director, Eliezer Budasoff, who is Argentine, and with the editor charged with drafting a manual of style, Paulina Chavira, who is Mexican. This study draws on the results of these conversations, as well as information obtained from the outlet’s website (sections, contents, design, etc.) and social media.

This research is organized under three headings: (1) “The Spanish-Speaking Market as a Niche for Expansion,” which introduces the paper’s mission of public service through high-quality journalism, with an interdisciplinary and bilingual team; (2) “The Language Policy,” which includes conversations about the use of language and illustrative examples, always with the goal of instructing the public on proper use of the language; and (3) “Business Model,” which addresses the formula employed—free access—and the prospects for the future, with a paid subscriber system incorporated into the parent company.

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2. The Spanish-Speaking Market as a Niche for Expansion

The *New York Times*’ global growth project viewed Spanish (as well as Chinese) as an opportunity for expansion, since one of the business group’s strategic goals is to win new markets. Thus, it aimed to increase its readership by capitalizing on growth in the Spanish-speaking population and on the paper’s global reach, which extends beyond

the U.S. Within this framework, it sought to strike a balance between developing its editorial offerings and building an active, committed readership in order to add value for readers in Spain and Latin America.

2.1. Public Service and Intercultural Exchange

With its new initiative, the *New York Times* offered a service to the Hispanic community, which could now access the newspaper's high-quality journalism without a reading knowledge of English, either through translations or, in other instances, by reading the paper's original Spanish-language journalism, which adhered to the same standards of quality and rigor as the *Times* in English. According to Argentine journalist Eliezer Budasoff, who led the paper from 2018 through its close and was convinced it was doing a public service, "The *Times* is unbeatable in terms of quality. It's a newspaper that's famous for getting to the truth with articles that are fact-checked, accurate, and well written, and that helps readers understand the truth in the midst of an information maelstrom."²

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Furthermore, thanks to its approach to language, which went beyond journalism, the project encouraged cultural exchange. "The material we produce transcends borders, because, if it's well curated and well edited, it may prove useful to a reader from any society," noted Budasoff, citing specific stories with a universal dimension. "How can reports on violence in Guatemala interest someone who's far removed from that reality? The key is finding a point of contact between the story and people's everyday lives, so that they can become invested in a story about violence in Guatemala, even if they themselves aren't Guatemalan or worried about the violence."

² Except where otherwise indicated, quotes from Eliezer Budasoff are from an in-person interview with the author conducted on July 20, 2018.

[Editors' note: for greater reader accessibility, quotes from primary and secondary sources which were originally published in Spanish have been translated to English by the Observatorio Instituto Cervantes for this version of the article.]

The New York Times

martes, 25 de junio de 2019

NOTICIAS CULTURA OPINIÓN AMÉRICA LATINA ★ REPOSADO

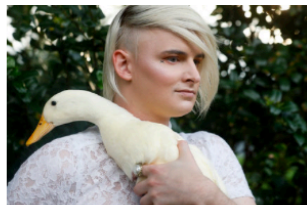


CESAR RODRIGUEZ PARA THE NEW YORK TIMES

MÉXICO

Los viejos sindicatos de México contratacan la reforma laboral

Una nueva ley garantiza a los trabajadores el derecho de decidir quiénes serán sus representantes sindicales; sin embargo, los líderes obreros independientes señalan que transformar el sistema será un trabajo arduo y lento.



EVE EDELHEIT PARA THE NEW YORK TIMES

ESTADOS UNIDOS

¿Animales de apoyo emocional o solo mascotas? Las autoridades de Estados Unidos lo debaten

El número de personas que afirma que tiene el derecho a vivir con animales en aras de su salud mental ha crecido rápidamente; sin embargo, los críticos afirman que los dueños obtienen certificados falsos para evitar pagar ciertas cuotas o llevar mascotas adonde normalmente no se les permitiría ir.

CIENCIA

Tus células como nunca las has visto

La microscopía del ADN usa reacciones químicas típicas para hacer un mapa del interior de una célula, lo que permite ver con exactitud dónde se encuentran las moléculas y de qué manera se distinguen las diversas células entre sí.

Por KINVUL SHEIKH



MÉXICO

La nueva Guardia Nacional mexicana propaga miedo entre quienes migran

El despliegue de las fuerzas mexicanas a la frontera, como parte de un acuerdo con Washington y con la intención de disuadir a las personas



Figure 1. A Leading Journalistic Brand to Win Over the Hispanic Audience. The *New York Times en Español* website had the same layout as its English counterpart. Thus, readers perceived the same seriousness and quality as they saw in its parent project. Source: *The New York Times* (website).

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The paper did not allow current events in the U.S. to determine its agenda; rather, it focused on Latino communities' places of origin. It was a well-considered move, as even Hispanics living in the United States often remain invested in their home countries, where family and friends still live, or where they own property. Thus, the paper sought out stories that provided value to diverse Hispanic communities through a balance that reflected "local realities with a universal character" (Budasoff, 2017).

Thus, the *New York Times en Español* wrote for readers in "Latin America and all other countries where there are Spanish speakers with an appetite and a need for independent journalism" (López, 2017), leveraging trust in its brand in order to stand out in the context of noisy new media and information overabundance (Franco Rodríguez and Gértrudix Barrio, 2015).

2.2. High-Quality Journalism Every Day

The website organized its coverage into five sections: news, culture, opinion, Latin America, and starred (long-form stories for leisurely reading). These sections adhered to the *New York Times*'s time-tested journalistic methods in order to create a space for high-quality reporting. "Unlike other media, we don't have political or economic ties to anyone, which makes it possible for us to talk about everything," explained Budasoff, who was grateful for the perks of working for a well-reputed brand: "While the rest of the sector is divesting from long-form journalism, we're putting our money in our content."

Even though the outlet did not publish a fixed number of articles (the number varied based on the moment and needs), it produced an average of between eight and ten pieces per day. Around 70% of stories were translations from the English paper, while the remaining 30% consisted of original content written exclusively for the Spanish edition. In some instances, Spanish texts from the *New York Times en Español* were translated for publication in the English edition.

Particularly noteworthy was the weight given to opinion and ideas (that is, to cultural discussion), one of the hallmarks of the *New York Times*. In fact, the *New York Times en Español* lined up a network of contributors who were remarkable in their diversity of thought and geographic origin, which in turn created a pluralistic environment for debate that was hard to find in other media conglomerates.³ This lineup included, Martín Caparró from Argentina, Jorge Carrión from Spain, Viridiana Ríos from Mexico, and Roberto Mangabeira from Brazil. "The opinion section is an incredible place to debate issues that don't have a place in other Latin American news outlets," said Budasoff. "Above all, we want to shed light on complex, underreported realities."

³ At times, this freedom caused problems. For example, in May 2017, many readers canceled their subscriptions to the English edition of the *Times* over an opinion column by Bret Stephens on climate change. Cf. <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2017/05/01/lectores-del-new-york-times-estan-cancelando-su-suscripcion-por-esta-columna-de-cambio-climatico/>.

This bid for superior journalism was marked by the paper's sharp editing and multimedia-oriented mentality, with top-tier graphics and interactive materials that gradually gained momentum.⁴ At the same time, the paper fostered a closer relationship with readers through social media and its daily newsletter, which it sent every business day via email. This bidirectionality took the foundations of the current media landscape into account, acknowledging that readers are no longer passive subjects but *prosumers*: producers and consumers of content. The *New York Times en Español* received praise as well as criticism for certain perspectives but, most of all, it received abundant suggestions for topics, as well as alerts about what was taking place in various parts of Latin America. These suggestions and alerts did, in fact, inspire some of the paper's reporting.

2.3. An Interdisciplinary, Bilingual Team

For logistical, economic, and journalistic reasons, the company chose to place the *New York Times en Español*'s newsroom in Mexico City. As the country with the world's largest Spanish-speaking population and the hinge between the U.S. and Latin America, Mexico was a strategic choice for the project's interests. Additionally, Mexico City is a cosmopolitan hub with considerable political, cultural, and economic maneuvering, making it a hotbed of material and ideas for the editorial team.

According to data provided by the paper's management, around twelve full-time editors (from Mexico, Venezuela, and Argentina) worked at the *New York Times en Español*. This core, which had its headquarters in the heart of the Mexican capital, worked with an expansive network of collaborators throughout the region and an external agency that handled around 80% of translations (the editorial staff translated the remaining

⁴ For an illustrative example of this investment in multimedia, see "La increíble historia del rescate en una cueva tailandesa." Cf. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2018/07/16/cueva-tailandia-rescate/>.

20%, which were breaking news stories for immediate publication⁵). Importantly, the office also enjoyed support from its parent company, which provided economic, human, technical, and material resources from New York.



Figure 2. From New York to Mexico City, and Back Again. The New York newsroom (pictured) supplied its outlook and resources to the Mexico City team, which published the Spanish-language edition of the paper. Source: *The New York Times*.

New York allotted a budget to the Spanish edition for translations and original content. But critically, beyond this financial support, the synergies between the papers also enabled them to optimize resources and multiply results, which proved essential. For example, the New York team of developers is available to all of the parent company's initiatives, and so they were able to support several of Mexico City's projects and

⁵ One such instance occurred in April 2019, when the paper covered the fire at Notre Dame Cathedral. Cf. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2019/04/15/notre-dame-incendio/>.

developments. The Spanish-language newsletter also used the same program as its English-language counterpart.

This integration also extended to editorial practices. For example, when the *New York Times en Español* translated an English-language article with interactive elements, U.S.-based technicians helped ensure that material was transferred correctly. Or if Mexico City was looking for images or other graphic material to include in a report, the *New York Times* photo department offered suggestions or solutions that saved the Spanish edition time, money, and effort.

Despite this support, the *New York Times en Español*'s offerings would not have been intelligible without a multicultural newsroom, as this helped build community among distinct Hispanic groups. According to Eliezer Budasoff (2016), this necessitated a never-ending battery of questions to make sure everyone understood certain expressions: "By being mindful of the particularities of the language, we try to give the reality we're describing a local flavor but a universal character. If we only worked with people from one country, we'd be depriving ourselves of that richness you discover when you have people from a lot of different places."

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2.4. Global Audience

The *New York Times*' investment in Spanish fits within its broader, global goal of winning over new readerships. Jodi Rudoren (2019), associate managing editor for audience, confirmed the need for "storytelling that meets readers' needs, wows them, and is so compelling, so essential, so helpful, so excellent that they make it a daily habit." To achieve this, Rudoren writes: "We need to help our journalists think more about the audience and read the data signals about what readers want in order to help inform coverage decisions. Ultimately, it's about building relationships."



Figure 3. Facebook, the Most Popular Social Network by Number of Followers. Social media allowed the *New York Times en Español* to be in constant contact with its audience. Its Facebook page had nearly two million followers. *Source: Facebook.*

In this context, the product aimed at the Spanish-speaking population emerged as a major development opportunity, given the size of the potential readership. “The response has been very positive and, in general, readers are very passionate in the comments section,” Budasoff said in 2016. He noted that the publication had a competitive advantage: “It’s very important to the Latino audience that a company like the *New York Times* tells their truth and that there’s rapid dissemination of certain stories that the local media just aren’t telling.” This vacuum meant that, often, other leading media outlets incorporated the *New York Times*’ agenda into their own journalism.

The *New York Times en Español*’s largest audience was from Mexico, followed by Colombia, Argentina, Spain, and the U.S., with a high rotation rate between the third, fourth, and fifth positions. Though it was not possible to collect precise figures for this study, social media offers an approximate number of followers: when the paper shut

down, it had over 1.7 million followers on Facebook, and around half a million on Twitter.

3. Language Policy

The editorial team had a clear understanding that, as experts have pointed out, the news media are a reference for how to write (Cuervo Sánchez and Medrano Samaniego, 2013). It also knew that the press is not always prepared for that responsibility—even less so at a time when staff sizes are shrinking, and automated systems are replacing human editors, at the expense of quality. In this landscape, there is no shortage of typographical, accuracy, and stylistic errors, which outlets correct in their digital editions after publication (if they correct them at all). As Ramón Salaverría, professor at the University of Navarra, pointed out nearly a decade ago:

Journalism is experiencing one of its most difficult moments. Job insecurity, apathy toward continuing education, minimal specialization, suspected capitulation to political and business interests... All of these ills, so familiar in today's newsrooms, create a landscape, often encouraged by the news organizations themselves, in which journalists have lost many of their traditional professional attributes. (Salaverría, 2010, 240)

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The *New York Times en Español* wanted to rise to this challenge, and it was prepared to become a lone linguistic oasis. Below, we examine its language policy and how it influenced the newspaper's use of Spanish.

3.1. Teaching the Language and Showcasing its Richness

The news media, traditionally, have had three functions: educate, inform, and entertain (Gómez Nieto, 2017). For the *New York Times en Español*, the educational facet was linked to use of the language, with the goal of showcasing the richness of Spanish for the Hispanic community. Instead of choosing to avoid linguistic markers, the project encouraged diversity: “We don’t believe in neutral Spanish because we know that Hispanic readers are just as familiar with the Spanish of Gabriel García Márquez as

they are with the Spanish of Julio Cortázar or Carlos Fuentes,” wrote the paper’s first editorial director, Elías López (2017), in a kind of declaration of principles.

Although writing articles that would be comprehensible to Spanish speakers from over twenty countries—all with their own linguistic idiosyncrasies—never ceased to be a challenge (García Izquierdo, 2009), the team had a guiding maxim: “We don’t want an artificial Spanish that’s neutral, but a real Spanish in which all of us see a reflection of ourselves.” Thus, they took great care in the paper’s long, complex translation process, which included at least two rounds of editing. The paper invited readers to send their comments and corrections to “comentarios@nytimes.com,” so that their work could improve according to the suggestions of their most attentive and studied readers.

With this focus, users were able to discover that there is no single valid Spanish, but rather, that it exists in a variety of different forms. “Why do we want to put our language in a box in which Spanish speakers don’t see themselves reflected?” asked editor Paulina Chavira,⁶ who advocated for enriching the audience by retaining expressions unique to Colombia, Spain, Venezuela, Mexico, or Paraguay: “The Spanish of every country is just as valid, rich, and varied as the Spanish from any other. We have to uproot this idea that my version of the language is more important than everyone else’s, and we do that by feeling proud of our language’s abundance.”

Editors used a two-pronged approach to naturally showcase this linguistic diversity without derailing readers. First, in a given text, they included all of the regional alternatives for a word, as in the article “*Sin popote (ni cañita ni pitillo ni sorbete), por favor,*” which briefly defines a Spanish word for drinking straw, *pajilla* (“which is typically used to drink water or soda”), then incorporates its many variants: *popotes*

⁶ Except where otherwise indicated, quotes from Paulina Chavira are from an in-person interview with the author conducted on August 7, 2018.

(Mexico), *pajita* or *sorbete* (Argentina), *pitillo* (Venezuela), and *cañita* (Peru).⁷ One article on the benefits of eating watermelon features a number of different names for the fruit,⁸ and another, when describing the phenomenon of getting goosebumps, incorporates the Spanish terms “*piel de gallina*” (Spain, Argentina, etc.), “*piel chinita*” (Mexico), and “*se me escarapela la piel*” (Peru).

Second, they chose terms according to the country discussed in a given article. In these instances, rather than including alternatives, they simply used regional expressions and offered readers sufficient context for understanding. For example, when discussing the process by which a president is inaugurated in Mexico, the paper used “*la toma de protesta*,” and not the more standard “*la toma de posesión*,” and in a piece on Venezuela, it left the uniquely Venezuelan curse “*¡Coño, pana!*” unedited. Thus, readers gradually expanded their horizons and enriched their vocabulary, as the paper published new stories about different parts of the globe every week.

The paper also fought the use of foreign terms in Spanish writing. In a world where English words and structures nose their way into practically every form of discourse, the *New York Times en Español* defended the autonomy of the Spanish language. Specifically, it offered Spanish alternatives to broadly accepted Anglicisms, including *poder establecido* for “establishment,” *noticias falsas* for “fake news,” *comida para llevar* for “delivery,” *entrenador personal* for “personal trainer,” *compras* for “shopping,” *complejo hotelero* for “resort,” *entrenador* for “coach,” and *grupo de presión* for “lobby.”

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3.2. A “Caretaker for Words” in Search of Excellence

In order to offer instruction on the use of Spanish and highlight the language’s abundance, the paper relied on a style editor, Paulina Chavira (mentioned above), a

⁷ Cf. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2018/03/12/prohibicion-popotes-plastico-medioambiente/>.

⁸ Cf. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2016/07/14/los-beneficios-de-la-sandia-que-quiza-no-conocias/>.

journalist by training who, before joining the project in January 2016, worked as a translator and proofreader at Editorial Planeta (Mexico). This “cuidadora de palabras” (caretaker for words), as she dubs herself on Twitter,⁹ gained popularity for her successful effort to compel the Mexican national soccer team to put accent marks, where appropriate, on players’ jerseys, a move inspired by the “Ponle acento” campaign led by Latin American baseball players in the U.S. in 2016.¹⁰

Chavira, who authored the manual of style for the *New York Times en Español*, hit another milestone while she was working for Editorial Planeta, thanks to her #117errores campaign. It all began in July 2013, when Mexico’s Secretary of Public Education acknowledged that the country’s free textbooks contained 117 orthographic and factual errors. That was the moment when the future *New York Times en Español* editor took action against the overwhelming number of mistakes she saw in the media every day:

My outrage grew, because I am certain that the news media are a reference for Spanish speakers: someone is more likely to check how you write *vicisitudes* in a newspaper than they are to look it up in a dictionary. Or if someone saw on TV that it’s written *ex primera dama*, they assume that the people working for that outlet have enough training and professionalism to write it properly. But in reality, it’s unusual for people who work in the media to take the time to refresh their Spanish language skills, which they acquired, like all of us, in primary school. That outrage gave rise to #117errores: a campaign to identify the mistakes that major Mexican media publish every day, mistakes that may not even be questioned. (Chavira, 2017)

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Since then, this campaign “for the love of our language” has lobbied for proper use of the language as a responsibility. Chavira continued this daily advocacy from the *New York Times en Español*: “We’re all humans and sooner or later, we’re going to make mistakes. But these efforts are about not surrendering to the errors we’re seeing from even the most prestigious publications: missing accent marks, ill-placed commas...” This set the *New York Times en Español* apart from other Spanish-language online

⁹ Cf. <https://twitter.com/apchavira>.

¹⁰ Cf. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2017/06/29/futbol-acentos-mexico/>.

newspapers, where technical and staffing limitations stood in stark contrast to the solvency of a project backed by one of the world's foremost news organizations.

Having such an editor at a time when other newsrooms are shrinking speaks to the *New York Times*' bet on editorial quality. Paulina Chavira's profile as an editor is among the most prominent in all of Ibero-America, and her presence guaranteed higher standards: "She is the main person in charge of answering our questions about the rules of Spanish and bringing conversations about use of language and our style to the news desk," said the editorial director, happy about "a continually improving process" that prompted "vigorous debates." The inception of this process is discussed below.

3.3. *Conversations on How Best to Use the Language*

Given the paper's unique approach and the diversity of its newsroom, which included journalists from several parts of Latin America, there were constant discussions on the use of the language. The paper decided to make these reflections available to the public via an article that was periodically updated with new discussions or stylistic decisions.¹¹ This was a space in which the editor, who specialized in language, shared the paper's criteria and, additionally, offered updates on Spanish orthographic rules.

Entitled "*Una palabra es noticia*" (A Word Is News),¹² the article's introduction sets out the paper's vision and responsibility: "Words are any journalist's primary communicative tool. At the *New York Times en Español*, we take our language and the way we use it very seriously." It then enters into numerous educational discussions based on readers' questions or ideas that emerged in the Mexico City newsroom itself.

For example, on May 17, 2019, it posted an entry entitled "¡Buenos días! ¿O buen día?" which was inspired by one of readers' most frequent comments, regarding the

¹¹ Cf. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2018/11/23/paulina-chavira-palabra-es-noticia/>.

¹² *Ibid.*

greeting in the paper's daily email newsletter. "People often say that we're making a mistake," the article says. However, according to the *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* (published by the Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española), both *buenos días* and *buen día* are valid. The only difference is that the latter is more common in South America:

That is: an expression can be more common in some countries than in others, but that does not mean that one expression is correct and another is incorrect. At the *New York Times en Español*, we believe that all varieties of Spanish are valid, and we like to encourage use of diverse forms in the way we write. *Buenas tardes*, readers. Or *Buena tarde*, if you prefer.¹³

Clarifications like this were commonplace. On November 16, 2018, in an article on the beginning of Joaquín Guzmán Loera's trial in New York, the editors faced a dilemma: what should they call the criminal group that the famed drug lord was charged with leading? The Sinaloa *Cártel*, with an accent mark, or the Sinaloa *Cartel*, without one? They explained that in Mexico, "the emphasis is on the 'a,' and, since the word ends with 'l,' it has an accent mark: *cártel*." In Colombia, on the other hand, the emphasis falls on the "e," and so it does not have an accent mark. As both are correct, they chose to write about the Sinaloa *Cártel* and the Medellín *Cartel*, "in accordance with usage in each country."

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Making the most of El Chapo's trial, the paper ran a piece on how nicknames and aliases should be written, according to Real Academia Española's *Ortografía de la lengua española*:

We only put nicknames between quotes if they are between the first and last name (Joaquín "el Chapo" Guzmán or Joaquín "Chapo" Guzmán). To clear up a common misapprehension: the article is not part of the nickname; the first letter should be in lower cases, and it should form a contraction with prepositions (*el Chapo*, *del Chapo*, *al Chapo*). How do we know this? Because if he were standing in front of us and we were having a conversation, we would say: "So tell me, *Chapo*..." not "So tell me, *el Chapo*..." Although, in all likelihood, we would just run away.

¹³ Cf. <http://lema.rae.es/dpd/?key=buen+d%C3%Ada>.

For answers to these questions, Paulina Chavira often turned to Fundéu (Fundación del Español Urgente) and to the Real Academia Española's Language Advice Department. If publication could not wait, she chose a safe expression while she waited for a definitive answer. Among other things, "Una palabra es noticia" examined the possibility of using the terms *tránsito* and *tráfico* as synonyms to refer to "the circulation of motor vehicles" and the possibility of using *fútbol* and *futbol*, with and without an accent mark, indiscriminately:

If you write it with an accent mark, you are probably from Argentina, Peru, Venezuela, or Spain, and you pronounce it with the emphasis on the "u." If you're Mexican, Guatemalan, or Nicaraguan, the emphasis would be on the "o" and, as a word with the emphasis on the final syllable that ends with "l," it should not have an accent mark. Here at the paper, we use both variants.

The word *acento* itself, when referring to a diacritic mark, required clarification in this improvised guide. Many readers held that it should actually be called a *tilde* and sent the paper their criticisms. Within a few days, with the support of Fundéu, a new entry appeared: use of *acento* is permissible, as the third dictionary entry for the word is "Spanish orthographic sign consisting of a short line that points to the right and upward (´) and which, according to orthographic rules, is written over certain vowels in accented syllables."

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Ultimately, the use of Spanish at the *New York Times en Español* was closely linked to the social function of the *New York Times*, which, as a leading news organization, endeavored to offer reporting of the highest possible quality. It understood this service as extending not just to thoroughness in its journalistic and investigative efforts, but also to sharpness in its use of language.

4. Business Model

The increase in the number of online newspapers in the past few years, given the internet's low barrier to entry, raises the question of which business models facilitate high-quality journalism (Jones and Salter, 2012). Although there are many options—it is advisable for publications to diversify their revenue streams and not depend on classic sources of income such as advertising—it is possible to identify one shared requirement: development of a business strategy that works in tandem with the editorial strategy, in order to avoid being born “with one foot in the grave” (Albalad, 2018, 219).

The *New York Times en Español* was different from other nascent ventures, as it enjoyed support from one of the sector's most respected companies. Even so, it had to halt its activity when it “did not prove financially successful.”¹⁴ Readers could access the paper's content free of charge during its more than three years of operation. In fact, all of the content was entirely open, with no paywall. During this initial phase, the paper attempted to sketch the contours of its readership and identify its most faithful users, with the long-term goal of eventually launching a subscription-based service. The paper wanted to learn about its readers in Latin America and understand their needs and preferences (Nafria, 2016), intent upon achieving a significant degree of market penetration.

To do this, it offered its audience content that they could not find elsewhere, thanks to two attributes: specialization and quality. Little by little, this added value helped the paper grow a vigorous community of readers. “First, we have to create an audience and showcase our strengths,” explained Budasoff, who envisioned a second phase: “Once we've cultivated an audience that's willing to pay for our product, then it might be the right time to launch a digital subscription model, or to explore an alternative

¹⁴ Cf. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2019/09/17/espanol/una-nota-para-nuestros-lectores.html?module=inline>.

model.” In today’s market, publications need a network of followers before they can set a starting price.

In theory, the goal was to replicate the successful formula of the English edition, which, at the start of 2019, had more than “4.3 million subscribers, 3.36 million of which were digital, and which aimed to reach 10 million subscribers by 2025” (Nafria, 2019). The paper’s subscriber base has grown exponentially: it had 281,000 subscribers when it launched its digital system in mid-2011 and, since then, it has not stopped growing, as is clear from the online business’s own data (figure 4):

In the second quarter of 2018, the NYT had net profits of \$23.6 million, 51.3% more than in the second quarter of 2017. And if we analyze the results of the first half of 2018, we see that net profits reached \$45.5 million, that is, a 58.1% improvement over the first half of 2017. (Nafria, 2018)

Charging for content seems to be the future of digital journalism, according to communications expert Telmo Avalué (2019): “16% of U.S. users now pay to read the news... In Europe, Norway and Sweden are notable markets, where the notion of paying for information is fairly entrenched.” Avalué highlights how France, the United Kingdom, and Germany are heading in that same direction, while the trend is struggling to take hold in Spain, despite numerous initiatives.

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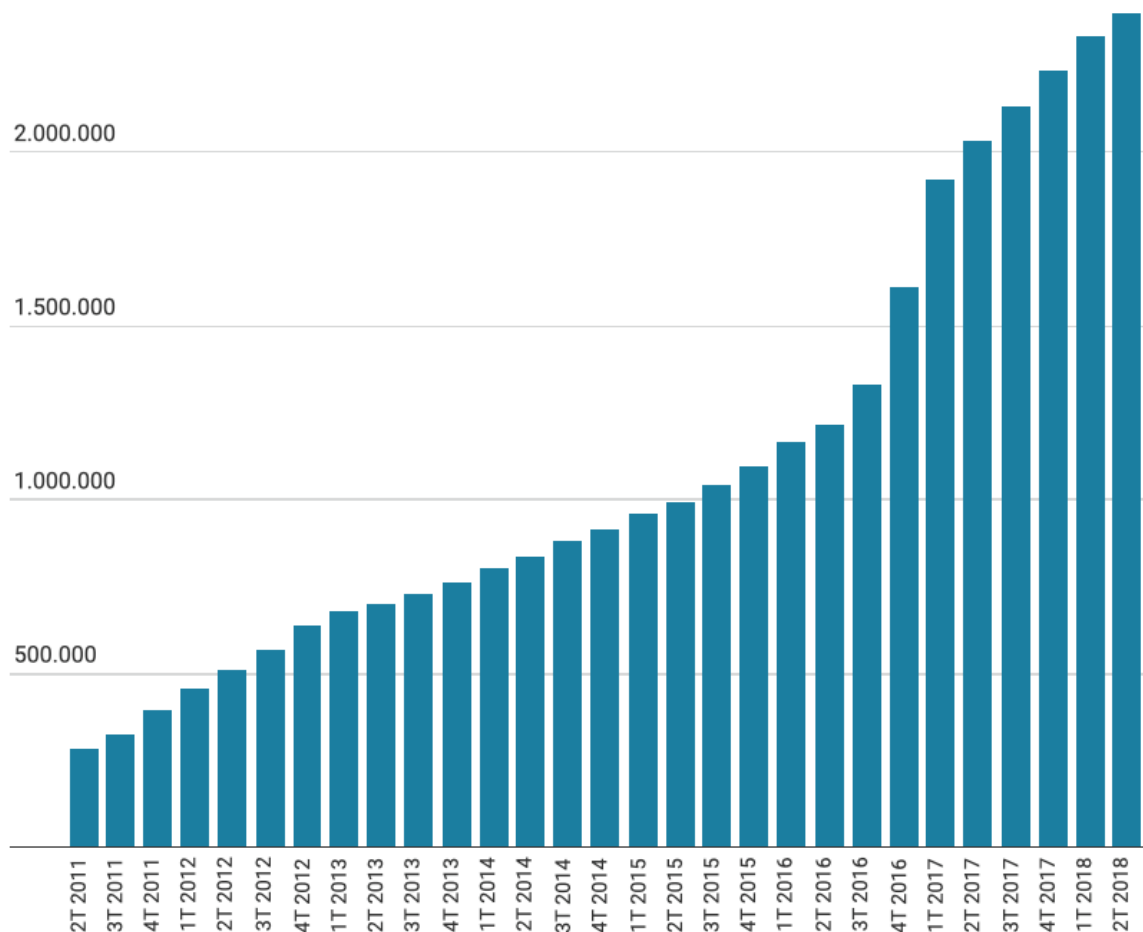


Figure 4. Digital Subscribers to the *New York Times* (English edition). Since 2011, the *New York Times* has pushed a paid digital-subscription model. As is clear from this graph, this formula has met with success, and offers one possible approach for other outlets to follow. *Source: Ismael Nafria.*

Despite this model's success, the *New York Times* decided to discontinue its Spanish edition on September 17, 2019, after failing to turn a profit during its three years of operations:

We launched *NYT en Español* as part of an experiment to reach and engage more international readers by extending our coverage to different languages. While the Español site did attract a new audience for our journalism and consistently produced coverage we are very proud of, it did not prove financially successful.¹⁵

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Although the business assured readers that the change would not affect coverage of Latin America—it would continue to have staff in Medellín, Mexico City, and Rio de Janeiro—the Instituto Cervantes mourned the decision: the language of Cervantes “is part of the U.S. identity” and the closure of the paper amounted to “a step backward” for “a newspaper that has done so much to fight Trump’s anti-Hispanic and anti-Spanish-language policies.”¹⁶ The editorial team bid their readers farewell with a selection of stories and articles that they “were proud to have published.”¹⁷

The *New York Times*’ new strategy focuses on a paid subscription service, and editors will continue to translate the paper into over a dozen languages, “including Spanish,” according to the statement cited above.¹⁸ While waiting to see what this approach will look like in practice, another titan of journalism, the *Washington Post*, is encouraging Spanish journalism through a new opinion page that “features original and translated Spanish-language op-eds from writers based globally and in the U.S.”¹⁹ *Post Opinión*, as this space is called, seeks to “highlight perspectives from newsmakers and underrepresented voices from Latin America, Spain, the U.S., and beyond.”²⁰

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5. Conclusions

The world’s 577 million Spanish speakers and heightened growth prospects offer a promising market space for news media. The *New York Times*, with unprecedented global ambitions, paved the way for a digital product that successfully won a Spanish-speaking readership (300,000 readers received the paper’s weekly email newsletter). The project, headquartered in Mexico City, was heir to the *New York Times*’ journalistic tradition, which lent the emerging outlet a degree of prestige and quality that is difficult

¹⁶ Cf. <http://www.diariosigloxxi.com/texto-s/mostrar/334155/cervantes-reprocha-nyt-fin-edicion-espanol-forma-parte-identidad-estados-unidos>.

¹⁷ Cf. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2019/09/17/espanol/america-latina/nytimes-en-espanol-historias.html>.

¹⁸ [Editors’ note: interestingly, the *New York Times en Español* published this statement in English and Spanish. While the Spanish version says “incluso y con frecuencia al español,” the English only says, “including Spanish.”]

¹⁹ Cf. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/pr/2019/08/28/washington-post-lanza-una-nueva-pgina-de-opinin-en-espaol-post-opinin/>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

to find elsewhere in the sector. The “Gray Lady” of journalism set the strategic objective of providing added value to readers in Spain and Latin America, as well as the Hispanic market in the U.S., with articles that provided context, helped readers understand current events, and guided decision-making.

The initiative emerged in an environment of noisy new media and information overabundance, where breaking news takes priority over long-form content. In opposition to this trend, the *New York Times en Español* bet on quality over quantity, hoping to sate the Hispanic public’s thirst for independent journalism. Thus, while conventional newspapers continued to reduce their staff sizes and swear off big stories, the *New York Times* invested in its content through reporting, investigation, and an all-star team. Its approach consisted of fidelity to the core values of journalism while incorporating elements of the new multimedia landscape, so that user-readers could expect the *New York Times en Español* to adhere to the same time-tested quality standards as its parent project.

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Thus, the online-only *New York Times en Español* was built on the meticulous editing for which the newspaper has been famous since its inception, and which has clearly played a role in its solvency. By relying on six bilingual editors, the paper ensured not only excellence in its contents, but also optimal translation of the English articles it received from the New York newsroom. Of special interest was the paper’s in-house language expert, who ensured proper use of the language and encouraged constant conversations on word usage. This is particularly notable, as it contrasts sharply with the orthographic, grammatical, and accuracy errors that plague so much of online Spanish-language journalism.

Critically, the project’s language policy diverged from that of other publications: unlike the online newspapers analyzed in the previous study by the Observatory of the Instituto Cervantes at Harvard University (Albalad, 2019), the *New York Times en Español* encouraged diversity in use of Spanish in order to ensure readers enjoyed the

language in all of its abundance. Although facilitating comprehensibility for an audience based in over twenty countries was a daily challenge, the editors considered the Spanish of one region to be just as valid as that of any other. Thus, in addition to offering reporting, the paper sent a clear message: “Spanish is a vast and rich language, and it’s better to encourage its variety, rather than limit it.”²¹ Thanks to this approach, the newspaper became a veritable training school for thousands of Spanish speakers, for whom it answered questions and offered instruction on unfamiliar expressions.

Why, then, did the company choose to close this leading publication in the Spanish-language market? That decision prompts us to conclude with a reflection on the news media’s *raison d’être*, which transcends this one case study. In our current landscape of extreme polarization, where fake news and conflicts of interest abound, the news media must resume their social function. Developing sustainable models is, of course, essential, as communications executives must balance their accounts just like everyone else. But the bottom line cannot be the sole or primary consideration when making decisions. A news outlet cannot operate as if it were just another business, concerned only with profits—its very nature requires prioritizing public service.

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²¹ Cf. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2019/07/04/nytimes-traduccion-espanol/>.

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